

## A TEMPLE OF GOD

Swami Paratparananda

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PEOPLE all over the world are familiar with the idea of sacred places of worship, a temple, a church, a mosque and the like. We build temples, decorate them with architectural beauty, install images, appoint proper persons to perform worship and engage people to keep the precincts clean. For as the proverb goes, cleanliness is next to godliness. Cleanliness in the exterior is an essential contributing factor to cleanliness of the interior, of the mind. A clean place spontaneously produces a soothing effect on man.

Now, what is the idea behind these temples? Millions of people, even today in spite of the materialistic trend of the society, attend churches, temples and mosques. Why? Because there is in man an unquenchable thirst to know the Unknown, to know the Wielder of destiny, to know the Highest Principle and to adore, and to worship It. God is that Unknown, by whatever name you may call Him. To the generality of mankind the abstract Principle is beyond comprehension. They require some concrete symbols through which they can worship Him. So images and symbols are a necessity in the religious field. To house the images temples are dedicated. If you go through the history of the founding of any temple, which has continued to cast its influence, you will find that there has been some saint, some seer who had sanctified that place with his austerities, practice of spiritual disciplines, or by his mere stay. Narada in his *Bhakti Sūtra* says, 'They (the great devotees) impart sanctity to places of pilgrimage'.<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramakrishna avers, 'God is present where people talk about Him. One feels there the presence of all holy places. Places of worship recall God alone to my mind'. Most of us are aware of the law of association. It is equally applicable to places of worship as it is respect of persons, and ideas. Sri Ramakrishna used to cite the example of a devotee who was overwhelmed with ecstasy at the sight of a babla tree. The idea flashed in his mind that the handle of the axe in the garden of the temple of Radhakanta was made from the wood of babla'. Of course these are instances where the mind has been tuned to a very high pitch. Even on a lower plane and with a little direct association the temple would bring to anyone's mind the idea of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Narada Bhakti Sutras, 69.

That is the purpose of the temples.

Further, the temple is not merely a place of congregation for all types of people. It is not meant to be utilized for social functions. It is a place of worship of God. The very idea of visiting a temple makes us feel that we should be pure. People take bath, put on washed and clean clothes and contemplating on Him they approach the deity. And if at that time he should find the surroundings are dirtied, and that neglect reigns everywhere then his mind would naturally rebel at the condition; the idea of holiness associated with the temple would recede to the background. Today if these simple rules are forgotten and a temple becomes a place of assemblage of people for transacting business or exchange of views on mundane matters, then that temple loses its sanctity. Remember how Jesus drove the moneylenders and businessmen who were pursuing their trade even inside the temple, saying 'It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves'.<sup>2</sup> Neither should man indulge in idle pastimes in places of worship. So, meticulously should one be careful in maintaining the sanctity, purity and cleanliness of a temple, of a place of worship.

## II

Now this idea of images and temples can be extended to one's own self, with much benefit, spiritually. We find that we are fettered with the limitations of the body, senses and the mind, that is, the idea that we are the body cannot be got rid of even with much effort. The ailments of the body, the miseries overwhelming the mind bring us down to think ourselves as body, or mind. There are only two ways of overcoming these concepts. By intense dispassion to all that is of the world. To treat even one's body as a meaningless burden, to be spurned. People devoted to the path of knowledge can only be successful in having such an attitude. The other method is to look upon the body as a temple of God. We have to take care not only of the outer structure but the inner sanctum sanctorum, i.e., not only the body but also the heart should be maintained pure, free from blemish. Otherwise how can we install the image of the Lord within?

Sri Ramakrishna in an exquisite parable illustrates this idea. Of course he gave it out in a different context but it will not be out of place here. 'There lived in a village a young man named Padmalochan. People used to call him "Podo", for short. In this village there was a temple in a very dilapidated condition. It contained no image of God. Aswattha and other plants sprang up on the ruins of its walls. Bats lived inside and the floor was covered with dust and the droppings of the bats. The people of the village had stopped visiting the temple. One day after dusk the villagers heard the sound of a conch-shell from the direction of the

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<sup>2</sup> Gospel according to St. Luke, 19.46.

temple. They thought perhaps someone had installed an image in the shrine and was performing the evening worship. One of them softly opened the door and saw Padmalochan standing in a corner, blowing the conch. No image had been set up. The temple hadn't been swept or washed. And filth and dirt lay everywhere. Then he shouted to Podo:

*You have set up no image here,  
Within the shrine, O fool!  
Blowing the conch, you simply make  
Confusion worse confounded.  
Day and night eleven bats  
Scream there incessantly . . .*

‘There is no use in merely making a noise if you want to establish the Deity in the shrine of your heart, if you want to realize God. First of all purify the mind. In the pure heart God takes His seat. One cannot bring the holy image into the temple if the droppings of bats are all around. The eleven bats are our eleven organs: five of action, five of perception, and the mind.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that divinity dwells within all. But as long as the heart is not made pure, how can you feel the divine presence within. Sri Ramakrishna says: It is one thing to know that there is fire in the wood and quite another to generate it by friction between two pieces of wood. It is one thing to know that milk is good for health but quite a different matter to drink and be benefited by it. Likewise it is one thing to know that we are all divine but quite another thing to realize it, experience it. We know ourselves mostly as fair or dark, of a certain height, weight and so on. What does this all denote but the body? The body is only a vehicle for the Self to work through. It is only a structure. As the temple is no temple as long as there is no image of God installed within it, so too, so long as God is not realized within, the body is only a collection of bones, flesh and so on.

### III

Love of God is the priest of the temple in the human heart. Discrimination and dispassion can be stated to be the caretakers and cleansers of this temple. Love of God, devotion or *bhakti* is essential if God has to make any response to man's endeavours. It is said that God looks into the heart of man and not what he says nor even what he does. He is satisfied with the smallest service done to Him with the greatest sincerity.

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<sup>3</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 53, 3rd Edn., 1957. Pub. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4.

Sincerity is the clay out of which the bricks of the *sanctum sanctorum* of this temple are made of. When man prays sincerely to God to grant him His vision, He sends him all that is necessary for his progress. The Guru who will guide him will come and all other requirements will gather unto him by themselves. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you',<sup>4</sup> said Jesus. The obstacles in one's path to spiritual progress are cleared without any effort on one's part if one but seeks God earnestly. God chooses him who prays to Him earnestly and sincerely, not for things mundane but for His vision alone. It is dependence on God alone that can save us from many a fall. As Sri Ramakrishna points out, 'A boy who holds the father's hand, while walking on the ridge of a field, may slip and fall down but not when the father firmly takes hold of the boy'. And in this dependence prayer is a necessary instrument, for it cleanses the mind as well. As in the parable of Sri Ramakrishna cited already, there can be no installation of the image of God unless the heart is cleared of the dross, of the attachments to worldly things. God does not come into a place already occupied with worldly desires. 'When there is some one already in charge of the stores, the owner of the house will have nothing to do with matters concerning the store.'

Sri Ramakrishna was once asked by a devotee as to how love for God can be developed. His reply was, 'One gradually acquires love of God through the practice of chanting God's name and glories. One should not be ashamed of chanting God's holy name. As the saying goes, "One does not succeed so long as one has these three: shame, hatred and fear".' But this is what exactly prevents our progress. We are ashamed to be labelled as religious in the present age, for religion is looked down upon as the occupation of some crazy fellows, as the opiate of the poor. How then can they who seek status and position in the social ladder openly identify themselves with religion? This is the difficulty or embarrassing position of many. However, the law of nature cannot change whether you like it or not. The law of spiritual development too cannot be modified because it irks some. If we want a jewel, we have to pay the price or give up all hope of acquiring it.

What does Sri Ramakrishna mean by telling, 'one should not be ashamed in chanting God's holy name'? Does he mean that we should make a display of our religiosity? He does not. At another time he instructed the devotees: 'you will do your spiritual practices in your own mind, in a secluded place of your house or in the forest'. But it is quite a different matter if it is a congregational singing. One should not feel himself too big to chant God's name along with others.

Purification of the heart comes through reciting prayers, chanting God's name. Then alone love of God wells up. Unless one has deep affection for God it is not possible to remember Him always and until this

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<sup>4</sup> St. Mathew, 6. 33

remembrance of God becomes constant and uninterrupted, we may conclude that love of God has not taken firm root. Narada in his *Bhakti Sūtras* enumerates the characteristics of Bhakti as 'the consecration of all activities by complete self-surrender to Him, and extreme anguish if He were forgotten'.<sup>5</sup> It is such supreme love of God that makes a man holy, makes his body a temple of God, in the real sense of the term. This love of God is not acquired all of a sudden. We have to work hard for it. It is the greatest treasure that man can possess. Can it then be so easily attained?

Dispassion for the things of the world, and discrimination between the real and the unreal, are to be cultivated to make our devotion strong and infallible. For it is impossible to hold on to God, think of Him or meditate on Him for any length of time, if we are not sure that He alone is real and all other things are unreal. The follower of the path of devotion also has to discriminate between the real and the unreal. Otherwise how can he withstand the temptations that always surround him?

The question that raises its head at this juncture is: What shall we do with our turbulent senses? How can we control them? What is the way to overcome them? The devotee of God directs the senses towards Him. In a beautiful verse a lover of God entreats his limbs and senses in this wise: 'O tongue, sing the glories of Keśava; O mind, meditate on Murāri; O hands, worship Śrīdhara; O ears, hear you the stories about Acyuta; O eyes, see Krishna; O feet, go to Hari's abode; nose, smell thou the tulsi (basil leaf) offered at Mukunda's feet; O head, bow yourself to Adhoksaja'.<sup>6</sup> The several names we find here are of Vishnu, the great Lord, and each of them projects a picture, of some incident that occurred in one or other of His Incarnations before our mind's eye or describes His glory. Ruminating over them we become absorbed in the thought of the Lord and thus attain concentration of the mind. The more we are able to dwell on God's form and His sport the more will we be able to lift ourselves above the mundane plane. For the baser desires will then be held in abeyance for the time being and if one pursues one's devotion without any intermittance and without any remission, these desires will slowly weaken and ultimately be wiped out.

Perhaps a doubt still lingers: It may be all right in the case of a mind which has somehow stumbled into the path but what of those persons who have not got any taste for the spiritual life, who though immersed in worldly pursuits, duties and enjoyments, have a faint liking to transcend it? To them Sri Ramakrishna prescribes holy company to get over the disease of worldliness. 'Prayer and the company of holy men beget yearning for God. But it is not enough to be in the company of religious people only for a day. You should constantly seek it, for the disease has become chronic,' says Sri Ramakrishna. The *Bhāgavata* too extols holy company in these words: 'In this world the company of holy

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<sup>5</sup> N.B.S. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Mukundamala Stotra, 16.

men even for half a minute is a covetable treasure for man'.<sup>7</sup> 'For people struggling in the terrible waters of this transmigratory existence the tranquil saint, the knower of Brahman, is the supreme resting place, even as an invulnerable boat is for a drowning man.'<sup>8</sup> Narada opines, 'But it is extremely difficult to come into contact with a great soul and to be benefited by his company; the influence of such a one is subtle, incomprehensible and unerringly infallible in its effect'.<sup>9</sup>

It is difficult for a small spark to kindle a heap of wet wood but a roaring fire can consume even the plantain trees. Likewise by contact with the knowers of Brahman even the worst sinner can turn a new leaf in his life, though the ordinary man with a little devotion may lose even what little he possesses, if he associates with a wicked person.

## V

We have not only to seek holy company but simultaneously avoid evil association. For otherwise what benefit we reap from the former will be neutralized by the latter. Nay, we may be, dragged down to levels lower than where we originally were. As in the instance of company so too about food should one be careful. There is a reference to food as a means to the purification of the mind in the Upanisad. 'If the food is pure one's mind becomes pure. When the mind is pure the memory remains steady. The memory remaining steady there comes release from all bondages.'<sup>10</sup> Śrī Śankara commenting on the above passage remarks, 'Whatever is gathered in through perception and imagination is *āhāra* (food) for the mind. The purity of knowledge regarding these sense contacts means their being not influenced by one's defects such as attachment, aversion and infatuation.'<sup>11</sup> What Śrī Śankara wants to convey is that purity of mind can be achieved only through giving up of attachment and aversion to worldly objects. And when that purity of thought is achieved the memory of the Lord becomes constant, and that leads to liberation.

Other interpreters of this passage of the Upanisad have taken the word *āhāra* in its literal sense i.e., the food that is eaten. They find three types of defects in food, viz., (1) those impure by nature, (2) impure by adulteration and (3) impure due to association. Some attention paid to these things will be really helpful for the aspirants. But we need not be too fastidious about these things, forgetting the main purpose of life, viz., God-realization. There is a song of Mirabai, the great poetess-saint of Rajasthan, which, though couched in sarcasm, points out the real discipline that leads us to God. She sings: 'O Man, it is necessary to practise spiritual disciplines, it is necessary too that you should sing the

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<sup>7</sup> Bhagavata, XI.2.30.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., XI.26.39.

<sup>9</sup> N.B.S. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Chandogya Up. VII. Xxvi. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Commentary of Sankara on the above passage of the Upanishad.

glories of God. It is incumbent that you should develop devotion to God as also love Him. What will mere outer purification by bathing daily do? If that were only sufficient then all the creatures living in water would have seen Hari first. If living on fruits and roots could give a glimpse of Hari, bats and monkeys would have it before all. If living on milk alone Hari could be attained then the young ones of all mammals would have been blessed indeed. Mira is of the firm opinion that the Darling of Nanda cannot be had without pure love'. This shows that, though we may not discard or disregard the ordinary rules about the purity regarding food and the like, too much stress on the externals will only divert our attention from the main issue and as a consequence hamper our progress. The primary aim is to love God, for His own sake. Thus alone is the body converted into a temple of God.

## **APPROACH TO GOD**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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THERE is a conception that unless there is awe and fear and the concomitant feelings of submission and servitude, God cannot be approached or worshipped. While it is a fact that this attitude may be one of the approaches to God, it does not necessarily follow that it is the only approach. An everyday and every man's experience in the world should throw some light upon this statement. Whom do we remember most? Those whom we fear or love? Who does command our submission, non-acquisitioned and spontaneous, earliest; one who tyrannizes or one who loves? The only answer can be those whom we love. In fear the burden of submission is irksome, always, and is a compulsion that is sought to be overthrown the moment the subject feels himself strong enough to do so, or to flout it. But in affection, in love, man does not feel it though it may weigh down upon him. There is no groaning under its weight; there is not even the grumbling. Rather, there is a spontaneous joy in such submission. In worship or approach to God also this same rule is applicable. In fact man's feelings, being what they are, cannot be multiplied in number; no fresh type of faculties can be created but they can be extended, expanded, sublimated. And that is what happens in our approach to God. You are not asked to be bereft of your feelings or create new ones but only to turn them Godwards.

Now, what infuses awe or fear into us? Is it not the immensity of the powers or glory of God? And also a feeling of alienation from Him when we do not consider Him as our own? 'It is those who love glory themselves that think much about the glory of God,' says Sri Ramakrishna. Why should we be overwhelmed with His glory? Perhaps, there is a desire for worldly things and glory lurking in ourselves that makes us do so. Perhaps, we want to bargain with Him for some of His glory. This does not, however, mean that one should not appreciate a beautiful scenery or a serene and soul-elevating place or circumstance. But to think of His glory and forget Him is not an aspirant's way. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'What will you gain by counting the trees and branches and leaves in a mango grove? You have come to eat mangoes. Eat them and be happy'. What will it avail us if we come to know what all



are the powers of God? And is it possible to know all? On the other hand, if we realize God, see Him, talk with Him that will liberate us, make us free. And this freedom is not something like that what we see in the world, momentary and conditioned. It is eternal and unconditioned. It makes us soar beyond the plane of mundane consciousness. It enwraps us in a divine and eternal light, makes us free from fear, free from inhibitions, free of likes and dislikes, free from attachment and hatred. Is not such a state covetable? Worship of God helps us reach this state. Nothing else can.

There is a Sanskrit verse by the poet Bhartrhari which runs thus: 'In enjoyment there is the fear of disease; in social position, the fear of falling off; in wealth, the fear of kings; in honour, the fear of humiliation; in power, the fear of the foes; in beauty, the fear of old age; in scriptural erudition, the fear of antagonists; in virtue, the fear of calumniators; in body, the fear of death. All things of this world pertaining to man are attended with fear; renunciation alone stands for fearlessness.'<sup>1</sup> We may add that when this renunciation leads to God-realization it opens the flood-gates of bliss eternal leaving no room for the baser motives and fear to assert themselves. That is why one who has touched the source of Truth, of Light wavers not in his path; fears nothing. He stands like the adamantine rocks which though battered by the waves remain unmoved, undented. Tribulations and trials, miseries and afflictions leave him unperturbed. When we realize God we know Him to be our own, the Soul of our souls, our inmost Being. Can we then call it servitude or submission in the sense we understand worldly servitude? To whom do we submit? Is it not to our own inner Being? Could there be any harm in that? What is more welcome than that we conquer our baser impulses, the turbulent passions, and the still stronger ego and submitting to the Indwelling spirit be at peace with ourself and the whole world? And if worship of God does it, as assured by God-men and men of God, why should we stand away?

All the objections to worship of God seem to arise from the conception that He is an extra-cosmic Being, sitting somewhere in the Heaven, high above the clouds, demanding implicit submission under threats of dire consequences, holding out bouquets and enjoyments to those who follow His commands and punishment of hell fire to those who transgress. But the Hindu view of God — that He is the Indwelling Spirit of every being and at the same time transcends them all — is a very encouraging one. Here the distance between the soul and the Oversoul shrinks, as it were, to an appreciable extent. The strangeness, man at first feels towards God, drops off yielding place to a feeling of appurtenance, belonging. The sages and saints experienced this; the Upanisads declare it: The *Chāndogya*, for instance, points out 'that Purusa which is seen in the eye that is the Ātman'.<sup>2</sup>

Bādarāyana in his Śārīrika Sūtras removes the apparent ambiguity

<sup>1</sup> Vairagyasatakam, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Chandogya Upanisad, VIII.vii.4.

about the meaning of this passage — whether it refers to the Jīva or the Paramātmān — by two aphorisms: ‘The one within (is the paramatman); on account of His qualities being declared’.<sup>3</sup> A second passage which refers to the “within” occurs in the same Upanisad (I. vi. 6) wherein the description of that Being, in the orb of the sun, is given.<sup>4</sup> An objection was raised that this description cannot pertain to the Paramātmān — He being without form — and therefore must only be of the *jīva*, or the deity representing the sun. This contention is, however, refuted. The highest Lord though without form assumes forms to bestow grace on the *sādhaka* by His own power, *Māyā*.<sup>5</sup> Why does this become necessary? It is well-known that all individuals have not the same capacity of comprehension. Our sages too knew it. So, for such of those who cannot or do not like to think in terms of the formless aspect of God, the forms and qualities are declared.

Any further doubt lingering in one’s mind is removed by the next aphorism: ‘And there is another one (i.e. the Paramātmān, who is different from the individual souls animating the sun etc.); on account of the distinction being declared.’<sup>6</sup> Where is this distinction proclaimed? The *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* gives the answer. It is not the deity representing the sun that is meant while referring to the One inside its orb, but the ‘One who dwells in the sun, but is within it, whom the sun does not know, whose body is the sun, and who controls the sun from within, that One is the Internal Ruler, your own immortal Self’.<sup>7</sup>

Śruti is never tired of repeating its statements to drive home the truths. It repeats this formula in the case of all elements, all beings, all limbs of man, and his mind and his knowledge. Here we see how close we are to God and yet we know Him not, comprehend Him not. Sri Ramakrishna used to give the simile of the musk-deer. The deer would smell the fragrance of the musk but not knowing that the source of the fragrance was in its own navel, would run to all quarters of the forest and at last when tired would lie down and then come to know that what it has been seeking outside in vain was all the time within itself.

Now a question would arise: ‘If we are controlled by a higher power residing in us, in what way are we responsible for our actions?’ Such a question was put to Sri Ramakrishna also. And that question will be repeated for ages to come, by people who would want to shift the responsibility of their wicked deeds on to someone else. Actually, they do not believe it when they repeat that it is the Indwelling Spirit who is working through them. It is only a veil to hoodwink others. In the heart of their hearts they know that they are far far away from believing it themselves. They assert their ego most of the time. ‘Well’, you may say,

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<sup>3</sup> Brahma Sutras, I.i.20.

<sup>4</sup> Chandogya, I.vi.6.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Sri Samkara in his commentary on Br. Sutra Bhashya, I.i.20.

<sup>6</sup> Br. Sutras, I.i.21.

<sup>7</sup> Br. Up. 3.7.9.

'yours is a strange logic indeed! You breathe hot and cold at the same time. Once you say that every thing is controlled by the Inner Ruler and again you say that the ego asserts. Then, what type of a ruler is that who cannot resist the force of the ego?' To this we reply, 'True, it seems very incompatible. But haven't you seen a mother, with her benevolence and beneficence, though guiding the steps and conduct of her child, giving way to its unreasonable importunities? Aye, she even sometimes allows the child to burn its fingers in fire though she could, if she would, prevent it in the interest of the child. But then she would take care of it again as soon as it has done with its play, learnt its lessons. For all that, can you insist that the mother was not strong enough to restrain the child? No. Likewise the Inner Ruler (*antaryāmin*) is not a despot. You are given a little free play to use your faculties, to pick your own way, learn your lessons yourselves in the world, when you would not listen to the sane advice that is pouring forth from your own Inner Being. He even allows you the freedom to deny Him. But there it ends, your ego comes into clash with those of others if you will assert it too much. Then you fall back for support on God, on your Inner Being. Where then is the inconsistency in what we have said?' This much about those who would say that they have their free will.

A little digression here is inevitable as the subject of free will has been introduced. Is our will free? The answer is yes and no. We can approach this reply from two standpoints. First of all, as related already, a certain amount of freedom is given to us, just as a cow tethered to a post is allowed to roam about, in a meadow, to the extent the length of the rope round its neck allows it, but no more. We can feel this even in society. Society gives us freedom to develop in our own individual way, of course, subject to certain restrictions. And when we go beyond the set bounds, down comes its mighty arm. The long arm of the law seizes one who transgresses its limits, or enters into others' domains. However much we may like to break these bonds they would not yield, but only chafe us the more. We are not in any way in a dissimilar position as far as 'will to act' is concerned. So many factors press us down: our inherent tendencies, circumstances, environments and the like.

From the second point of view, as long as our will remains distinct from the Cosmic Will it is not free, but when the former runs in concurrence with the latter it has no more bonds. Whatever it wills comes true, for it can have no desire apart from that of the Cosmic Will. Of course, this latter state is possible only when man has attained complete perfection, when not a speck of worldly taint is left in him.

To return to the subject of submission: what about those who simulate submission accepting the existence of a Higher Entity ruling over us? It is a dangerous game they try to play. They are deceiving themselves. Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the Brahmin — who killed a cow and who while taking credit for the lay out of his garden and every good and beautiful thing he possessed, imputed the sin of cow-killing to Indra, the

presiding deity of the hand — should serve as a very poignant eye-opener. Another example Sri Ramakrishna used to cite was that of Duryodhana. Duryodhana said to Sri Krishna: 'I know what is righteousness but I have no inclination to practise it, and I know what is unrighteousness but I have no disposition to avoid it. O Krishna, I act as you, dwelling in my heart, make me act.' Sri Ramakrishna says that such lip service won't do us any good: 'You know in your heart of hearts that those are mere words. No sooner do you commit an evil deed than you feel a palpitation in your heart.' Again he said, be one in your thought, word and deed. For sincerity is the *sine qua non* of spiritual life. A man with a sincere trust in God does not come to grief. 'If you place your trust in a great man he won't let you down. What then to speak of the Lord!' remarks Sri Ramakrishna.

Having said that awe and fear, submission and servitude need not be the only approach to God it devolves on us to point out what other approaches are feasible. We shall leave out the Vedantic idea of 'Atman is Brahman', as it is not a practicable proposition in the case of all and sundry. Worship implies three things, the worshipper, the worshipped and the act of worship. Let us recall what we said earlier, viz. that God assumes forms for bestowing grace on the aspirant. Everything will be easier to comprehend if we remember this. Now, to God with form, the other forms of approach would be respect, reverence and love. The last one is an intimate relation. We are not devoid of these feelings. We respect and revere those who are good and great, who possess virtues in abundance, and who are pure. Man loves his father, mother, wife, and children. The approach of the Vaisnavas is somewhat on this line, and can be followed with profit. There are no conventionalities to be observed, no restrictions to be feared in man's approach to these relations. Man feels one with them. That is the reason why man turns to his home after a hard day's labour or a nerve-racking experience, for rest and sympathy. He is sure of the soothing touch of the beloved ones there. It restores him to cheerfulness, gives him courage to face life again, however terrible a form it may assume.

But very rarely do people come across disinterested love in the word. It is all give and take, a shop-keeping, that is why there is so much of unrest in families. Perhaps, man's love towards God begins that way. He will worship God to get some of his desires fulfilled. In other words, his devotion is *sakāma*. If, however, the aspirant uses his discrimination he will soon understand the emptiness of the enjoyments. Love of God rightly directed is able to generate in us dispassion for these enjoyments. That is the test of the dawn of real love of God. Nothing tempts a man, who has that love, to fall from the ideal. It is love of God for His own sake, not for the sake of 'loaves and fishes'.

Man is obsessed with the idea that every thing should be judged by his own standard. He wants to weigh God also in his own moral balance. This shows how anthropomorphic an ordinary man's idea of God is. Nay,

even great theologians and scholars commit this mistake. They superimpose their own imperfections, disabilities and drawbacks, on the Lord, and posit that such a being does not deserve any worship. But a little thought would satisfy that it is puerile to speak of good and evil in the transcendent. We will bring down the transcendent Lord to the level of man, if we try to impose on Him our standards, of morals and the like. Morals and laws are necessary in a world of multiplicity where there is a conflict between interests. But God is one who has no axe of His own to grind, who has no pleasures to seek and is on a plane where there is no multiplicity, no interests to clash. He is ever pure, ever perfect, ever knowing, and ever free. He desires nothing, wills nothing. If such a Being does not deserve worship who else will? Man, wherever he finds greater powers, greater talents and greater virtues instinctively bows down his head in salutation. Then why should he be arrogant towards the highest Being, who is the fulfillment of all virtues and power and glory?

## CONCEPT OF A WORSHIPFUL BEING

**Swami Paratparananda**

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FOR ages now, the controversy as to the nature of a worshipful Being is going on. Some say that He is infinite, absolute, without form, eternal, and is inconceivable by the human mind. Others have contended that He is of infinite good qualities, that He has form and though He is all-pervading, He has an abode of His own. Some others again say that He cannot be said to be absolute and infinite, yet He is self-surpassing; yet others give Him a definite form and assert that He can be none other and all other gods are only lesser than Him. Simultaneously a section of humanity has held that there is no such Being at all. It is all a superstition of the frail human mind, of weak persons and should be got over. In the recent centuries this latter view has been gaining ground.

Scientists in the beginning, in the West, were the first to raise the banner of revolt against the then prevailing form of religion and theology there. For the Church at that time, put down, with a firm foot, whatever went against their theological beliefs. Science, therefore, for its very survival had to stage a great fight. Later when the scientists got a free rein to explore their field and ultimately found that science alone could not give peace to mankind, and when contacts with the different religions made it possible to know what was meant by real religion, they discarded this inimical attitude to religion. Nevertheless, the lesser men who call themselves scientists who have as yet contributed nothing either to science or to their own countries are furiously fighting the lost battle. Here, we shall not concern ourselves with these people but limit ourselves to understand the controversy cited at the beginning of this article and enlighten ourselves whether such a controversy is worth the trouble.

### II

It is first of all necessary to know as to how this idea of a Being superior to man came to be conceived of in the beginning. The first feeling man experiences, when he comes to know of things, is that he is bound. In the beginning man might have felt the immensity of the power

of Nature, of the elements and therefore personifying them worshipped them, so that they may be propitious to him. So there came to be the worship of the sun, the earth, the fire and water. The earth was worshipped, when man came to depend on cultivation. It was propitiated in order that it may yield crops in plenty. Man felt that these were more free than him and would grant him freedom, when propitiated. Swami Vivekananda says: 'If we try to examine the various sorts of worship all over the world, we would see that the rudest of mankind are worshipping ghosts, demons and the spirits of their forefathers. Serpent worship, worship of tribal gods and worship of the departed ones, why do they do this? Because they feel that in some unknown way these beings are greater, more powerful than themselves, and limit their freedom. They therefore seek to propitiate these beings in order to prevent them from molesting them, in other words, to get more freedom. They also seek to win favour from these superior beings, to get by gift of the gods what ought to be earned by personal effort.'<sup>1</sup> So, we can say that this idea of a superior being or beings originated with the bondage man felt — the moment he began to look around — and the freedom he hankered after; a superior being he thinks would give him unlimited freedom. Even in the crudest concept of God this idea is manifest. To quote Swami Vivekananda again: 'These two views (the ancestor worship and worship of Nature), though they seem to be contradictory, can be reconciled on a third basis, which to my mind is the real germ of religion, and that I propose to call the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses. Either, man goes to seek for the spirits of his ancestors, the spirits of the dead, that is, he wants to get a glimpse of what there is after the body is dissolved, or, he desires to understand the power working behind the stupendous phenomena of nature. Whichever of these is the case, one thing is certain, that he tries to transcend the limitations of the senses. He cannot remain satisfied with his senses; he wants to go beyond them.'<sup>2</sup> Later as man evolved and began to think deeply, the idea of God also evolved. God came to be conceived of as a Person, sitting somewhere in the heaven infinitely merciful, infinitely kind, who showers blessings on the good. Many gods gave place to one God, omniscient, and omnipotent. In other words Monotheism became prevalent. Now, most of the religious can not go beyond this idea, though there are indications in their scriptures which point to higher and nobler sentiments.

Well, as it is, it is not bad; we need not blame them. But when they pose to be all-knowers, and dogmatic and begin to condemn every other thought, every other sentiment, every other religion as only worth to be consigned to the dust heap, or flames, we have to pity them for their shallowness; for they are as Christ said: 'Eyes have they but they see not; ears have they but they hear not.'

Further, by these condemnations they not only expose their intolerance of a second creed or religion, other than their own, but also express lack of depth, lack of sympathy, lack of sensitivity, and fear to go

beyond the limitations set by themselves. Let us remind ourselves that these are not things of the past, but of the living present. Dogmatism and fanaticism die hard. If one goes through some of the recent publications of the West and subsequently reproduced in India too, one will find how patent this fact is. Hinduism and India have again become the target of vested interests both in and outside India. This is a thing which cannot but be noted in passing though a detailed survey of it is not necessary in this context.

Now to return to our subject: This idea of a Personal God residing somewhere in the heaven was all right for the common masses but the Hindu seers were not satisfied with such a position. They persisted in their search and advanced further. They said, 'Well, God has an abode but he has an abode in us too, in everyone of us. Nay, we are his parts. Nature also is a part of Him. Just as man has a soul and a body, the whole universe and all the living and non-living beings are his body and He is its soul.' Here people still held on to a Personal God.

But there were seers who were not yet satisfied with the idea. Swami Vivekananda explains why they were not satisfied: 'This explanation — that there is a Being beyond all these manifestations of Maya and who is attracting us towards Himself, and that we are all going towards Him — is very good, says the Vedanta, but yet the perception is not clear, the vision is dim and hazy, although it does not directly contradict reason. . . . The idea that the goal is far off, far beyond nature, attracting us all towards it, has to be brought nearer and nearer, without degrading or degenerating it.'<sup>3</sup> The sages, therefore, indomitably struggled on until they came to the last word of Vedanta — Non-dualism, the idea of One without a second. 'The God of heaven becomes the God in nature, and the God in nature becomes the God who is nature, and the God who is nature becomes the God within this temple of the body, and the God dwelling in the temple of the body at last becomes the temple itself, becomes the soul and man — and there it reaches the last words Vedanta can teach.'<sup>4</sup> This idea, however, is beyond the grasp of most people. If any one says 'You and I are Gods,' or 'Ātman is Brahman', the ordinary man will be shocked at — what he considers — this blasphemy. It is a thought too deep for most of mankind. They will either make a hash of this idea or will simply try to ridicule it. So, we see that every man wants whatever he considers as true to be accepted by everyone else. But we must ask ourselves, when we propound a theory, specially about religion and God: What right have we to condemn others or force them to accept our opinions? Fanatics have no patience to reflect upon this. They will either ask you to follow their pet theories or suffer the consequences. In olden days it was the sword but now it is abuse and vilification. We do not know, how God, who is supposed to be all-love, can remain where so much hatred is rampant.



### III

Now, we have so many concepts of God. Which concept is true? What is the way out of this labyrinth of concepts? What must a common man follow? Were the great sages all-wrong? If they were not, whom should one follow? is the common man's dilemma. But to the Hindu, if he had studied his own scriptures, heard his Masters with attention and faith, this should be no problem at all. Even as early as in the times of Rig Veda our sages found out that 'Truth is One but sages call It variously, as Indra, Varuna, and the like.'<sup>5</sup> By whatever name one called that Supreme Being it was one and the same. Later too we find this idea being again and again repeated and stressed. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* Sri Krishna says, 'One who worships Me (the Lord), in whatever form, to him I come in that form. For, O Arjuna, all people travel everywhere in my path alone.'<sup>6</sup> A poet sang, 'Men take different paths, straight or crooked through different tendencies, yet, O Lord, Thou alone art the ultimate goal of all men, as ocean is of all rivers.'<sup>7</sup> Sri Ramakrishna by his intuitive realizations verified this truth and then in his homely inimitable style said: 'Just as water drawn from the different places of a tank by people speaking several languages is variously named, as 'jal', pāni', 'aqua' and 'water', so according to the distinctive tendencies of man, he addresses God, as Brahman, Allah, Krishna, Kali and the like.'

So, it is wrong to be dogmatic about any one concept of God. Those who insist that God can be only what they consider Him to be are consciously or unconsciously dictating terms to God. In what a predicament should that God not be! Do they not consider this overlording Him? If God were such a weak person as to listen to the dictates of a community however large and powerful, He would be no better than the tribal gods conceived of in earlier stages of man's history. Yet, why do people persist in their self-righteous notions? In one word, if we have to say, they are not at all perturbed about God. They are concerned with all other things except Him. So there is conflict and quarrel, dispute and bloodshed, on the outer forms, and modes of worship.

Before dealing with the question, what is the path which one has to choose from among so many concepts, we have to consider one's own nature. Man is man because he can think, why then should he be reduced to the position of dumb driven cattle? The constitution of each man is different. No two persons are exactly alike even in physical appearance. Man comes into this world with loads of tendencies and never with a *tabula rasa*. The very fact that beings are born, say the Indian scriptures, is due to the momentum of past actions or Karma, and accordingly are their temperaments formed. The Hindu scriptures speak of three *gunas* or constituents of Nature, viz. *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, and according as any of these constituents is predominant the nature of man is tranquil, active or inert. For 'as is one's nature so is one's faith. And man's

character develops according to his faith, therefore as is his faith so is man'.<sup>8</sup> If man has to make real progress he should be allowed to develop in his own way according to his own nature. What another man can do, if possible, is to give him a helping hand in his own way and never by interfering with his ideal or condemning what he has cherished. If one cannot do that and if one is still solicitous for the welfare of that person, what best he can do is to keep off that person's track. What Sri Ramakrishna taught by reprimand and instructions to 'M', the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, can be studied with much benefit towards our spiritual growth. 'M', who had imbibed the idea that image worship is not a proper mode of worship, at the beginning of his contact with the Master came forward to argue that though God may have form, yet 'Certainly He is not the clay image!'

MASTER (*interrupting*): 'But why clay? It is an image of Spirit'.

'M' could not quite understand the significance of this 'image of Spirit'. 'But, sir,' he said to the Master, 'one should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay.'

MASTER (*sharply*): 'That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people — giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?'

By Calcutta people the Master means people who are imbued with the modern ideas. Man will do more harm than good by such interference. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*, 'Do not create confusion in the minds of the ignorant who are attached to work. For a wise man should encourage them in all work by steadily engaging himself in work.'<sup>9</sup> By working in an unselfish manner, without any motive man's mind gets purified and in a purified mind values of things become more and more clear until he comes to know the true nature of things. Similarly whatever a person's idea of God may be, he will, if he is sincere, come to the Truth. That is why Sri Ramakrishna said: 'He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe, who has made the sun and moon, men and beasts and all other beings. The Lord has done so many things — will He not show people the way to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide.'

## IV

What is, therefore, required of man is sincerity and yearning to know God, to see Him. Have we that yearning? Then we are on the right path. Do we do our spiritual practices regularly and systematically? Then there is hope that we shall one day see Him, that we are surely making progress on the path though we may not be aware of it. But mere book

knowledge and parrot-like repetition of scriptures will avail us nothing, take us nowhere. It cannot show us God. The Hindu scriptures openly and boldly avow this: 'Neither by expounding (of scriptures), nor by ratiocination nor by reading a great many Texts can this Ātman be attained. It is attained by him who seeks Him alone. Such a one's soul is illumined by the light of the Lord.'<sup>10</sup> A great significance is attached to the words 'Him alone'. It will not do to seek God as one among the many things you desire. It is no seeking at all. One should seek Him and Him alone. And this means that there should be no other thought in the mind and no other word in the speech except about Him, and no other deed but that which is dedicated to Him. And this should be done not for a day or a year but till realization comes. Can such steadfastness and one-pointedness be attained all of a sudden? By long, continuous and regular practice one gets a little concentration. How much of practice is then not necessary to have this desire to seek 'God alone'! He only truly worships who worships in this manner. Such a person attains Light no matter what form or ideal he worships. Attaining Light himself he becomes a light unto others. So it is not only the concept of God that brings man Light but his devotion to that concept. Swami Vivekananda said that that age will be an ideal one when each person will pursue his ideal of religion alone without any interference whatsoever from anywhere.

Let us understand this thoroughly and shed all inimical attitudes towards other sects, other religions and pursue our own paths with steadfastness and devotion, remembering at the same time that hatred and fanaticism will not lead us anywhere near God. On the other hand, it will take us away from Him. Study the lives of the saints and sages and find out one from among them who had attained that state by hating others. God is all-love. So if we have to worship God we should also become all-loving. Then and then alone our worship will be fruitful.

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I, pp. 332, 333. Seventh edition, 1046.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 59 (1948).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Rig Veda, 1. 22. 165. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 4.11.

<sup>7</sup> Shivamahimnastotra, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 17, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 3.26.

<sup>10</sup> Mundakopanishad, III. ii.3.

## CONTENTMENT AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

Swami Paratparananda

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THE first hurdle that man faces in spiritual life is his mind. It is a formidable hurdle but at the same time a very delicate one. It requires careful handling. The nature of the mind is fickle. Even a world-conqueror may be but a slave to his mind. The speed of the mind is said to be the fastest that can be thought of. It moves so fast, now it is here and in a moment it may be thinking of the remotest part of the globe. Again it is like a double-edged sword which cuts both ways. It can kill or save a man, spiritually speaking. So one has to be very dextrous in using it.

Further, it is not possible to measure the fickleness of the mind. If you happen to visit a menagerie you will notice the restlessness that is manifested in the caged beings, — especially the wild animals like bears, tigers and lions — moving round and round their cages. The agitated state of monkeys is proverbial to need repetition. The human mind is more restive and restless than all these. Swami Vivekananda once said that the mind is like a mad monkey, intoxicated with liquor and bitten by a scorpion. The agitation that goes on in such a monkey is inconceivable. Naturally prone to fidgetiness, madness increases its unrest enormously. What then will be its state if it becomes drunk and is bitten by scorpion? Can we have any idea of it? Its unrest cannot even be imagined. We will surely pity such a creature. Yet that is the very nature of an uncultivated, uncultured and uncontrolled mind. It flies from enjoyment to enjoyment. Even in sleep it is pestered with the impressions that it receives in the waking and is forced to project a thousand and one pictures of pleasure. One thing, however, that prevents the mind from perpetual dreaming is its being confronted by the painful side also. That is what breaks the dream and that is, again, what breaks our waking dream also.

The first thing, therefore, that we have to learn is that this fickleness will not do, that discontentment is the mire in which we get stuck up, that ambition is a trait that projects a fast receding goal, an *ignis fatuus*. Maybe ambition is all right for those who immerse themselves in materialism. But it does not bring them happiness. On the contrary it pours into them the poison of disquietude, a hankering that becomes unsatiable. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to a devotee in this connection can be noted with profit. Adhar Chandra Sen when he came to

Sri Ramakrishna was holding the post of a deputy magistrate, a post that carried prestige in those days. He became much attached to Sri Ramakrishna and the Master too loved him. Adhar sometimes used to come straight from his office to Dakshineswar, lest he should miss the Master's company if he went home. Even such a devoted man had once asked Sri Ramakrishna to pray to the Divine Mother, that he could get the post of vice-chairman of the Calcutta Municipality. Let us quote here what the Master said about it.

Master (*to Adhar*): 'Didn't you get the job?'

In order to secure the job, Adhar had interviewed many influential people in Calcutta.

Master (*to 'M' and Niranjan*): 'Hazra said to me, "Please pray to the Divine Mother for Adhar, that he may secure the job." Adhar made the same request to me. I said to the Mother: "O Mother, Adhar has been visiting You. May he get the job if it pleases You." But at the same time I said to Her, "How small-minded he is! He is praying to You for things like that and not for Knowledge and Devotion."' "

(*To Adhar*): 'Why did you dance attendance on all those small-minded people? You have seen so much; you have heard so much! After reading the entire *Ramayana*, to ask whose wife Sita is!

'Be satisfied with the job you have. People hanker after a post paying fifty or a hundred rupees, and you are earning three hundred rupees! . . . Serve him whom you are already serving. The mind becomes soiled by serving but one master. And to serve five masters!'

To call out such strong remarks from the Master two things were necessary: the Master's interest in the welfare of the devotee and his urge to point out to one and all the gaping chasm that awaits a spiritual aspirant, if he entertains worldly ambitions. There is no end to man's desire and no satisfying of all of them even if the whole world with all that is in it were his. There is no satisfaction in the enjoyment that comes from wealth and the like. Peace comes from contentment and contentment from being satisfied with whatever one has got.

## II

Why do we hear from every spiritual master that we have to give up worldly thoughts if we are earnest in seeking God? Christ said to a rich man, who had asked to be initiated into the life of religion, 'Sell everything you have, give it to the poor and then follow me'. Sri Ramakrishna said 'lust and gold' are the two impediments in the path of a spiritual seeker. The Upanisads too are categorical in their declaration, 'Neither by actions, nor by progeny and wealth, but by renunciation alone some attained liberation.'<sup>1</sup> Why is this so? Can there not be a *via media*? Knowing Brahman alone one goes beyond death; there is not any other

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<sup>1</sup> Kaivalyopanishad, 1.3.

path<sup>2</sup> declare the Vedas. Because, first of all, the world is such a subject that it engrosses the whole of man's mind once he gets into it. Worldly goods can so tangibly be grasped and palpably felt and perceived that it requires a very keen intellect to see in and through the kaleidoscope of this world. That the world, like a kaleidoscope, is but a glass tube with some glass pieces in it, worth nothing, yet lure people of immature minds again and again, is a fact that is discerned by a very few, a microscopic minority.

Secondly, a mind that is given to the world is always restless and an agitated mind is not the proper medium, not the proper ground, for the reflection of God's image. Arjuna, the hero, of many a battle confesses that the mind is, even as air, very difficult to control<sup>3</sup>. It is a common phenomenon, which is within the experience of every one, that the still waters alone, can properly reflect the objects near it, for example, the landscape on its banks. It is only the crystal clear water, which remains undisturbed or which does not rush at great speed, that discovers to us its bed with its myriad-hued stones and the life it holds in its womb. The case of the mind is very much analogous to this. Unless the mind is calm we cannot find out what is there behind it. Unless it is pure the reflection of the Most High is impossible. That is why the Upanisads ask us to ward off thoughts other than about God. They affirm that way alone lies the bridge to immortality.<sup>4</sup>

### III

The Hindus believe that man comes into this world to reap the fruits of his past actions. They lie in seed form, in the form of propensities or tendencies, in his mind and bide their time and spurt out when conditions become favourable. They are like the germs of diseases that remain dormant until the body in which they abide gets weak; then they attack with full vigour. The remedy, therefore, as in the case of the body, lies in keeping the mind strong, that is to say, wary and watchful. Man is naturally upset if he faces a too bitter or elating experience. This perturbation makes him lose his faculty of discrimination and commit some folly, which he may regret afterwards. It is for this reason that poise of the mind has been so much stressed upon in the *Gita*. 'He who does not get elated, nor hates; neither grieves nor desires, gives up both good and evil, and is full of devotion, he is dear to Me.'<sup>5</sup> 'The serenity of mind, kindness, silence, self-control and purity of thought — this is said to be mental austerity.'<sup>6</sup>

Austerity or Tapas is a thing which is almost forgotten in the

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<sup>2</sup> Svetasvataropanisad, 3.8.

<sup>3</sup> Bhagavad Gita, VI.34.

<sup>4</sup> Mundakopanisad, 2.2.5.

<sup>5</sup> Bhagavad Gita, XII.17.

<sup>6</sup> IBID., XVII.16.

present age. The modern trend is to give free reins to the mind, and senses. People can brook no restraint on their actions, neither have they control over themselves. They are content to be carried away on the tide of their emotions. They never stop to think of the *pros* and *cons* of their actions; selfishness rules supreme. In short, man is becoming more and more extrovert, the very nature which goes to make mind fidgety and restless. In the wake of this restlessness man rushes after more and newer pleasures until at last he runs up a blind alley, but having failed to cultivate the power to withdraw into himself, he, by the very momentum of his propensities, impinges against the wall, as it were. For given to a way of life that he is no more able to sustain, man loses his mental balance, becomes a neurotic. Therefore, to avoid this danger it is good for every one to practise a little introspection, a little withdrawal from the mad world of the senses.

Sri Krishna in the verse quoted above speaks of serenity of the mind. How can the mind be serene when we feed it and fill it every moment of our life with disturbing and distracting material? The way does not lie in pursuing these distractions but avoiding them. The worldly-wise may indict such a person of escapism but if he desires his own good he should not heed such meaningless chatter. Saner advice is to avoid such temptations. Sri Ramakrishna said that the temptations to man are as pickles to a typhoid patient. They should be kept out of sight.

#### IV

Having found out the nature of the mind, we should try to seek means to counteract its harmful trends. We have known now that there are lust, anger, greed, hatred, jealousy and pride, lurking in us and that these are deadly enemies of man. These are to be overcome, to be vanquished if we want tranquillity of mind, if we desire peace and bliss. How to do it? Patanjali suggests that a wave of opposite nature should be set against each of these whenever any of them tries to raise its head.<sup>7</sup> Jesus, as it were, reflects the very thoughts when he says, 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.'<sup>8</sup> When a wave of anger rises smother it with the thought of love. When hatred gushes out arouse the virtue of kindness. Do so every time a wrong thought oppresses you. But this is possible if we constantly and assiduously cultivate the virtues such as kindness, humility, dispassion and the like. A question may crop up here: What is the necessity of cultivating these virtues? Is it not enough if we send a wave of contrary nature when the evil thought arises? It is not so easy as that. Life is a struggle; it is a war between the lower and

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<sup>7</sup> Yoga Sutras, II.33.

<sup>8</sup> St. Mathew, 5. 43-44.

higher natures in man. The lower nature is always strong. We have heard in the Puranas how the Devas, were most of the time defeated by the Danavas and God had to come to their rescue every time. This fight goes on within us too. The demons of evil inclinations are always alert to undermine our Godward life. So our weapons are to be trim, ready and formidable to give fight to these foes. The virtues are our weapons here, and, therefore, are required to be practised continuously until they become a part and parcel of our nature. Then alone can we be sure of defeating the wicked inclinations.

Sri Ramakrishna gives us another method to overcome these evil propensities. 'Direct the passions to God. The impulse of *lust* should be turned into the desire to have intercourse with Atman. Feel *angry* at those who stand in your way to God. Feel *greedy* for Him. If you must have the feeling of *I and mine*, then associate it with God. Say, for instance, "My Rama, my Krishna." If you must have *pride*, then feel like Vibhishana, who said, "I have touched the feet of Rama with my head; I will not bow this head before anyone else."<sup>9</sup> Such constant remembrance of God changes the whole fabric of that person's mind. The passions then no more trouble him. He becomes contented and tranquil. He becomes dear to the Lord. 'A Yogi who is always contented, whose passions are under control, who is of firm determination, and whose mind and intellect are given unto Me and is devoted to Me, he is dear to Me.'<sup>10</sup> 'He, by whom the world is not troubled and who is not troubled by the world, who is free from elation, anger, fear and anxiety — he is dear to Me.'<sup>11</sup> To be noticed by the Lord and to be loved by Him, the devotee should make his heart pure, devoid of all other attachments. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.' Purity of heart is achieved by excluding all other thoughts and making it one-pointed; then alone contentment comes. And contentment is the precursor of Knowledge, of the descent of God into man's heart.

Here we may be asked: Is God partial then? Why is every one not dear to Him? The *Gita* has given us the answer. 'The Lord does not accept anyone's demerits or merits; but knowledge (that the Lord is same to all) is covered by ignorance; because of this they get deluded. But those whose ignorance has been destroyed by the knowledge of the Self — their knowledge, like the sun, manifests that highest Being.'<sup>12</sup> So it is not that God is partial but that we do not need Him. Whatever we yearn for that is given to us. If we seek the things of the world we get them but along with them will come the evils of the world too. A popular story that we come across in the Puranas may well illustrate this fact. Once when the gods had lost their everything to the demons and were sorely dejected, Lord Vishnu told them to churn the Milk Ocean to produce nectar, drinking

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<sup>9</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p.155 (1948).

<sup>10</sup> Bhagavad Gita, XII.14.

<sup>11</sup> Bhagavad Gita, XII.15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., V. 15 & 16.



which the mortals would become immortal. A sort of a pact was patched up between the two quarrelling parties, viz., the gods and the demons, for this purpose and making Vasuki, a huge serpent, the rope, Mandara mountain the churning rod, they churned the Milk Ocean. But the first thing to come out was not nectar but a virulent poison, the very breeze of which suffocated and made the lives of the gods and demons alike miserable. The gods then took refuge in Shiva and prayed to him to save them from that torture. The story says that the great God drank the poison and relieved the universe of its misery. Many other things came out of that great effort but nectar was the last to be produced. This story tells us that things coveted here are not unmixed with misery. Pleasure and pain go together; one who accepts pleasure must accept pain also; he cannot avoid it. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*, 'The happiness, that is derived from the contact of the senses with their objects, which tastes like nectar in the beginning but in effect works like poison is of *rajasic* nature'.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand that happiness which in the beginning savours like poison but in effect works like nectar that is called the *sattvic* joy and is born out of the tranquillity and purity of the mind.<sup>14</sup> Knowing this we should pray and strive to attain purity of heart.

## V

There is, however, one discontentment, one restlessness which is not harmful for a spiritual aspirant, viz. divine discontent: restlessness to see God, eagerness to feel His presence. This restlessness on the contrary is an antidote to the other. Here there is no straying away from our moorings. It is rather a gathering back into the fold, a going home. But this discontent comes to one in a million, after years of austerity and practice. Ordinary people have to plod on and try to still the lower type of discontent. For the former discontent leads you towards God and the latter entangles you into the world. Remembering this let us exert our bit to free ourselves from this bondage, from this *Samsara*.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., XVIII.38.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., XVIII.37.

## **DEVOTION: SECONDARY AND SUPREME**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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THE INDIAN mind is very analytical and it stops at nothing until it would arrive at the highest that could be reached; specially it is so in the field of religion. Swami Vivekananda, referring to this characteristic of the Hindu said, 'One peculiarity of the Hindu mind is that it always inquires for the last possible generalisation.' At another time he remarked, 'This analytical power and the boldness of poetical visions which urged it onward are the two great internal causes in the make-up of the Hindu race.' Endowed with this mind, as the Hindus were, they critically evaluated every phase of man's progress in the spiritual life. To them, therefore, all devotion was not one. It was foolish, they thought, to class one who had attained the highest in devotion with a person who had just begun to tread the path; one is like the mature man and the other like a baby in swaddling-clothes. They saw what a vast difference there was in the devotion of the two towards the Godhead. So they classified devotion or Bhakti as *parā* (highest) and *gauni* (secondary).

Why this difference even in the spiritual life, is a naive question. For it is not as the difference that is made in the social or political field, either according to the station in life in which one is placed or to the party which one belongs. It is a difference in the transformation of the inner being. And we have to remember that this difference is not imposed by the person who has attained to *parā* Bhakti upon one who is just beginning his spiritual life, that is one who is still struggling to reach God; but a distinction that is to be marked by those who yearn to progress in spiritual life. For them the lowest man cannot be the ideal. Ideals should always be high, otherwise they cannot be ideals, but only ideas. What Swami Vivekananda said regarding ideals can be profitably remembered here. 'Without the struggle towards the Infinite there can be no ideal.' And again, 'If we cannot follow the ideal, let us confess our weakness, but not degrade it; let us not try to pull it down.' We have to approach all problems of spiritual life keeping this in mind so as not to get confounded by our unfounded and illogical reasoning.

### **WHAT IS GAUNI BHAKTI?**

Gauni Bhakti is preparatory devotion, a stage in the final evolution of *parā* Bhakti. It is a helpful process by which one arouses and directs

the faculty of love towards God. 'It is of three kinds, according to the qualities of the mind of a person in whom it manifests itself; either it may be classified as *sattvika*, *rajasika* and *tamasika*, or it may be divided as *Arta*, and others.'<sup>1</sup> This is a division in keeping with the Hindu tradition, of allowing every person to grow in his own way, according to his mental evolution and make-up. To prescribe a uniform mode of worship of God to one and all, Hinduism feels, is to blind oneself to the actualities of life, to facts, and to stunt, cramp or distort the growth of the individual.

In this preparatory stage man takes the aids of symbols, uses rituals and the like for adoring God. He takes the name of God a certain number of times daily, sings hymns to Him and so on. Again, according to the qualities of the mind of the individual he may perform these things in an ostentatious manner or without any outward show. Sri Ramakrishna in his inimitable way gives the description of these types of devotees thus: 'Bhakti, devotion has its *sattva*. A devotee who possesses it meditates on God in absolute secret, perhaps inside his mosquito net. Others think he is asleep. Since he is late in getting up, they think perhaps he has not slept well during the night. His love for the body goes only as far as appeasing his hunger, and that only by means of rice and simple greens. There is no elaborate arrangement about his meals, no luxury in clothes, and no display of furniture. Besides, such a devotee never flatters anybody for money.'

'An aspirant possessed of *rajasic* Bhakti puts a *tilak* on his forehead and a necklace of holy *rudraksha* beads, interspersed with gold ones, around his neck. At worship he wears a silk cloth.'

'A man endowed with *tamasic* Bhakti has burning faith. Such a devotee literally extorts boons from God, even as a robber falls upon a man and plunders his money. "Bind! Beat! Kill!"— that is his way, the way of the dacoits.'

Again, the *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of four types of people who worship God. One who is moved by a sense of misery, one who is eager to know the correct path, one who is moved by the desire of acquiring some gain and lastly the *jnani*, the true knower of God.<sup>2</sup> But the last of these does not come under the category of people having *gauna* devotion. He is of the other class, those possessed of Mukhya-bhakti. His love of God is for the sake of God alone.

But we have to take note that man should try to elevate himself from the lower to the higher type of devotion. The *tamasic* Bhakti, for instance, usually is resorted to, to attain some occult power to do evil or gain some end which will entail great harm to others. In this *tamasic* condition of man he does not understand what is good and what is evil for himself; he is moved by his own inertia, indolence and indulgence. Nevertheless, devotion and earnest prayer may lead him on to the right path and save him from much waste of his precious labour and time. His

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<sup>1</sup> Narada Bhakti Sutras, 56.

<sup>2</sup> Bhagavad Gita, IV, 16.

wicked urges would get curtailed under the effect of earnest prayer and ultimately may leave him. He may gradually evolve into the *sattvika* type; so also with those of *rajasic* kind.

Now, *sattvika* Bhakti is nearer to the devotion without taint, Mukya-bhakti, than the others. After a little practice the former slides into the latter. For as the *Bhagavata* says, 'A person, who is devoted to inaction, performs them for the sake of the Most High; or does any sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice alone (without any motive), yet has not gone beyond the idea of difference is of the *sattvika* type.'<sup>3</sup> This little distinction it is that separates him from the Lord and that is why he should persist in his devotion.

### HOW TO RECOGNIZE THIS KIND OF BHAKTI

Narada says that this devotion is more easily attainable and recognizable than the supreme Bhakti,<sup>4</sup> though the exact nature of devotion defies precise analysis, definition or description.<sup>5</sup> In man this feeling of love is present as a natural element. There is none so unfeeling as not to have experienced love towards something or somebody, at some time or other. This intrinsic feeling when purified and directed towards God with added strength is called Bhakti. That is why it is told that this devotion is not very difficult to achieve or recognize.

Further proof of possession of this phenomenon of Bhakti is that a peace, that goes beyond all understanding, settles on such a person. He becomes calm, not for the time being, but for all time. This experience of inner peace forms the firm bedrock of all spiritual edifice. Reaching it one is able to understand arguments against godly life as mere baby-prattle.

Yet, should there be a doubt as to how a devotee who is very anxious and always seems to be worried to serve the world can be at peace, it is to be understood that the devotee does not look upon the world as something that needs his help, but as the manifestation of the Lord, his God. He understands that, as a puny creature, he can do but little to help the world and that the Lord who is omniscient and omnipotent needs no help from the devotees to bring about its good. As such though engaged in service the devotee's mind is not perturbed.

It is such people alone who are a potent force in the regeneration of the world. By worry and anxiety much of man's energy is wasted, whereas those whose mind is made tranquil can work better and more effectively. From all these distinctive characteristics manifest in a person one can understand that devotion has dawned in his heart.

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<sup>3</sup> III, 29,10.

<sup>4</sup> Narada Bhakti Sutras, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 51.

## IN WHAT WAY CAN ONE APPROACH THE LORD?

As already stated love is not a foreign element that is to be introduced into man's nature. It is inherent in him. In the generality of mankind, however, this love flows towards persons closely related, such as father, mother, wife, husband, child, friend or master. Now when this love is turned towards God it may not be far different from this natural love, only the direction, the flow is to be changed. Once an old lady complained to Sri Ramakrishna that though she was eager to do her spiritual practices her love for her grand-child prevented her from doing them. Sri Ramakrishna suggested a simple remedy. He asked her to look upon that child as the Lord Himself and think that she was serving Him alone when she was attending on the child.

That by any type of Bhakti mentioned above one can not only move towards God but realize Him through it, is amply supported by scriptures and proved by the experience of saints and sages. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, 'Whosoever approaches me in whatsoever way even so do I accept him. For in all ways, O Partha, men walk in My path.'<sup>6</sup> We read that in the ancient times the Gopis, the cowherds of Vrindavan, and Yasoda, the foster mother of Sri Krishna, looked on him and loved him in different ways, knowing full well that he was the Lord Himself incarnate. Coming to the middle ages, Meera, the Rajaput princess, and Andal, the South Indian Brahmin girl conceived of God as their consort and realized Him. So too did St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross and others followed other ways to attain the same goal. Other saints of other times too sought and realized Him in various ways.

Almost in our own times one of the women-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who was a child-widow and was pretty old when she came in contact with the Master, meditated upon God all through her life as her darling child, as baby Krishna. With her practices she had the vision of her Chosen Ideal. It was a marvellous phenomenon. For some months she actually saw with her eyes open, her Gopala. She fed him, put him to bed, and He played with her, snatched her rosary and teased her in innumerable ways. And this happened not in the mythological times, nor *pauranic* ages but towards the end of the last century and beginning of this. Some of the Western disciples of Swami Vivekananda like Sister Nivedita met her and were charmed by the simple, unlettered, village lady who had reached the acme of Bhakti by sheer yearning and faith. Sri Ramakrishna himself realized God through all these modes of approach, which in the Vaishnava literature are called *Santa*, *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya* and *madhura*, and even more than these.

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<sup>6</sup> B. Gita, IV, 11.

## PARA BHAKTI

We now come to supreme devotion. It is pure devotion untainted by any desire, unmarred by any motive. It is love for love's sake, for the sake of God who is all love. This devotion is one-pointed. Such devotees want nothing else in the world except God. Their life is for the benefit of mankind. One who has attained such a state of devotion is called a *Bhagavata* and a Saint.<sup>7</sup> They are filled with God and may or may not perform ritualistic worship. 'Hearing about Me but once, their minds become absorbed in Me, who is the indwelling spirit of all, like the Ganges that gets merged in the ocean. This is the sign of Bhakti that goes beyond the *gunas*,<sup>8</sup> says the *Bhagavata*. Again it says, 'That is called the acme of Bhakti by which one transcends the three *gunas*, and becomes fit to attain My Being.'<sup>9</sup> Swami Vivekananda speaking about this supreme Bhakti declares, 'When the soul succeeds in appropriating the bliss of this supreme love, it also begins to see Him in everything. Our heart will then become an eternal fountain of love and when we reach even higher states of this love, all the little differences between the things of the world are entirely lost; man is seen no more as man but only as God. . . . Thus in this state of Bhakti, worship is offered to every one, to every life, and to every being.' In the *Bhagavata* there occurs a passage which speaks in an identical language: 'I do not find any one superior to him, whose all actions are dedicated to Me and whose body, mind and soul are given to Me ; because such a person has reached the state of same-sightedness (*samadarsanat*). He bows down mentally to all beings and respects and reveres them knowing that the Lord alone has entered these beings in the form of *Jiva*.'<sup>10</sup>

With this intense Bhakti the ego of the devotee gets dissolved. He accepts whatever comes to him, good or evil in the eyes of the world, with an equanimous mind. 'He ceases to distinguish between pleasure and pain in so far as they affect him. He does not know what it is to complain of pain or misery and this kind of uncomplaining resignation to the will of God, who is all love, is indeed a worthier acquisition than all the glory of grand and heroic performances', are some of the outpourings of Swami Vivekananda, about whom Sri Ramakrishna said, 'He is all Bhakti inside and Jnana outside.' Finally let us conclude with what Sri Ramakrishna says about this divine love: 'Attaining that love (which transcends the three *gunas*) the devotee sees everything full of Spirit and Consciousness. To him "Krishna is Consciousness, and His sacred Abode is also Consciousness." The devotee, too, is Consciousness. Everything is Consciousness. Very few people attain such love. Such a devotee becomes like a child five years old, not under the control of the *gunas*.'

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<sup>7</sup> Bharadvaja Samhita.

<sup>8</sup> Bhagavata III, 29, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., III, 29, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., III, 29, 32 & 34.

## EQUANIMITY

**Swami Paratparananda**

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### I

THINGS in nature are in a state of flux, every moment they change. The seed that is sown sprouts in a few days and becomes a plant, puts forth buds, and the buds blossom overnight. A few hours and they too wither away yielding place to fruits, sometimes. The moon revolves round the earth and the earth round the sun, every moment. The whole universe is in the vortex of activity. It cannot rest for fear of its annihilation. But eternal activity is an impossible conception. There must be periods of rest following activity. In everything created we find it. Maybe the period of activity and rest in some cases can be counted in terms of hours, while in some others (as in the case of the earth) in millions of years. All the same, if nature is built on any definite plan, if from the construction of the microcosm any conclusion as to the cosmic process can be drawn it should be admitted that there must be periods of activity alternating with periods of rest, in the universe as a whole. Hindu scriptures support this view. They speak of the cyclic theory of manifestation, when they say: 'The Lord projected the sun and the moon (and the other beings) as on the previous occasions.'<sup>1</sup> The Hindus do not say that this life of the earth or of the universe is all that has been in the womb of time. Creation, in their opinion, had no beginning. It is only alternately rest and projection.

However, if it is asked: Why then do the Upanisads speak of a 'beginning' when they say: 'The Existence alone, without a second, there was in the beginning'?<sup>2</sup> Sri Sankara replies, that the 'beginning' here refers only to the present cycle of creation. And what was there at that time (in the 'beginning') is described in one of the most beautiful concepts in the Rig Veda which in Swami Vivekananda's words is given here: 'Then there was neither aught nor naught, nor air, nor sky, nor anything. What covered all? Where rested all? Then death was not, nor deathlessness, nor change of night and day. That existed, that breath, covering, as it were, that God's existence, motionless.'<sup>3</sup> Further, the Vedas wonderfully picture that indescribable first state as 'Gloom existed in gloom.'<sup>4</sup> Persons living in villages, far away from cities, might have some faint idea as to this.

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<sup>1</sup> Rig Veda, 8.8.48.

<sup>2</sup> Chandogya Up., 6.2.1.

<sup>3</sup> Rig Veda, 8.7.17.1&2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 8.7.17.3.

They would have noticed that calm of the gloomy night of the New Moon, which instils awe and almost fear into the traveller. Imagine now how much more calm there would have been in that 'gloom in gloom'.

But coming to the calm, there is the calm before the storm, there is also the calm of the sultry night, when the wind tired of blowing has gone, as it were, to take rest in some distant cave. But what a vast difference between the two types of calmnesses — the one that was before the projection of the universe and the others enumerated above. In one there is all the assurance of placidity, in the other all the fear of the impending calamity. In the one there is the soul-soothing coolness, in the other there is the presence of unbearable discomfort. In the one there is peace, in the other there is anxiety.

A remote resemblance to this soul-soothing tranquillity can be met with in the calm of the mountains, of the Himalayas. The mountain-retreat holds a direct contrast to the hectic and mad whirlpool of activity of the world, caught in which poor man loses all his bearings and moorings. Far away from the madding crowd, secure in the contemplation of his own self, man, in the retreat, not only retires from the world outside, but also withdraws from the worlds he is creating within. Perhaps a very near parallel to that indecipherable calmness can be experienced in the dreamless sleep. Here, in dreamless sleep, we get an idea, though yet a little vague, of what equanimity is.

## II

All creation is rushing back to gain this equanimity — this disturbed balance, though unconsciously. Human beings too do it, some unconsciously and some consciously. Aye, that is the difference between man and the other creatures — he can strive consciously to possess that equanimity. For man is a peculiar phenomenon, perhaps, the most wonderful creation of nature. It is only he that manifestly goes against nature. He fights with it tooth and nail. Though created with a frail constitution he has survived all the onslaughts of mightier animals and of subtle pestilences as well. He has harnessed the forces of nature to serve his needs. He has delved into the depths of nature's secrets, and is trying to gain mastery over them. But fighting external nature forms only a fraction of the total struggle. With all his conquest of the outer forces man is still not in a happy position. His inventions of all sorts give him pleasure, for sometime, no doubt — we shall say, give him excitement — but that only increases the tension on the nerves, increases the horrid torrent of unrest. Tranquillity does not come with these pleasures; instead a deep void soon develops, a wide chasm soon opens, as a reaction.

However, this running after the pleasures too is done with the view to attain that Infinite Bliss, to forget everything else, but only mistakenly, as one thirsty in a desert takes the mirage as an oasis and runs after it. A large majority of mankind mistakenly takes these pleasures as the be-all



and end-all of life. Why so? How does the error arise? It is said in the Upanisads that the joy which the beings live by is an infinitesimal fraction of that divine Bliss.<sup>5</sup> The error has arisen because mankind has taken that little insignificant fraction of bliss to be the Infinite. That is how they are misled. For that divine Bliss cannot be found in the finite things; in the Infinite alone is the complete Bliss.<sup>6</sup> It is a fact, that has been assured by the Hindu scriptures, that ultimately everyone will reach that Infinite Bliss, because all this has come out of It, live in It and in the end will return unto It.<sup>7</sup> But that may take aeons and also transmigration through millions of lives. Inert things and unthinking beings may bide their time, but a human being should consciously make efforts to regain that 'kingdom of heaven', and then it will come.

### III

Why do we say that the gaining of this equanimity, serenity, is a step towards that Bliss, nay that Bliss itself? Because bliss can reign only in a place undisturbed. On the placid surface of the lake alone can objects be reflected. Again, in that Infinite Bliss there is no movement, as at the beginning of creation. That is why all Teachers call upon us to cultivate this virtue of equanimity, poise. For instance, Sri Krishna speaks of a *sthitaprajña*, one of steady wisdom. Mark the words 'steady wisdom'. It is not a wisdom that is every moment changing. Neither does it mean knowledge in the ordinary sense of the term. We can have a faint conception of what it is, if we go through the description of *sthitaprajña* given in the Gita. Sri Krishna describes the state of such a person of 'steady wisdom' thus: 'When one annihilates all desires, arising in the mind, and is satisfied in one's own self by the self, then alone that one is called a man of steady wisdom'<sup>8</sup> Every word here is significant. It is to be noted that desires are to be annihilated and not merely subdued. For the subdued ones may arise again and work havoc by taking toll of the subject for all the subjugation it has suffered. Again the word 'all' is very important. There is no *via media* in that, no concession, no compromise, 'all desires' have to be burnt. We may not show out our hankerings, but they may all be there in the mind. That too is dangerous. They should all be wiped out even from the mind. The definition does not end here, it continues 'satisfied in one's own self by the self'. What is the meaning of that? It means that for such a man's satisfaction, contentment, no outer agency is required, not even the dreams or imaginations of pleasure. His mind knows nothing at that time except the presence of the Ātman, the self, effulgent and infinitely blissful. When man attains to such a state,

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<sup>5</sup> Taittiriya Upanisad, 2.8.

<sup>6</sup> Chandogya Up., 7.23.1.

<sup>7</sup> Taittiriya Up., 3.6.

<sup>8</sup> B.Gita, II.55.

then alone can he be said to be of 'steady wisdom'. *Samādhi*, the acme of all spiritual life, is not far from such a person. As Sri Ramakrishna says it is like the appearance of the dawn in the east showing that the sun will rise before long.

Continuing Sri Krishna says: 'Unperturbed in calamity and unattached to happiness, devoid of attachment, fear and anger such a one given to contemplation is called a man of steady wisdom'.<sup>9</sup> This is another sketch of such a person, which explains, as it were, the previous description. The world teachers do not leave us in suspense as to what they say, as to what is good for us. They want to be as explicit as possible, as unambiguous in their idea as the vehicle of language can convey it. They come down to our level of understanding to do that. Sri Krishna probably felt that posterity may misconstrue what he has said and go wrong. He did not like that it should be so. That is why he elaborates the idea. We may put on a brave front when we are in distress but all the same there may be trepidation in our hearts. But courage born of strength is a different thing altogether. Swami Vivekananda cites the example of a sage who was unperturbed by the threats, of Alexander the Great, to kill him if he refused to accompany him to Greece. Swami Vivekananda describes the episode thus: 'And the man bursts into a laugh, and says, "You never told such a falsehood in your life, as you tell just now. Who can kill me? Me you kill, Emperor of the material world! Never! For I am Spirit unborn and undecaying, never was I born and never do I die, I am the Infinite, the Omnipresent, the Omniscient; and you kill me, child that you are!"' That is the serenity of the sage which Krishna refers to. It is born of the realization of Truth.

Again, Swamiji speaking about fearlessness gives an example of a sannyasin, 'who used to repeat "Shivoham" — "I am Bliss Eternal", and a tiger jumped on him one day and dragged him away and killed him; but so long as he was living, the sound came, "Shivoham, Shivoham"'. That is equanimity, that is being steadfast in wisdom, to be fearless even in the jaws of death, to be one with the Ātman, to be 'satisfied in the self by the self' and also 'to be devoid of attachment'. For what else is so precious to one as one's own body? Is not all the struggle of the ordinary run of mankind to keep this body intact? It is so. Yet here was one who did not think even of the body as anything better than the rags he wore.

To such alone can realization come and not to cowards. 'This Atman cannot be attained by the weak, neither is it attainable by errors, nor without having recourse to renunciation',<sup>10</sup> says the *Mundakopanisad*. Sri Sankara commenting on this verse says that the word *pramāda* (error) that is used here means possession of or hankering after son, wealth, fame and the like. It is this error that involves man more and more into bondage. So beware says the scripture. The Upanisad continuing says, 'That wise person, who strives by these methods, enters the realm of

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., II.56.

<sup>10</sup> Mundakopanisad, 3.2.4.

Brahman,<sup>11</sup> the realm which is of the nature of perfect tranquillity, of immortality.

We are familiar with the episode of Yājñavalkya and Maitreyi. Perhaps part of it may bear repetition here: When Yājñavalkya imparted his wish to retire to the forest, to his two wives, and with that end in view wanted to divide his assets between them, the intelligent Maitreyi asks him, 'My lord, can I become immortal if this whole earth full of wealth comes into my possession?'<sup>12</sup> 'No, no,' replies Yājñavalkya, 'there is no hope of immortality through wealth.'<sup>13</sup> 'If so,' replies Maitreyi, 'what shall I do with that which brings me no immortality. On the other hand tell me about that which can bring that state.'<sup>14</sup> That is the type of non-attachment born of discrimination. This non-attachment, being free from desires, that is spoken of in the Gita, is not a passing phase. It is of a permanent nature. Serenity sometimes comes to any man, after the fulfilment of his ambition or some of his desires. But it is very short lived. A gust of wind in the form of some other ambition, blows this serenity away. A starving man will have no wild desires, but in him the hankering after them is not burnt away. It is dormant, in the seed form. When his body returns to normalcy all these wild desires get hold of him again. But the restraint of the man of steady wisdom, when he has realized the Highest, is of quite a different type. It is natural and results in enormous good. It is then that the state of equanimity becomes an accomplished fact. There is no fall from there. 'Attaining this divine state one is not deluded again; one who rests in it even at the time of death, attains Nirvana in Brahman,'<sup>15</sup> says the Gita.

A question may crop up here: When everything is changing and changeable how can this state alone be of a static, permanent nature? To this we ask: Does a fried seed sprout? No; it does not. Likewise with God-realization, attainment of *samadhi*, one is not attracted to the lower life. The seeds of desires are, as it were, burnt, their vitality to germinate is lost. Sri Ramakrishna puts across this idea very exquisitely: 'Suppose there are two magnets, one big and the other small. Which one will attract the iron? The big one, of course. God is the big magnet. Compared to Him woman is a small one.' By 'woman' Sri Ramakrishna means lust, and we can include the other desires also. This analogy, however, should not be stretched too far, by asking why should not all be attracted by God, if He is such a big magnet. The question is superfluous, for this pull can be experienced only by those who have felt God, realized Him. Others who are far away from Him cannot feel the attraction, as iron placed beyond the field of a magnet does not respond to its attraction, though the strength of the magnet has not diminished in any way.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Br. Up., 4.5.3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4.5.4.

<sup>15</sup> B. Gita, II.72.

We referred, above, to the state of things when the creation was yet not projected. How did the Rishis come to know of it? Through their realization. They came to know that what was before the creation ought also be what it will be when it dissolves. And in *samādhi* everything dissolves. What there is cannot be described. It is like the dreamless sleep infinitely projected, but producing wonderful results. A word picture of this state — similar to that given in the Vedas, cited above — is drawn by Sri Ramakrishna:

‘When the mind reaches the seventh plane, then the ego vanishes completely and the man goes into *samādhi*. What happens when the mind reaches the seventh plane cannot be described. Once a boat enters the “black waters” of the ocean, it does not return. Nobody knows what happens to the boat after that. Therefore the boat cannot give us any information about the ocean.’ The mind is in the condition of the boat that entered the “black waters”, uncharted ocean of Brahman. In such a man the mind which could have taken pictures of the things, gets merged in the Ātman or Brahman, in that state. That is why we draw a blank there. But this state is not one that is to be dreaded. For it is a state getting into which all bonds are cut asunder, all doubts are shattered, resolved, and fruits of one’s actions are worn away.<sup>16</sup> Is not then such a state, of perfect equanimity, covetable?

#### IV

Now we come to the method of attaining that state. Practice is absolutely necessary to attain any end. Swami Vivekananda remarks, ‘You may sit down and listen to me by the hour every day, but if you do not practise, you will not get one step further.’ That is a fact of experience with all. Further, we have to impress upon our mind that the means adopted to achieve an end should be as unsullied as the perfection, the goal, which we covet. ‘You cannot attain what is infinite by finite things,’<sup>17</sup> says the *Kathopanishad*. Similarly, you cannot attain a noble end by diabolical means. The state of equanimity, is a very high one. So, whatever qualities the man who has achieved that end possesses — enumerated in the scriptures — are to be the means by which one can hope to reach that state. One has also to go beyond the sway of the three *gunas* in order to do that. For the *gunas* bind man down to this earth. Sri Ramakrishna has compared these *gunas* to robbers. The first one (*tamas*) kills, the second one (*rajas*) leaves you bound, the third one (*sattva*) releases you, but cannot take you to your goal. For that you have to go beyond them and be without them. That is what Sri Krishna also advises Arjuna, ‘The Vedas deal with subjects that are in the domain of the three *gunas*. O Arjuna, go beyond the three *gunas*.’<sup>18</sup> Here by ‘Vedas’ is meant mainly the actions

<sup>16</sup> Mundakopanishad, 2.2.8.

<sup>17</sup> Kathopanishad, 2.10.

<sup>18</sup> B.Gita, II.45.

enjoined by them for attaining heaven and the like. Thus from all points of view, we see that, one has to be rid of all material yearnings to attain this state of everlasting equanimity.

## ETHICS OF AUSTERITY

Swami Paratparananda

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To think of austerity in the present times appears to many as an anachronism, to speak of it as out-of-date and to practise it is considered definitely primitive, antediluvian, with the result that we find where we are; neither able to solve our increasing problems nor to reap the benefits that would have accrued from its practice. To act as one likes, to think as one's mind fancies and to speak as one's tongue presumes seems to be the order of the day and this is considered as freedom. Nothing can be more pathetic than such a condition. It is more so when such a state of affairs happens in a country which had nurtured from time out of mind the idea of sacrifice, self-effacement to an extent unheard of in world's history. Whether we take cognizance of our epics as facts of history or as myths, the ideal placed before us by them is very high. We hear of Rishi Dadhichi's giving up of the body so that the devas may make weapons out of his bones and kill the demons with their aid; we hear of king Shibi protecting a dove from a hawk and in the process and in conformity with justice, being ready to sacrifice his body in order to appease the hunger of the bird of prey. Whatever value we may place on these stories, the moral which is attempted to be inculcated in the people and the moral which was once practised, we must concede, is self-sacrifice. Ancient Indian society was built on that ideal. There the highest honour was not given to the most ruthless or powerful tyrants but to the possessor of greatest virtues, among which austerity, which meant a life of self-effacement, was one. It was practised by not only those who exclusively devoted themselves to the life of the spirit but was the norm of the whole society. A popular saying of the time, which puts the idea briefly, was that an individual should be given up for the sake of the clan, the group, the family; a family for the sake of the village, a village in the interest of the country and every thing for the sake of the Self (Atman).<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this may look as a digression from the subject but it is not so. For by austerity we do not mean here physical privation alone. Austerity according to the *Gītā* covers all the spheres of man's life: his body, speech and thought. What we in the present day consider as most trivial and hence unworthy of notice such as the way one comports in his

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<sup>1</sup> Mahabharata, Udyoga Parva, 129.48.

everyday life, even regarding the minutest details, was prized most by our ancients. The *Gītā* says, 'Adoration of God, the twice born, the preceptor, and the wise, and purity, straightforwardness, practice of continence and non-injury are the austerity of the body'.<sup>2</sup>

Let us examine the implication of this statement, every word of which is pregnant with meaning. The very idea of adoring God postulates the acceptance of His existence, and His accessibility. No one adores a being who is unknowable and unapproachable and in whose existence there is a doubt. Secondly this adoration also means that there is a relation between Him and the worshipper; relation such as that between master and servant, as between father and child, as between friends, as between the indweller and the house, and so on. The purport is that God is not like an absentee landlord, demanding only his dues and not caring for the tenant. He is actively concerned with the affairs of all beings. Man has lost that belief in a higher power due to the scientific inroads and materialistic philosophies. Along with this he has forgotten also that he is not a mere combination of body, senses and mind but something more. This is but a natural corollary. Perhaps the latter view gained ground first and later on disbelief in God, agnosticism and scepticism sneaked their way into the human mind. Now, why was this adoration of God considered a necessity? So that man may not forget that however highly placed he may be, however powerful in the empirical world, he is but a puny creature before a higher power; a power that ruled the universe, that meted out desserts according to one's deeds. Before Him everyone of us and even all of us are nothing. This was the first teaching.

Why should we adore the twice-born is the next question? The twice born, specially the Brahmana, was not adored because he was born in that class but because he possessed qualities of head and heart which deserved admiration. Sri Krishna enumerates a few of them in the *Gītā*: 'Control of the mind, and sense organs, purity (inner and outer), forgiveness, straightforwardness, knowledge of the scriptures and realization of its contents in one's own life, and a firm faith in God —these are the natural tendencies of a Brahmana'.<sup>3</sup> No one in his sane mind, even at the present day, can say that the possession of such virtues, in whomsoever they may be, is detrimental to society. On the other hand everyone is coming to realize the absence of these virtues as being the cause of all our trouble, and miseries. No wonder then that the possessor of these qualities was adored in a society, which put a high premium on their acquisition. Again, it may also be observed that unless one honours and respects an idea or a norm one would not be able to imbue it, not to speak of practising it. Further, however much an abstract idea or ideal may appeal to us it is very difficult to practise or believe in unless we find

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<sup>2</sup> Gita, 17.14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 18.42.

before us people living that idea, and where such ideas are lived our heads, of their own accord, bow down, either in appreciation or in respect. So that was the second injunction: to respect goodness.

In former times the preceptor, specially the one who guides man in his spiritual path, was revered more than the parents. The parents give us the body but the preceptor, the guru, discovers to us our inner-being, the Self. He puts us on the path to perfection, salvation. He gives to us, as it were, a second birth; honour was therefore due to him too.

The wise that are referred to in the above quotation of the *Gītā* do not mean those who are merely conversant with the scriptures but those who have realized God, known their self by experience. Naturally one who loved the life of the spirit adored these men. For only they, if at all any, were worthy of worship —having overcome worldly desires they help others to cross this transmigratory existence.

Next comes purity. Purity of the body was insisted upon, as dirt on one's person and surroundings did not signify a good taste. Besides association with dirt engendered unclean thoughts as well. And one who is pure will be straightforward also. Guilelessness, as Sri Ramakrishna used to term this simplicity or straightforwardness, was a virtue, to be had only after infinite efforts in the past lives, and was the high water mark of the evolution of one's mind. To possessors of this quality, Sri Ramakrishna would remark, God realization would come with a little effort.

Continence or *brahmacharya* is the next requirement not only of the fourth *āshrama*, but of every stage of life. The first stage, that of studentship or *brahmacharya*, as it was formerly called by the Indian seers, was a rigorous way of life, where all luxuries were shunned and where flippancy in conduct was meticulously eradicated. The student's mind was never allowed to stray away into sensate regions and was always directed to the acquisition of knowledge and learning about the values life. Even in the household, the second stage, it was enjoined on man to cultivate abstinence. Sri Ramakrishna too said to the householders that husband and wife should live as brother and sister when one or two children were born to them. And to those who wanted to devote their lives exclusively to God, the life of continence was indispensable. Sri Śankara categorically brings this to the fore in the *Vivekacūdāmani*, 'One who is after the care of the body and yet thinks of realizing the Self is like the man who desires to cross a river through the help of a crocodile mistaking it for a log of wood'.<sup>4</sup> Our sages never minced matters, as such they sometimes appear to be severely critical of the ways of the world. But then we must remember that, like the surgeon who seems to be

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<sup>4</sup> Vivekachudamani, 86.



ruthless in cutting out a gangrenous growth, the seers had no option but to point out in the strongest language at their command the dangers that beset a spiritual aspirant in his path. In spite of such warnings people fall into the trap set by Mahamaya, the great illusion, as if willingly. What would have happened, if these eye-openers were not there, can best be imagined than expressed!

We now come to non-injury. Sometimes man makes a travesty of this teaching. He follows only the letter and deliberately forgets the spirit behind the instruction. He thinks that only one who injures physically is an evil doer. But injury need not be only physical. Man can without actually doing bodily hurt play enough mischief to goad others into situations where there will be no way left for the individuals but to do away with themselves. Yet, outwardly the person who is responsible for such catastrophes may appear as the mildest being living on earth, one who would not harm even an insect or worm. Therefore, the proper way in which we can evaluate the meaning of this instruction is to view it in the light of the circumstances under which it was given. Coming from the lips of Sri Krishna who had persuaded Arjuna to fight a battle, which was almost like a blood bath, this interpretation seems to be meaningless. It should, therefore, be treated in a different way. It should be conceded that injury can be done in other ways also. This, however, should not be interpreted that physical violence is encouraged or connived at by us or was done so even by Sri Krishna. In no way is physical violence advocated here. What we want to stress is that there are other ways of doing harm which ordinarily escape human attention or though known, society finds itself helpless to root out. For our purpose anything that is done to acquire wealth, fame and other worldly possessions unrighteously is *himsa*, injury. Take for instance the food adulteration that is going on at present. Does it not harm people; is it not an injury? But most of us forget that it is. Therefore, even on the pragmatic level non-injury is a must that is to be practised by all members of the human society. Can we then say that this austerity is useless? We shall not find anyone, not even those who indulge in these malpractices, who would say so openly.

We said earlier that austerity (*tapas*), in the sense that it was understood of yore, covered speech and thought too. Sri Krishna says, 'Speech that does not hurt or wound any, truth that is kindly and for the good of those to whom it is spoken, the practise of the study of scriptures—these are said to be the austerity of speech'.<sup>5</sup> This world is a peculiar place and contains both types of extremes: the evil as well as the good. There are people, who take delight in wounding others' feelings. It is a morbid taste and not less heinous than those acts of murder which a pervert commits, merely for observing the death agony the victims

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<sup>5</sup> Gita, 17.15.

undergo. Sometimes we spread gossip without taking into consideration the sensibility of the person concerned. It rankles in one's heart to hear unmerited condemnation or wicked rumour. We may better understand these things if we put ourselves in the victim's position. How would any one like it? None would, criticism, even when healthy is not palatable, what then to speak of wicked tales. The pity is we never discriminate in this way and therefore give reins to the tongue. A little introspection will surely bring to light the evil effects of desecretory speech and make us more cautious. There is a saying that one who has controlled the tongue has controlled all. It is the tongue that makes man a glutton and it is the tongue again by unbridled speech that sows the seeds of dissension, feuds, and wars.

Truth as we had pointed out on an earlier occasion is a great healer. It heals the fever of fear. Swami Vivekananda states: 'And here is the test of truth — anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison; there cannot be any life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all-knowledge; truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating'. Speaking about truth Sri Ramakrishna observes: 'Truthfulness in speech is the *tapasya* of the Kali Yuga. By adhering to truth one attains God'. But how difficult man finds today to practise truthfulness. He finds the way of untruth easier, far more remunerative than the path of truth. But this is a false assumption. Truth alone ultimately triumphs and not falsehood, is an adage of our ancients. It is like the corrosive substance which penetrates even granite rocks.

Our sages did not leave us high and dry as to how to conduct ourselves in this work-a-day-world. The adjectives, *priyam* (kindly) and *hitam* (beneficent) of the word *satyam* (truth) used by Sri Krishna in this context shows us the way. Elsewhere it is said, 'Speak truth that is affable, but not truth which is disagreeable'. As an instance we can cite the Holy Mother's instructions. She would say that one should not even ask a cripple how he was lamed. That is a sore point of his life and would stir up memories which, perhaps, he is trying to forget. Restraining oneself from such remarks is also an austerity of speech.

About the austerity of thought what does the Gita suggest: 'Tranquillity, gentleness, quietude of the speech, control of the inner organ, purity of thought — these constitute the austerity of the mind'.<sup>6</sup> It need not be pointed out that everyone yearns for tranquillity. But how can it be cultivated if the mind is always thrown into mountain high waves of modifications, due to the perceptible alluring world? In the pursuit of tranquillity people run after pleasures, thinking that is the way to attain it.

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<sup>6</sup> Gita, 17.16.

But has anyone gained placidity by involving oneself into sense pleasure? No. So, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say one must even while satisfying their little desires think about their momentariness in order to overcome all greater desires. Peace is not so easy to attain if once one gets entangled in the world. So one who seeks eternal peace should withdraw into himself; should renounce all worldly desires.

Man becomes gentle if his mind has reached the stage of quietude. All other mildness or gentleness is forced by circumstances. It is only outward, not born of the mind. The mind may be a seething cauldron of jealousy, yet the man may, for all appearances, look like an image of gentleness. This quietude of the mind cannot be practised if quietude of speech is not practised and this in turn is impossible unless the lower nature in us is controlled. All this is feasible when one's thought current is purified. Constant thinking about God only can purify our heart. There is no other way for the cleanliness of the mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'As you go to the east the west is left behind'. So as you go towards God the thoughts about other things become less and less.

We have now seen that even in the present age austerity has a place. It is not antiquarian as it may appear at first sight. Whether it is the secular or religious sphere, control of the body, senses, speech and mind is a necessity even now. The more a society inculcates this virtue the higher it rises in the estimate of the world, and the more easily it is enabled to solve its problems. Such a society will have the least number of problems and even the gravest of them will melt like icebergs that float down to warmer climates. The power of austerity is limitless. It is the fountain of all virtues. For a man of austerity, as described above, everything becomes easy. Will we have the courage to practise it? Then we need not fear anything in the world.

## **HOLY COMPANY AND SPIRITUAL LIFE**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

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Man is a gregarious animal. He wants associates; he wants companions; he must have society. Rare is he who can live by himself. Why? Because man has been made so, created so. The Lord created man with the senses going outward therefore he perceives, seeks things outside,<sup>1</sup> says the *Kathopanishad*. His delights are outside of himself. Alone he is afraid of several things — of robbers, if he has money; of life, if he has enemies; of himself, if he has a bad conscience and so on. A man with a tormented conscience likes to lose himself in a crowded place — crowded with activities as well as people.

Again, man wants to share his thoughts, his sorrows, his joys with others. Aye his joy too, in a sense. For where is the man who can say that he will not share some good news, that gives him happiness, with another who is likely to appreciate his talents, or envy his success? In sorrow and in disease, man really needs somebody, who would sympathise with him, who would feel for him; for want of this succour sometimes men have been seen to lose all faith in humanity and turn unfeeling, unappreciating brutes, nay, they may even be driven to insanity or may become hardened criminals. History has a number of incidents which go to prove this.

Psychological investigations, in which America has fairly advanced, show that even babies languish and die for want of sympathy and love. They instinctively feel — though their minds may not have developed to grasp intellectually what they feel — that they are not wanted. The very atmosphere, perhaps, becomes oppressive to them. This is not merely a conjecture. It can be inferred by your own experience in life. In our everyday life we meet with such situations. You are invited to a party, because you happen to be in some way related to the people, who are giving it, but in reality they will be glad if you abstained from attending. You do not know it yet. You go to the function and immediately you regret your action, for you instinctively feel that you are an unwanted person there, though you came not uninvited. Perhaps a dead silence of a minute or two at your entry, in the otherwise gay atmosphere, tells you that; or something like it happens and you become aware of the true state of affairs. It may sometimes be suffocating for you and perhaps you wish you were not there at all. On the other hand others at some other place would, probably, wish that you went to them even uninvited and felt yourself at home with them. Such instances show that an atmosphere is not merely physical but something more. And this other atmosphere acts

on the psychic being of man as the outer climate and atmosphere acts on his body. The psychic being in man can be and is influenced by the environment he lives in, by the company he keeps. 'Tell me with whom thou art found, and I will tell thee who thou art,' said the German poet-philosopher Goethe. This has been the verdict of not only him but also of others before and after him.

So, it has been a universal experience, all through the ages, all through the climes and all throughout the world that, but for a few exceptions, all men desire company; and that association influences them as sure as milk acted upon by acid transforms itself into curd. That being so it behoves all to take good care with what type of people they associate.

## II

Spiritual personages have emphasized the need of keeping holy company, on all aspirants. In ancient India it was easily done; everything fitted like a glove, on account of the traditional method of education — of living with the Guru. Every Brahmana boy was required to study *Brahma Vidya* under a competent preceptor, otherwise he was called a friend of a Brahmana and not as a Brahmana. This appellation, *Brahma-bandhu*, was not a coveted title, rather it was a way of ridicule, a derogatory epithet. The parents were very conscious that their children did not become mere friends of the Brahmanas.

At an early age of eight, the boys were sent to the preceptor's house and they studied under him all he could teach and imbibed his way of life as well. But there was nothing in this relationship, of teacher and disciple of that time, which could be termed as regimentation. Where love and affection was the guiding principle, harshness was only a semblance. The teacher bestowed upon his disciples as much affection as he showered on his own children. This period of life was one of austerity, of learning, of studentship — *brahmacharya*. Those who passed through the training could rise to every occasion in their future life. They had, neither difficulty, nor vacillation in facing the most trying circumstances with equanimity, for their feet were set on firm ground. This was the basic on which life was built in ancient days. And in this set-up, holy company was a foregone conclusion.

## III

But, as it happens, this ideal could not strictly be followed in later periods. Yet the idea that holy company was a necessity of spiritual life was indisputably accepted by one and all. There is a common saying in the Sanskrit language, which brings out this idea. Translated it means: 'With the benefit of holy company one attains to the state of non-attachment. With non-attachment one goes beyond infatuation; and going

beyond it one grasps the steadfast Truth, the Ultimate Reality; attaining It one is freed here while living; one becomes a *Jivanmukta*.' This was not a cant but the living experience of hundreds of people. Even to this day instances occur when a touch of, or a glance from a holy man transforms a person. Swami Vivekananda used to say that spirituality is a thing that can be given like a flower or fruit, by those who have realized God. Jesus Christ took as his foremost disciples fishermen and said: 'Come and follow me and I shall make you fishers of men'. And that he really did. A servant boy of a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna by association with the Master became one of the wonders of spiritual history — we mean Swami Adbhutananda. What great heights of spiritual wisdom did he not scale! He had literally and truly no education, as it is generally considered at the present time. So he had no access to the Scriptures. Yet, as attested to by his brother disciples and people who visited him in later times, words of wisdom flowed from his lips. He had direct access to the Source of all knowledge. Such was the transmutation that was produced by the company of Sri Ramakrishna in Lātu Maharaj.

But personalities like Sri Ramakrishna come once in a while, once in an age. They are the embodiments of spirituality, they are the Incarnations, the path-finders. What and who they are exactly is beyond any man's mind to assess. They can be understood in a small measure only through the disciples, who reveal some aspects of his life through their own. Are we then to wait till another Incarnation comes? No. Though Incarnations and saints of a high order may not always be present amidst us, there are at all times sincere and earnest people treading the path of spirituality or exclusively devoted to God, in smaller or greater number. Even in the worst spiritual crisis they are present, as can be inferred from the words of the Gita, which says that the Lord incarnates for the protection of the good and chastisement of the evil. It is the company of these virtuous, holy men that one should seek. Sri Ramakrishna declares, 'One cannot know the truth about God through science. Science gives us information only about things perceived by the senses: of things material. For this reason a man cannot comprehend spiritual things with his ordinary intelligence. To understand them he must live in the company of holy persons.' Then he gives a familiar example to illustrate this idea: 'You learn to feel the pulse by living with a physician.'

Sri Ramakrishna's one favourite phrase which explains the usefulness of holy company is, 'Come here now and then'. This he advised all those who had good parts in them. who were spiritually inclined, though they themselves did not know of it. He was a diviner of souls. At the very first sight he could find out the propensities and possibilities of a person. So, whenever he would come across a person who had a taste for spiritual life, he would repeat this invitation of his; and in some cases where he was sure that a little effort would do immense good to the persons, he kept constant watch over them and had them brought to him; and if they failed to come for any long time due to any reason he would

himself seek them out.

## IV

How does the company of holy persons help? How does it act? Holy persons have known the evanescence of worldly things and have also come to know that the only thing that is valuable, covetable, real and existing is God. Having known about it they are strenuously striving to realize it in their own lives by giving up all desires and by trying to keep constant remembrance of Him, in many ways. Sri Krishna voices their feelings thus: 'With their minds and senses given to Me, expounding about Me to one another, always speaking about Me, they spend their time in great joy.'<sup>2</sup> It is not a morbid elation like that of the enjoyment of sense pleasures — which as a reaction brings in great depression with the passing away of the moment — that one feels in thinking of God. It is not stimulated by drugs. It spontaneously wells up from the heart. Its source is perennial, nay eternal.

A glance at a day's routine of Sri Ramakrishna, as available to us in the written records, explains the veracity of the above statement of the Gita. It also explains the potential creativity of that bliss — a creativity far more beneficial to man than any he could think of giving effect to, viz, the unravelling of a new life, the opening of fresh vistas which were till then closed to his vision.

For Sri Ramakrishna there was neither day nor night. Every hour would bring on him a different divine mood. He had very little or no sleep at nights. With him the nights would pass away in *samādhi*. But whenever any devotees stayed with him he was careful to see that they did their spiritual practices regularly. He would wake them up even at three o'clock in the morning and ask them to sit for meditation. In the small hours of the morning he would start chanting the names of God, totally immersed in His thought and utterly unaware of the surroundings as well as of his own body. For hours this would go on. Later in the day, if any devotees stayed with him he would talk on God and give them helpful instructions.

In the afternoon he rested only for a short while after the midday meal. Devotees from Calcutta would then arrive. Sometimes there would be singing of devotional songs, but there would always be unceasing talks on God. Many times during the singing of songs and in the midst of talks he would go into ecstasy, either being moved by the sentiment of the songs, or at the mention of a particular approach to God. Thus in his company it was all a veritable mart of joy-supreme and awareness of God.

Sri Ramakrishna, the adept teacher that he was, discouraged all talks except on God among the devotees. Do not the Upanisads say, 'Know Him, the Atman, alone and give up all other vain speech. This is the way to Immortality, Blessedness, Liberation'?<sup>3</sup> Sri Ramakrishna lived the truths of the Upanisads and helped others live up to them. To the youngsters he would say, 'You are pure and unsullied; untainted by the

touch of the world; so you must be careful. Keep away from all attractions of the world. When the plant is young, one should protect it with hedges and keep off the cattle from trampling over it or eating it up. But when it grows into a tree even an elephant can be tied to its trunk.' Who would speak such plain words except a holy man? The holy man is not at all bound by the conventions of society. He is no respecter of persons; where truths, higher values of life were concerned, he would be plain spoken. However, truth is sometimes bitter; but, like medicine though bitter should be administered to cure a patient of his disease, truth though unpalatable must be spoken to cure man of his worldly fever. And that only a holy man has the right and courage to do. We will do well to read, what Sri Ramakrishna said to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee,<sup>4</sup> the great novelist of Bengal, regarding the duties of man. He never minced matters. That is the advantage of a holy man's company: he would correct you if you went wrong. He neither feared nor curried favour with any person.

A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Ramakrishnananda, the first President of the monastery in Madras spoke to the boys who came to him, about renunciation as the only means to God realization. The parents of the boys, naturally, got frightened lest the boys should turn monks. Some of them, who were helping the upkeep of the monastery in some way, threatened the Swami that they would withdraw their support if he did not desist from preaching renunciation. The Swami seemed to have remarked, 'What! Shall I stop preaching what our Master has taught and shown us as the only goal of life? Let them that are averse to such advice withhold their help if they like. The Lord will look after my needs.' How undaunted are the holy men! For them truth is dearer than life itself; and they alone know how to be steadfast to truth.

On another occasion, a gentleman who came to visit the monastery at Madras pulled out a newspaper to read. This called forth a sharp rebuke from Swami Ramakrishnananda: 'Sir,' he said, 'you can read that elsewhere. When you have come to a holy place think of holy things.' Instances like these can be extensively cited to prove that we learn from holy persons much that can help us in our spiritual life, if we but care to cultivate their association. The *Bhāgavata* too remarks: 'That same association, which cultivated towards ephemeral objects out of improper understanding, becomes the cause of bondage, transmigration, when cherished towards holy persons makes for non-attachment'<sup>5</sup> Continuing it says that these holy men are verily the breakers of bondage (*sangadosa harā hi te*). 'By constant association with them, the incidents about the glories of God become sweet like honey to the heart and ears of the audience; and with this liking will follow immediately faith, taste and devotion to the path of salvation. By devotion and thinking about the Lord's deeds man gets dispassion towards the sense pleasures. It is then that he, devoted to *yoga*, will try by the honest *yogamārga* to control the mind. Thus, such a man without serving the purpose of Nature (i.e. without running after the sense pleasures), and by knowledge fortified



with dispassion, by yoga directed towards the Lord, and by devotion to Him, besieges the Indwelling Spirit in this very life,'<sup>6</sup> further adds the *Bhāgavata*.

## V

To the question, how long one should have holy company, we may answer only in one way; that is as long as one lives. Even God-men and men of God desire the company of pure souls, what then to speak of ordinary aspirants! How fervently did Sri Ramakrishna pray to the Divine Mother! 'Oh Mother.' he said, 'where are Thy pure-souled devotees! Bring them here, Mother, bring them. My ears are burning by hearing the talks of the worldly people.' Such then is the desirability of holy company.

Only one class of people need no holy company viz. those who are too much engrossed in the world, whom the *Bhāgavata* poignantly describes as 'stricken by destiny'. With very much pathos the scripture says: 'These miserable people have their intelligence stricken by destiny in a way as to make their senses averse to discourses on the Divine — discourses which are potent to destroy all evils. They have their minds completely overpowered by greed and therefore craving for the niggardly little crumbs of desires, engage themselves in unwholesome acts from eternity to eternity.'<sup>7</sup> For them the very atmosphere where the holy ones live becomes stifling, unbearable. How it is so, we shall illustrate from the incidents which Sri Ramakrishna observed and give it in his own words: 'Sometimes I find that the devotees of God are accompanied by worthless people. Their companions are immersed in gross worldliness and don't enjoy spiritual talk at all. Since the devotees keep on, for a long time, talking with me about God, the others become restless. Finding it impossible to sit there any longer, they whisper to their devotee friends: "When shall we be going? How long will you stay here?" The devotees say: "Wait a bit. We shall go after a little while." Then the worldly people say in a disgusted tone: "Well then, you can talk. We shall wait for you in the boat."'

However this may be, even people who desire worldly things have much to gain by serving these holy men say the Upanisads. 'Whatever worlds a man of purified *sattva* thinks of in his mind, whatsoever enjoyment he desires, all those worlds and all those desires he obtains. Therefore one who wants wealth or power should propitiate these knowers of the Ātman,'<sup>8</sup> declares the *Mundaka Upanisad*. Sankaracharya commenting on the above sloka remarks that 'the worlds and enjoyments' that such a person thinks of may be for himself or for others and as a man of purified *sattva*, all his wishes will come to be fulfilled. Yet, it may be noted that as for himself a knower of Brahman will have no desire. For he has gone beyond desires and attained the Highest. Or to put it in the words of the Gita that state is one, 'Attaining which he does not think there is anything higher or superior to be obtained and established in

which he is not perturbed by the direst of calamities.'

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<sup>1</sup> Katha Up. 4 . 1.

<sup>2</sup> Gita. 10.9.

<sup>3</sup> Mundaka Up. 2.2.5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Pub.: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras. 1947 Edn. Pp. 640-641.

<sup>5</sup> Bhagavata III. 23.55.

<sup>6</sup> Bhagavata III. 25. 25-27.

<sup>7</sup> Bhagavata III.9.7.

<sup>8</sup> Mundaka Up. 3.1.10.

## HOW FREE IS OUR WILL?

Swami Paratparananda

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THERE is an idea current for some decades now that man's will is unfettered, that it is free. A straight negation of this statement is not possible, nor can it be blindly accepted as wholly true. Why can we not assert one way or the other? Why should we hesitate to accept or reject this statement in toto? Let us examine these questions. What is meant by will? According to the Oxford Dictionary it means: 'the faculty by which a person decides or conceives himself as deciding upon and initiating action'. Again, it gives us the meaning of 'free will' as the 'power of determining one's choice of action independently of causation'. The Indian philosophers call this 'deciding faculty' as *buddhi* in Sanskrit. According to them it is a part, so to say, of the inner organ (*antahkarana*); *manas* (mind), *citta* (mindstuff), and *ahankāra* (the ego) go to form the other parts of it.

The first objection that will be raised against the theory of free will, if the above definitions are accepted, is how can an instrument be free. If it were so the writer's pen, the artist's brush, the carpenter's chisel, the blacksmith's hammer and such other instruments would have done work by themselves. To this we may be answered that, it is not the instrument by itself that is meant here but the instrument or faculty which is energized by consciousness. In that case it is not the will that is free but the person, who to many is at most the ego, the 'I'. Then the question arises: Is the ego free? What is the ego? These are questions that must be answered in order to come to a clear conception of what we have to say about the will. The ego according to the Advaitin is a false identification — due to nescience or ignorance — of the Atman or soul with the idea of 'I'. How can that which is by itself under the spell of ignorance be free? Perhaps the person wishing to favour this idea of free will may not like to go into this intricate method of reasoning. The idea appeals to him. So he accepts. But it is one thing to accept a theory and quite a different thing to put it into practice in the day to day life. A man of free will as defined above must not be deterred by circumstances. All his resolutions must come true and be fruitful or he should not be worried or disturbed over the results. Even when the results are unfavourable he must be able to take them on calmly. Does a man, who subscribes to the theory of free will, happen to possess this tranquillity? That is the

question. That is what ultimately counts; for the ultimate aim of man, to which end are all his struggles and efforts throughout his life, is to attain tranquillity, peace and blessedness. Ask yourself: Why do I want freedom? Because in it alone there is peace, and joy. In bondage, in dependence a great many things compel you to act and behave against your wishes in spite of yourself; you are inhibited by circumstances, and goaded by inherited tendencies and obtaining situations.

How then can one be free? We need not go far to test this freedom. Try to break a bad habit or cultivate a new good one and you will find the difference. We make good resolutions in the morning but by evening, carried off in the current of habits, they are all washed away, and this happens day after day, month after month, year after year and yet we are not able to put the resolutions into effect. Is that the indication of a free will? So, it goes without saying that the will, with whatever it is identified, is not so free as we think.

Yet, this idea has been placed in man's mind as an incentive to work. If this incentive was not there, if everything has been automatic then there would have been no evolution of man; perhaps he would have been as primitive today in his habits, customs and manners and morality and religion as the man of paleolithic age, living in caves and moved by passions like animals. Man is man because he can struggle against nature outside and inside of himself; he has that much of freedom. Sri Ramakrishna speaking of the free will says: 'It is God alone who has planted in man's mind what the Englishman calls "free will". People who have not realized God would become engaged in more and more sinful actions if God had not planted in them the notion of free will. Sin would have increased if God had not made the sinner feel that he alone was responsible for his sin'. We would have found that the laws of the land would have no meaning if everyone was not made responsible for his actions. There would have been no rule of sanity; it would have been a pandemonium, a chaos. That is what happens to people who take the sense of the theory of Karma in a perverted manner. Overcome with *tamas*, inertness, they have no urge to work, and attribute everything to Karma. But ask them as to what they know about the theory, which is much maligned by the foolish or un-understanding, and you will come to know that either they do not know about it or stop with saying that it is the result of the actions in past lives. They do not pause to consider as to who did the actions in the past whose results they are reaping now. Everyone reaps the results of his own actions, and not that of another. Justice may be miscarried in a court of law where the judge has to go by the evidence that is put before him; but before God who is the witness of all our actions, all evidence is self-revealed and there can be no injustice. Only the weak and the ignorant do not want to pursue this line of thinking. For then they will naturally be confronted with the question: if the past actions have produced the present results why not change the pattern of our actions to mould our future lives? These thoughts are

perhaps, too much for the idle, because they are logical and convincing arguments and would naturally lower them in their own eyes if after coming to this conclusion they were to remain indolent.

## II

Whence has this idea of freedom arisen? We know there are some notions which are fundamental to man, e.g., eternal life, unalloyed bliss, and unlimited freedom. The Advaitin says that they are the nature of the essence of man, of the Ātman. Therefore it is not possible for him to forget his nature, however much he is smothered by nescience, however much impeded he is by his limiting adjuncts. Just as a man who has seen a fearful dream even after waking up continues to be in a scared state for some time more, similarly man's inner nature though covered by heavy encrustations persists to assert itself in some way. The notion of free will is one such.

The question which now faces us is: Why does that which is free need not be called free? Let us not confuse one thing with another. It is a fact that the Ātman is free but not in the state of identifying itself with the body. The Ātman has no action to do, nothing to be attained; what has the one which is eternal, pure, enlightened and free, by its very nature to attain?<sup>1</sup> Nothing. Whereas action is for a purpose, to satisfy a want, to fulfil a desire. Of course we have to make exceptions for the actions of the Incarnations and their apostles. They come to redeem humanity, to show them the path; they have no purpose of their own to attain. Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā*: 'I have no duty to perform in the three worlds, nor have I anything to attain which has not been attained, yet I engage Myself in action'.<sup>2</sup> Others are moved to act by some motive, either high or low. The higher motives such as realization of God, attaining *bhakti* are good and do not bind man down, do not make him go round the cycle of birth and death. He becomes more and more free as this motive gets strengthened. The lower motives which are mostly selfish and are concerned in the satisfaction of the desires of the body and mind do not liberate us. On the other hand, they drive one more nail into the coffin of our bondage. Thus we see that to involve in action shows a state of imperfection. How then can there be perfection in an imperfect state? It is not possible, and that is where we stumble — by trying to see perfection in the imperfect; rather, seeing the imperfect as the perfect. And when we once know that what we consider as our self is not the Self but the non-self it is not correct to call it free. But this discriminative knowledge comes later, on realization of God or Ātman; till then this error will remain. Only we have to know, at the beginning, that the will is not entirely free though the appearance of freedom is there. Sri Ramakrishna has explained this idea in his marvellous way. He gives the example of a

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<sup>1</sup> Maitre. Up., 1.16.

<sup>2</sup> Gita, 3.22.

cow tethered to a peg by a rope. The cow can move freely within the area described by the circle with the rope as the radius and not more. If the owner is pleased he may lengthen the rope and allow more space for the cow to move about and graze. The cow may think itself free but when it wants to go beyond the length of the rope it will feel the pull of the rope round its neck. Man's will is also like that. He has been given freedom within certain limits beyond which he cannot go. A hero like Arjuna asks Sri Krishna, 'By what is man prompted to do wicked deeds, though unwilling, compelled as it were by force?'<sup>3</sup> 'This desire, this anger, born of *Rajas* is a great depredator, and a great sinner; know that to be your enemy here',<sup>4</sup> replies Sri Krishna. So where is the free will, when it is easily motivated and moved by desires and swayed by passions? We come to know of our limitations only when storms of failures toss our boat of life on the sea of *samsāra*. A young man, full of health, wealth and power does not realize this. He thinks he is supreme. Even grown-up people who have not had to face any great calamity will not understand it. But there comes a time when everyone has to face life as it is and not as a rosy dream. The thorns in the rose will prick and open man's eyes to reality. Only one will is free and that is the will of the Most High. One who submits to His will glides smoothly through all storms and stress.

### III

How to be one with the will of the Creator? There is a story of a *Yogi* who was standing on the shores of the sea. A gale arose and he saw a ship caught in the gale and being mercilessly driven and thrown about on the sea. The *Yogi* had attained some powers. He could control even the natural elements. Out of compassion, as it were, he exclaimed 'Let the storm cease', and his words were fulfilled. But as the wind suddenly died away, the ship capsized drowning all who were on board. This shows that human will is not all-perceiving, it cannot look beyond appearances and then falters and misjudges things. Therefore it is all the more necessary that we should try to attune our will to the will of God. There is a beautiful parable of Sri Ramakrishna which illustrates this attitude. There was once a weaver who was a devotee of God and who did all the work that was expected of him in his station of life, but never forgot God. Even in his transactions he saw the will of Rama, his chosen Deity. He was honest and therefore when people came to deal with him he would say: 'By the will of Rama the value of thread is so much, by the will of Rama cost of labour is so much and by the will of Rama the profit is so much and price so much'. People of the whole village liked him and trusted him. One night, however, when he could not sleep and was sitting in the worship hall and remembering the Lord some thieves who had nefarious intentions forced him to accompany them. They burgled a house and put the booty

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3.36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3.37.

on the weaver's head to carry and marched him on. Just then the police arrived and the robbers fled. The weaver was caught with the robbed jewels and was put in the lock-up. Next day he was produced before the magistrate. People of the village who had gathered in the court were astonished to find the weaver in the dock. They said to the magistrate that the weaver could never have stolen the jewels. The magistrate then asked the weaver to state his case.

The weaver said: 'Your Honour, by the will of Rama I finished my meal at night. Then by the will of Rama I was sitting in the worship hall. It was quite late at night by the will of Rama. By the will of Rama I had been thinking of God and chanting His name and glories, when by the will of Rama a band of robbers passed that way. By the will of Rama they dragged me with them; by the will of Rama they committed a robbery in a house; and by the will of Rama they put a load on my head. Just then, by the will of Rama the police arrived and by the will of Rama I was arrested. Then by the will of Rama the police kept me in the lock-up for the night, and this morning by the will of Rama I have been brought before your Honour.' The magistrate realized that the weaver was a pious man and ordered his release. On his way home the weaver said to his friends, 'By the will of Rama I have been released'.

But this type of surrender to the will of the Lord is obtained by long and sincere practice, and by living a pure and unselfish life. To borrow an expression of Sri Ramakrishna there should not be any theft in the chamber of one's heart of such a person. The mind and speech should be one. Such a one is called a great soul, a *mahatma*. A Sanskrit verse describes him as: 'Same in thought, word and deed'. If we attempt to follow this principle we shall gradually get rid of our ego and be able to surrender ourselves to the will of God.

What is the use of such surrender? Does it not look like slavery? We glibly use the word slavery when it concerns the upholding of our ego but when it concerns our material prosperity we are ready to undergo any humiliation. And what do we gain by such demeaning? Unrest and thirst, desire for more, whereas surrender to God's will brings us peace. Nothing perturbs a person who has surrendered to the will of God. He bows down to the will of the Lord with calmness not because it is inevitable but out of joy, knowing that in it alone lies the blessedness of his life. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'You are not worried when you rely on a good man'. And who can be more good than God? As long as we think ourselves as separate entities possessing separate wills of our own, we shall be thinking of our duties to perform, desires to be attended to, ambitions to be achieved, and the idea to trust another, however good, will not arise in our minds. And as long as these ideas remain we will be severally impelled to seek our selfish interests which naturally will come into conflict mutually. So wills with worldly ambitions cannot be free as they would limit one another. Unless all the thought-currents flow in one direction, towards God, there could not be oneness of our will with that of

the divine and as said earlier without achieving identity of our will with that of God's there will always be turmoil and strife making the will more and more subject to constriction. Let us try to cultivate reliance on God, without in the least slackening our efforts towards realization. For all spiritual teachers have pointed out that grace of God is the most potent and essential factor in the progress and attainment of the goal of life, liberation.



## HOW TO CALL ON GOD

Swami Paratparananda

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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 *Kaivalyopanisad*. '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> Kaivalyopanisad, 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.

## HOW TO PUT PAIN TO A BENEFICIAL USE

Swami Paratparananda

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As adversity proves the mettle of man pain brings him out in his true colours, as it were. It is at a time when man is overwhelmed with pain, physical or mental, that one can gauge his character. High sounding philosophy one may preach but how one lives it in life and that too when overcome by calamities does in a great measure sum him up. None can deny that this world is an experience of pairs of opposites, love and hatred, pleasure and pain, sympathy and jealousy, co-operation and competition and so on. One of these pairs is acceptable but the other is unpalatable. The wheel of time, however, stops not to suit anyone's taste. It moves on and along with it sorrow and happiness too move into every man's life in succession, sometimes in rapid movement, sometimes slowly. There is no escape from this wheel for anyone.

Every one knows this: knows that youth and vigour are short-lived, that death succeeds birth as sure as night follows day. But the atheist, the agnostic and the materialist tell us to 'make hay while the sun shines', enjoy most when you can. They, however, forget or deliberately omit to add, 'and suffer while you cannot'. Aye, that is a verifiable phenomenon. Man is not even able to suffer patiently, having spent all his energy in enjoyment. If we keep open our eyes and ears and observe, we shall find how those who rush madly into the vortex of unbridled enjoyment find themselves left high and dry by the very senses that dragged them into it, when suffering relentlessly pursues them. Man's senses are like the fair-weather friends, letting you to fend for yourself when misery overtakes you; that is to say, pursuit of pleasure impoverishes man and makes him unfit to face life as it changes, — the least pain, the least misery, exasperates him

Again, as we have already seen, the very texture of this web of life is such that misery and happiness form its warp and woof and one cannot exist without the other. Pain cannot be ignored, for it presses itself on to the forefront and makes itself felt. Denying it has no meaning, nor suffering it as an inevitable evil bring us any credit. In an age where utility takes the pride of place among the incentives to man's action he must try to see what best use he can make of pain. To what use can misery be put? When we know it is sure to come in spite of all our efforts to avoid it, we must get prepared to accept it with equanimity. How can

this be done? By remembering that pain, like pleasure, is shortlived and bearing it without much ado, by taking it in our stride. That is what Sri Krishna taught Arjuna. 'The sense contacts, O Arjuna, result in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, but they are coming and going and are impermanent, therefore endure them.'<sup>1</sup> This endurance (*titiksa*) is one of the six qualities that are mentioned by the seers as the equipment that is incumbent in our journey towards the Highest. Endurance has been defined as, 'bearing of all afflictions without caring to redress them and at the same time being free from anxiety or lament on their account'.<sup>2</sup> If it is asked how to reach such a state when we are in the region of its antipodes, there is but one answer. And that is: by practice. We may remind ourselves of what Sri Krishna told Arjuna regarding the control of the mind: *abhyasa* and *Vairagya*, practice and detachment, he said, were the only way to do it. In every way of life, in every pursuit it is practice that makes us perfect. If you want to swim no amount of reading books on swimming can help you to learn it. One must get into water and struggle. A life-belt may help you in the beginning but if you depend on it always you may not drown but you will never learn to swim. A strong desire backed by immense exertion alone can achieve success in any walk of life. So also is the case with a religious aspirant. For him practice of virtues is a supreme necessity, being a step forward towards his goal. Now, to reach that state of calm acceptance or indifference to pain and pleasure we have to fall back upon something which we know to be more than all these little flashes of joys and sorrows, to be everlasting, eternal. But simple knowledge alone does not help. An awareness of that spirit in every day life and faith in its redeeming power are also necessary.

Pain makes us aware that life in this world is not a smooth sailing; there are tempests and gales which are to be faced. It makes us conscious that there is a power which is beyond all comprehension, yet controls our destiny. To the forgetful man it is a warning that something unpleasant awaits him always round the corner. It is a lesson that men should learn but unfortunately, generally, do not. But those who do are not afraid of afflictions. They come to understand that along with distress there comes from that same source the power to endure, if only they have the faith. There is a prayer of Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, which bears ample testimony to this fact: 'Let afflictions come to us always, O Lord, so that we may be able to behold you again and again. For beholding you results in effectively cutting off all further births'.<sup>3</sup> Is such a prayer incompatible with healthy living? Is it melancholy of the morbid type?

It is possible to pass off hilarity and affected cheerfulness to be a healthy way of living. But is that a fact? No, hilarity brings in depression in its wake and affected cheerfulness, to borrow an expression from

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<sup>1</sup> Bhagavad Gita, II.14.

<sup>2</sup> Vivekachudamani, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Bhagavata, I.8.25.



Swami Vivekananda, is putting roses over the festering sores, and calling it beautiful. There is a criterion by which one can judge whether the pessimism of a religious aspirant is that of a sick soul or what is born out of the penetrating wisdom which pierces through the hollowness of all the transient things of the world. The pessimism of such a person does not invade those around with defeatism, nor is he himself overcome by helplessness. Kunti along with her sons had to pass through ordeals and vicissitudes which many a staunch optimist would have shrunk away from, or in facing which would have gone under. But they withstood all and were prepared for the next fling of fortune with calm, but not slavish, resignation. There was dignity in their suffering. Their life does not make us hopeless but infuses strength and faith in ourselves. Under such circumstances can we call the prayer of Kunti a morbid taste for suffering? On the other hand, those who can see, will find in it a direct challenge to destiny: to do what it might and see whether they are found wanting. Such undaunted spirit surely cannot be engendered by brooding over the injuries and insults one has suffered from. That is the spirit which almost comes near the description of a person of 'steady intellect' of the *Gita*. 'Unmoved in affliction, unattached to pleasures, devoid of attachment, fear and anger, such a sage is said to be of steady wisdom.'<sup>4</sup> So this imputation of morbidity does not hold good in their case, as also in the case of other sages and saints who had to pass through similar circumstances.

Sometimes pain becomes the foreteller of a great event in a person's life; a metamorphosis, as it were, happens in one's outlook on life. It has happened in the case of those who later became great saints. A waylaying robber was shocked into awakening that his very near and dear ones were not ready to share the burden of his sins which he committed in order to maintain them. There was no physical pain but what mental anguish he must have passed through! And the result was the emergence of a brilliant sage who has made himself immortal by his great epic, the *Ramayana*. Another was the commentator on the *Gita* and the *Bhagavata*, Sridharaswami. Thrown into misery by the passing away of his wife, Sridhara did not weep or wail but was stunned. The veils of delusion were forcibly torn away from before his mind's eye. The whole play of this worldly phenomena became an open book for him and there and then he renounced. The example of Buddha is a household word to need repetition. He was moved by the suffering in the world, though its burning flames had not personally touched him. Instances can be multiplied but we presume these are sufficient for our purpose.

## II

Just at the beginning of this century there was a movement

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<sup>4</sup> Gita, II.56.

prevalent in some of the Western countries which was called the religion of healthy-mindedness. Prof. William James, the great Psychologist of his time, refers to this movement in one of his Gifford Lectures<sup>5</sup> wherein he cites many instances where cures had been effected in the case of several ailments by this religion of healthy-mindedness, where man naturally refused to be intimidated into thinking of evil or pain. If we carefully and critically go through the instances that he cites we find that it was the trust in God more often than mere optimism that could buoy the practicers up and save them from sinking into the morass of distress. These people had found out that moping and whining and weeping is not the way to face pain, but to create a positive approach: to refuse to be cowed down by misery and put trust in the ultimate good.

Should we then be unfeeling like stock and stone? Sri Ramakrishna gives us the answer. Once a gentleman who had lost his eldest son was brought to Sri Ramakrishna for consolation in his afflicted state of mind Sri Ramakrishna first sang a song which called for alertness and vigilance against death:

'To arms! To arms, O man! Death storms your house in battle array!

Bearing the quiver of knowledge, mount the chariot of devotion;  
Bend the bow of your tongue with the bow-string of love,  
And aim at him the shaft of Mother Kali's holy name.  
Here is a ruse for the fray: You need no chariot or charioteer:  
Fight your foe from the Ganges' bank and he is easily slain.'

Then he said: 'What can you do? Be ready for Death. Death has entered the house. You must fight him with the weapon of God's holy name. God alone is the Doer. I say: "O Lord, I do as Thou doest through me. I speak as Thou speakest through me. I am the machine and Thou art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller. I am the engine and Thou art the Engineer." Give your power of attorney to God. One doesn't come to grief through letting a good man assume one's responsibilities. Let His will be done.

'But isn't your grief for your son only natural? The son is one's own self reborn. Lakshmana ran to Ravana when the latter fell dead on the battle-field. Looking at Ravana's body, he found that every one of his bones was full of holes. Thereupon he said to Rama: "O Rama, glory be to Your arrows! There is no spot in Ravana's body that they have not pierced." "Brother," replied Rama, "the holes you see in his bones are not from my arrows. Grief for his sons has pierced them through and through. These holes are the marks of his grief. It has penetrated his very bones."

'But house, wife, and children are all transitory; they have only a momentary existence. The palm-tree alone is real. One or two fruits have

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<sup>5</sup> Collected in book form entitled the *Varieties of Religious Experience*

dropped off. Why lament?

'God is engaged in three kinds of activity: creation, preservation and destruction. Death is inevitable. All will be destroyed at the time of dissolution. Nothing will remain.'

What do we gather from this advice of the Master? It does not decry man's feeling for his kith and kin, on the other hand it is unnatural to be unfeeling, but at the same time it stresses that separation from the near and dear ones and anguish on that account cannot be eliminated from this world; that the only way to go beyond pain is to have recourse to God, who is the repose of all. He makes our burden lighter. Did not Jesus declare, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'?<sup>6</sup> This is the message of hope that you hear from all God-men.

### III

Summing up we have that pain is an inevitable ingredient in the life of beings. It can be countenanced effectively first of all by discrimination, through the knowledge that pain being transient cannot be everlasting; secondly by turning the bitter experience to profit by making us dive deep into ourselves, or, if you like to call it so, to turn Godward. There is a passage in the *Mundaka Upanisad* which speaks of the nature of the *jiva* and how it transcends from its lower nature to the higher. 'Two birds of bright plumage, always associated, closely cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit while the other looks on without eating. Seated on the self-same tree, the *jiva* moans bewildered by his impotence to overcome grief and his limitations. But when he sees the other, the Lord, worshipped by all and His glory, he then becomes free from grief.'<sup>7</sup> That is the way to overcome the sting that is in misery.

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<sup>6</sup> St. Mathew, XI,28.

<sup>7</sup> III.i.1-2.

## **KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE (\*)**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – November 1962; Vol. 49; page 282

### ***Prevalent notion and how far it is true***

The prevalent notion about knowledge is that, of possession of book-learning, information about the scientific and technological advance, and the intellect to utilize the information thus gathered for the improvement, maintenance and furtherance of one's material condition. And, all our education today is directed towards this one object, of gaining material knowledge and its utilization. Lack of such knowledge is considered in common parlance as ignorance. This is the standard by which civilization and progress of a country is judged at the present juncture. The greater the number of scientists a country can produce, the vaster its power to build huge industries, the more advanced and progressive it is considered to be.

While we do not say it is bad, we only urge that we should move onward and not stagnate. The stream of life must flow on. There should be a flow in the ideas, the thought-current should be able to irrigate vaster fields. It should give us incentive to be active, to be progressive in contributing to world-peace. The moment we put a barrier to our thinking, raise a wall, as it were, and cut ourselves off from the spirit, degradation sets in. We become onesided. Our development contracts lop-sidedness. For, man is not merely a lump of matter but spirit as well. Without the spirit, matter is powerless because matter as such, being inert, cannot act independently of the spirit. It has no purpose of its own to serve. A conscious entity alone can strive for something. The Samkhyas, the first and foremost evolutionists, stressed that *prakrti* (matter) exists and works for the sake of the *purusa* (the spirit) alone. The insentient *prakrti* works in the presence of the *purusa*, being, by itself, incapable of performing any action. There should therefore be a harmonious growth of the body, coupled with the uncovering of the spirit. So this knowledge of the sciences, which helps to drive away the crude notions of the geography of the world and the like, which enables us to extend the horizons of the various sciences to enormous magnitudes, and which develops our intelligence, should be utilized for the better understanding of the spirit as well. If we do not cultivate the spirit of introspection, how different are we from animals? Man is man because he can think of higher things.

This knowledge which would bring only material prosperity even the birds and beasts possess. In the Devi Mahatmyam there is a story very

illustrative of this: Suratha, a king deprived of his kingdom and living in a forest, still broods over the fate of his pet elephant and the erstwhile treasures which had fallen into the unscrupulous hands of the enemies. He understands that it is unprofitable to think of them, yet he could not shake off his attachment. He approaches a hermit named Medhas and places his doubt before him: 'Why, O wise one, we, who are possessed of knowledge, are repeatedly attracted to our past associations though they have been bitter, and are thus deluded?' The reply of the Muni is significant. 'Every being has this knowledge of objects perceivable by the senses. Man is certainly endowed with it, but it is not his exclusive possession, for that kind of knowledge even the cattle, birds and other creatures are seen to enjoy.'<sup>1</sup> Overtly it means we are no better than animals if we confine our knowledge to these things alone.

The lower creatures may not be knowing about the nuclear fusion or nuclear fallout, may not know about space or inter-planetary travel, but that does not in any way stand in their living of life. Man by his rapid strides in the scientific field creates problems which he himself finds too formidable to surmount, whereas other creatures adjust by change of surroundings or change in their internal organism. They instinctively develop, while man with his superior intelligence only gropes in the dark and gets frightened. So material knowledge alone cannot be made the be-all and end-all of life.

Similarly, ignorance of these sciences does not necessarily mean the ignorance of the animal type. Maybe, one may not be able to express one's ideas in attractive language or understand everything that goes on in this wise world of ours, but on that account one may not be classed in the category of fools. Perhaps he is better aware of the eternal values than most of the so-called learned or wise. 'M' the recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna has, by faithfully placing before us his own discomfiture in an analogous situation, compelled our attention to understand what is knowledge and what is ignorance. Let us recollect the background: It was M's second visit to the Master. After some enquiries, 'Sri Ramakrishna looked at him kindly and said affectionately: "You see, you have certain good signs. I know them by looking at a person's forehead, his eyes and so on. Tell me now what kind of a person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under the power of avidya?"

M: "She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant."

Master (*with evident displeasure*): "And you are a man of knowledge?"

It was a rude shock for a man learned in the Western way to have been bluntly challenged in this manner. His own reflections on being thus addressed are worthy of our deep thought. He acknowledges: 'M had yet to learn the distinction between knowledge and ignorance. Up to this time his conception had been that one got knowledge from books and schools. Later on he gave up this false conception.'

### ***Two types of knowledge***

Knowledge can be sub-divided into two types. One knowledge which is cognizable by the senses and the other the intuitive, which is not of this world and which cannot be grasped by the senses. The *Mundaka Upanisad* makes this essential division: 'Two kinds of knowledge are to be acquired — the higher and the lower. The lower knowledge includes the four Vedas, Rig, Yajus, Sama and Atharva, and the Vedangas, like the science of pronunciation, the code of rituals, grammar, etymology, metre, and astrology. Then there is the higher (knowledge) by which the Immutable is realized.'<sup>2</sup> This is a bold statement by the Sruti. It says that even knowledge of the Vedas, which is considered to be the breath of the Lord, is given a lower position compared with that other knowledge by which one attains union with the Lord, what then to speak of knowledge of other sciences! The knowledge acquired through the senses can at best give us only worldly enjoyment.

At this point an objection may be raised: 'How can the knowledge (of Brahman) which is outside the Vedas be higher and how can it lead to emancipation, since it is traditionally accepted that the Smrtis, that are outside the pale of the Vedas and others perverted in their views, are useless as pathways to liberation? If such a view i.e., that the higher knowledge is outside the Vedas, is accepted then the Upanisads will have to be considered as outside the Vedas, which argument is definitely illogical.' Sankara refuting this objection says, 'It is not so, since by knowledge (*vidya*) is implied the realization of the thing to be known. What is chiefly meant to be conveyed by 'higher knowledge' is the knowledge of the Immutable which is what the Upanisads actually mean. It is not the mere collection of words that constitute the Upanisad. The books are called Upanisads in a secondary sense because of the knowledge therein contained. Without renunciation, and such other prerequisites, by the mere knowledge of the words of the Vedas, the 'higher knowledge' cannot be attained.'<sup>3</sup>

Further, in the Vivekachudamani, he explicitly and definitely says: 'Grand-eloquence, fluency in speech, dexterity in expounding the Sastras, contribute like the wisdom of the scholars, to enjoyment of the senses but never lead to emancipation.'<sup>4</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, even as a boy, with his keen intellect evaluated the worth of this lower knowledge. He noticed with what end in view the pundits carried on their debates for hours together. He marked that it was all for the paltry and petty things of the world, and designated such education as 'bread-winning'. In disgust he discarded it and turned away from it for ever. In the later years he taught all those who came in contact with him, what he had learnt and practised all through his life: that to know God is knowledge and it is the only knowledge worth striving for. 'God alone is real, everything else is unreal. This alone is knowledge, all other knowledge is worthless ', said he. About mere scholarship he used to say: 'Kites rise high in the sky but their gaze

is fixed only on the charnel-pit below, likewise mere scholars may soar high in their intellectual attainments but their heart is always attracted towards sense-enjoyments.' What an enormous difference there is between acquisition of intellectual knowledge, and gaining of immediate experience of the Highest Reality. The former can be compared to a man learning to swim by reading books on swimming without getting into water. Sri Ramakrishna used to maintain: 'You cannot get a drop of water by squeezing the pages of the almanac which foretells hundreds of inches of rainfall.' This immediate experience, Vedanta calls as *aparoksanubhuti* or *Brahma-saksatkara*.

### ***Nature of 'Higher Knowledge'***

It has already been described that 'higher knowledge' leads to God-vision, the attainment of the Immutable, the Ultimate Reality. It is aptly described as of the nature of light, since it is the only thing that is able to disclose the Atman hidden in the innermost recesses of our heart. It alone dispels the darkness of ignorance which has accumulated in our minds for ages. Through it, one comes to know the relation between the *jiva* and Paramatma. By its agency one is able to commune with Him. Nay, it confers Brahmanhood itself on man. 'Verily, whosoever knows of the Supreme Brahman becomes Brahman,'<sup>5</sup> says Mundaka Upanisad. When that state of knowledge is attained the differences between the knower, knowledge and the known is annihilated and the resplendent One alone shines in its true glory. 'There, neither the sun, the moon, the stars nor even the lightning shines, what then to speak of this mortal fire! All these shine through Its shining. By Its brilliance all this is perceived,'<sup>6</sup> declares the Sruti.

By knowing the One — God, Brahman or by whatever name we may call It — everything else that is to be known becomes known, because in reality there exists nothing else except Brahman. The variety and the panorama we see are only names and forms of this One substance, like the various ornaments of gold differently called do not have a separate existence from that of gold. Brahman is the only reality. The world seems real because of the substratum of Brahman. Again, it is of the nature of bliss. Attaining it all other gains taste insipid.

Strange misgivings may arise at this juncture. One may ask, 'If obtaining this 'higher knowledge', one loses one's individuality what is the use of such knowledge? We require knowledge to alleviate our misery and elevate our hopes of living a comfortable life. If, therefore, by this knowledge we lose our individuality itself, how can we enjoy?' True, we cannot, but we forget that all our miseries, trials and tribulations are due to this clinging to individuality. If we want to transcend misery we have to forego this separateness, lose it in the ocean of *Satchidananda*. There is no other way. Sankara describes the condition of a person who tries to attain God while still holding to his bodily needs, as that of one who

attempts to cross a river with the help of a crocodile mistaking it for a log of wood.

Whether you are a bhakta or a jnani it matters little, unless we sink our boat of ego we won't be able to dive into the ocean of Highest Bliss. Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the cow whose miseries did not end even after its death till its entrails began to sing the note, 'Tuhu, Tuhu, Thou, 'Thou, O Lord not I,' on the carder's bow, is very apposite to the case of a devotee. Devotion means, continuous thought of the Lord, even a little forgetfulness of whom brings pain. Where then is the scope for the play of the ego in such a heart?

A jnani meditates: 'I am neither the body, nor the senses, neither the mind nor the intelligence, I am the Eternal Bliss and Awareness, I am Brahman.' His small ego is destroyed and has merged in Brahman like the water inside a jar dipped in a reservoir mingles with the vast sheet of water, when the jar too is broken, or like the *akasa* contained in a pot becomes one with the *Mahakasa* when the pot is destroyed. The elements merge into their origin. It is like one's home-coming. And why should we be afraid of going back to our own home? It is like the child's return to its mother. Is it afraid of returning to the mother's arms? On one occasion Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda): 'Well, my child, suppose there is a cup of nectar and you are like a fly. How would you like to taste it?' Narendranath replied: 'I would sit on the edge of the cup and drink it. If I venture further I would drown and die?' 'No, my boy, you will not die. It is the ocean of nectar, of immortality. One becomes immortal by diving into it. Dive and drink deep of it.'

Swami Vivekananda realized this, experienced such a state, and then dispelled fear from those who entertained identical doubts by such homely similes as: 'There was once a rain drop which fell into the ocean and it began to weep. The ocean asked the rain drop what ailed it. It said I am losing my identity. The ocean laughed and said, "No, my dear, you are becoming one with your brothers and sisters here. But if, however, you find your life miserable rise above through the sun's rays and travel as you wish, but then you will have to face the rugged mountains and such other hardships.'" So also if at all we want eternal peace we have to lose our identity, our ego. It is only those who want to hold on to both the world and God that are afraid of losing their individuality and not a true lover of God.

### ***What is Ignorance?***

In an age of rationality man wants to know, why and what for of everything before he makes a move. We cannot brush aside this tendency of the age. The purpose of know-ledge is therefore to be stated. In a few words it can be said that the purpose is to dispel ignorance that has been enveloping us. What is this ignorance? We have briefly stated, in the beginning, what it is not. Now let us see what it is. Ignorance is described



as *maya* or *avidya*, in Indian Philosophy. It is the not-knowing of the essence of our nature, which is Satchidananda, that is called ignorance. Man thinks himself to be the body, the senses, or at the most an intellectual being, but never for once remembers his true nature. This is ignorance. Due to this identification he is impelled by the desires of the body, senses, and mind to work for their fulfilment. Like a bullock yoked to an oil mill — stretching its neck to get at the wisp of straw that dangles before it, but never reaches it — man works the mill of this world with a view to attain those little ever eluding tinsels of this world, those little comforts.

Man is familiar with the words, 'I' and 'mine'. How often do we not use this word in a day? But are we conscious of what we really mean at that time? We say: this wealth, this property, these people are mine. I shall enjoy this wealth. I shall amass more wealth. I am fair. I am dark. I am learned. I am ignorant. I am happy. I am miserable. All the time our identification is with the body, senses or mind. This, Sri Ramakrishna says, is ignorance.

Again he said 'lust and lucre' constitute ignorance, and the whole world knows how true it is! To accept the world and worldly things as they appear, to be real and to run after them is ignorance.

### ***Whence this ignorance and what is its nature?***

If our real nature is knowledge whence comes this ignorance? For, if knowledge is of the nature of light, it should not be clouded. Not so, for do we not find even the powerful sun being covered by a small cloud. How paltry is the cloud and how enormous is the sun. Yet does not the cloud, locally at least, prevent the sun being seen, from shining? Ignorance also similarly holds knowledge in abeyance by covering it, as it were. Ignorance sprouts from, our sages say, our desires and attachment. And these desires are due to our past actions (karma) and they in their turn are the effect of our actions in previous incarnations and so on. But whence did the first desire arise? To ask this question is to ask which was first the seed or the tree, the egg or the bird. Indian philosophers hold that these desires had no beginning, as also this ignorance. Its nature is that of darkness, of covering and projecting. In darkness we cannot see all things and many things that we see are not seen as they are. For instance, one sees a rope and mistakes it for a snake. The stump of a tree in darkness appears to one person as a ghost, to a thief as the policeman and to a lover as the beloved. Again it is like the mirage in the desert, creating wonderful pictures of lakes and landscape but with no actual reality behind it. Ignorance is so powerful that most of us in spite of our pride of knowledge, scientific and scriptural, are in it. Very few, perhaps one in a million, may escape its clutches. And those it is that show us that

ignorance can be ended, that it can be overcome by knowledge. Bring in a light and the darkness even though of thousands of years' duration, immediately vanishes.

Realizing our own nature as knowledge, ignorance in the form of conjured up images of this world falls off. And how does such a man live in this world? Let us quote Swami Vivekananda: 'Once in Western India I was travelling in the desert country. For days and days I used to travel on foot through the desert, but it was to my surprise that I saw every day beautiful lakes, with trees all round them, and the shadows of the trees upside down and vibrating there. "How wonderful it looks and they call this a desert country!" I said to myself. Nearly a month I travelled, seeing these wonderful lakes and trees and plants. One day I was very thirsty and wanted to have a drink of water, so I started to go to one of these clear, beautiful lakes, and as I approached, it vanished. And with a flash it came to my mind, "This is the mirage about which I have read all my life," and with that came also the idea that throughout the whole of this month, everyday, I had been seeing the mirage and did not know it. The next morning I began my march. There was again the lake, but with it came also the idea that it was the mirage and not a true lake. So is it with this universe. We are all travelling in this mirage of the world day after day, month after month, year after year, not knowing that it is a mirage. One day it will break up, but it will come back again; the body has to remain under the power of past Karma, and so the mirage will come back. This world will come back upon us so long as we are bound by Karma: men, women, animals, plants, our attachments and duties, all will come back to us, but not with the same power. Under the influence of the new knowledge the strength of Karma will be broken, its poison will be lost. It becomes transformed, for along with it there comes the idea that we know it now, that the sharp distinction between the reality and the mirage has been known'<sup>7</sup> Such then is the nature of ignorance and such is its end.

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<sup>1</sup> Devi Mahatmya 1.47 & 49.

<sup>2</sup> Mundaka 1.1.4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Sankara Bhashya on the above sloka.

<sup>4</sup> Vivekachudamani 60.

<sup>5</sup> Mundaka Up. 3.2.8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 2.2.11. Also, Svetasvatara 6.14. Katha 5.15.

<sup>7</sup> Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. II, pages 281-2.

## LIBERATION

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – August 1966; Vol. 53; page 179

THE Hindu scriptures speak of the four Purushārthas (aims of existence of man) viz., *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (acquirement of wealth), *kāma* (gratification of desire), *mokṣa* (final emancipation). One who is in the world, that is one who leads a life in the household must pursue all these. He cannot be said to be living the life according to the mandates of the Śāstras, if he follows the first three to the neglect of the fourth. Neither should his desires be in conflict with righteousness nor his wealth be acquired unrighteously. Though all the four are set forth as aims of human existence, actually the real and the supreme aim is emancipation. For that alone is eternal while the other three are transitory.<sup>1</sup> The Bhāgavata informs, 'He, who wants to go beyond the darkness of *samsāra*, of transmigration, should not have attachment for anything which goes against the four aims of existence. Among these too *mokṣa* alone is to be always desired. For the other three are subject to the rule of time (i.e. transient).'<sup>2</sup>

Why are they then mentioned as aims of existence? The Hindu seers were aware that it was not possible for one and all to take up the final aim all at once. Most of the people are born with a great many desires and impressions. Sometimes the impressions are so strong, the desires so turbulent that human beings even go so far as to break all codes of conduct to get them fulfilled. To overcome such a deplorable state the Hindu sages laid down a scheme of life which ultimately led man to emancipation. He would have to work out his *samskāras*, tendencies and yet must be aware of his own shortcomings. That was why the Śāstras enjoined certain rules, and accepted even acquirement of wealth and satisfaction of desires within the limits of righteousness as aims of existence. However, all the while they remind man that *mokṣa*, liberation alone is the final goal. There is no joy in the tinsels of this world, in the

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<sup>1</sup>Vedanta Paribhasha.

<sup>2</sup>Bhagavata, IV. 22.34-35.

Great alone is bliss.<sup>3</sup> But he would have to experience this for himself, that there is really nothing worth acquiring or enjoying in this world, that the life in the world is a sugarcoated pill. In the *Bhāgavata*, we come across a dialogue between the Rishi Maitreya and Vidura in which Vidura requests the seer to teach him how to live in the world. 'People do actions', says he, 'for the sake of enjoyment but they neither get joy nor rest or peace of any kind. On the contrary they suffer miseries again and again'.<sup>4</sup> This becomes obvious to all sometime or other. Maybe this idea will remain for a short time in some and in others it may persist. When it becomes an obsession with a person then he refuses to pursue desire and wealth. His life takes a new turn. For finding no rest elsewhere he retraces his steps and goes back to the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna illustrated this fact with a parable: "A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship anchored in the Ganges. Slowly the ship sailed out into the ocean. When the bird came to its senses, it could find no shore in any direction. It flew toward the north hoping to reach land; it went very far and grew very tired but could find no shore. What could it do? It returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After a long while the bird flew away again, this time toward the east. It couldn't find land in that direction either; everywhere it saw nothing but limitless ocean. Very tired, it again returned to the ship and sat on the mast. After resting a long while, the bird went toward the south, and then toward the west. When it found no sign of land in any direction, it came back and settled down on the mast. It did not leave the mast again, but sat there without making any further effort. It no longer felt restless or worried. Because it was free from worry, it made no further effort".

Continuing the Master said, 'Worldly people wander about to the four quarters of the earth for the sake of happiness. They don't find it anywhere; they only become tired and weary. When through their attachment to lust and lucre they only suffer misery, they feel an urge toward dispassion and renunciation. Most people cannot renounce lust and lucre without first enjoying them'. What is the way out? The *Bhāgavata* declares, 'As long as people do not take shelter at Your feet, which grant fearlessness, so long will there be fear, misery, desire, frustration and enormous thirst for wealth, possessions and relations. Further, the false notion of possession, of "mine", which is the root of all tribulations too persists till then'.<sup>5</sup> Sridhara commenting on this sloka

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<sup>3</sup>Chandogya Up., 7.23.1.

<sup>4</sup>Bhagavata, III.v.2.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., III.ix.6.

says, fear of losing, misery at loss, desire for more, frustration at failure to obtain the objects, and enormous thirst on account of such frustration will be there for people who have not taken shelter with God.

Sri Ramakrishna asks, 'What is there to enjoy in the world? Lust and wealth?' Then he himself answers the question, 'That is only a momentary pleasure. One moment it exists and the next moment it disappears'. But what a deep attachment it is! How difficult to get rid of! Even when the objects are absent the impressions do not give respite, like the smell of the flower they persist and the subtle body experiences them through the mind in dreams.<sup>6</sup> What then to speak of objects that are perceptibly present? They subdue him who hankers after them and make him their slaves. So one should repeatedly convey to one's mind that all things of this world are transient. Perhaps when a thousand times the mind has been told, it may, by the grace of God, be able to comprehend and try to carry out the idea into practice. Once the mind takes up the idea, half the battle of life is won.

## II

What is meant by liberation? What is that state? There are different concepts of liberation in the different schools of thought, even among the Hindus. For instance the Advaitin will say that becoming one with Brahman i.e., realizing one's identity with the Supreme is liberation. The Viśistādvaitin will say, 'to live in the proximity of God and be blissful is the highest aim'. We need not go into the details of these concepts here. What a spiritual aspirant has to know is that there is a state to be attained which is most blissful, reaching which there is no return to this world of tensions and sufferings. And the way to reach such a state is within the grasp of every human being if he but tries sincerely. This state is to be attained here and now. The Upanisads point this out. 'If man fails to know (the Self) here, before the fall of this body, he will be subject to rebirth in different bodies, in this creation.'<sup>7</sup>

One notion that is accepted by all Indian philosophers is the theory of rebirth and its concomitant theory of Karma. For unless these two ideas are accepted there seems to be no foundation whatsoever for any effort towards righteousness. If this world is all that exists then there is no necessity for anyone to strive for liberation, for as soon as the body falls,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., IV.29.35.

<sup>7</sup>Kathopanisad, 6.4.

the soul, if there is one in the concept of such philosophers, automatically gets rid of bondage. Supposing that they do accept birth in a new sphere, heaven or by whatever name they may call it, that also is a rebirth. This earthly body does not go there. And once a phenomenon is accepted as possible it will be illogical to refuse to admit a possibility of its repetition, for in all our experience here in this world, we find recurrence of every phenomenon, at a nearer or a distant time. The morning is followed by noon and noon by evening and evening by night and so on. Endlessly this has been happening. What special reason can we adduce to assert that what has happened once will not happen again? Unless a satisfactory reason is forthcoming we cannot brush aside this theory of rebirth sentimentiously and arbitrarily.

Again, the theory of karma, as we have often pointed out, falling in the hands of the ignorant has acquired, to a superficial student, a disparaging meaning. He thinks that this theory has made people imbecile and weak, take everything lying down. But belief in the theory of Karma is not fatalism, but a reminder that what actions you are doing now are going to form your future. Swami Vivekananda points out, 'Every thought that we think, every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form, so to speak, and lives in the fine body in a potential form, and after a time it emerges again and bears its results. These results condition the life of man. Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws excepting those which he makes for himself... Once we set in motion a certain power, we have to take the full consequences of it. This is the law of Karma'. It is the law of cause and effect, given the cause the effect is sure to come; so take heed says the Indian sage. If you are not careful how you behave now, you will have to reap the consequences later on. Not only are the bad thoughts and deeds reflected in the results which plunge one into misery but the good ones also do manifest their power for succour. Swamiji maintains that 'as bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon you like tigers so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever'. So let us remember that if anyone attains a high state of evolution of mind and character, he has worked for it and so too can we, if we have the will and strength to strive for it.

If *mokṣa* is such a high state, so covetable why do not people hanker after it, will be the next question we will face. The word *mokṣa* literally means release. Release from the prison of this world, from the chains of bondage to the wheel of birth and death. How can the release be achieved? By finding out its cause. The cause of birth is unsatisfied desires. How do the desires arise? Due to false identification of our real

being with the body and mind. The mind fed with the panorama of this world through the different senses craves for the objects of the senses and thenceforth rise desires. This false identification is due to ignorance of our Self. Desires compel man to work. Work again produces results good and bad, to reap the results of which we have to take birth repeatedly. So we see this is a vicious circle. It is a wheel set in motion by ourselves and therefore we have the capacity to get away from it if we but attempt. This too is an instance of the law of Karma. How then can we condemn it?

We are drunk with worldliness, by infinite desires, seemingly wholesome as also obviously unwholesome and therefore invite only unrest. Now the question is how to get rid of this worldliness. Here we do not speak of those who do not want to be cured of this disease but of those who at times want to, but are unable to do so, because of the long-time habit. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Just as the habitual drunkards are given rice-water to bring down the inebriation they are in, so too man must keep company of the holy to get rid of worldliness'. Hearing about God or about our true nature loosens our bonds, our attachments to the things of the world.

People have forgotten their true nature and are running after the gratification of desires, both of the body and the mind, like on a wild goose chase. So they have to be reminded as to who they are. Do they not know it? Yes, they know it in the wrong way; that is why there is all the trouble. 'This Self is to be seen; (for that, it is) to be heard, thought over and meditated upon.'<sup>8</sup> For after realizing it alone, is man liberated. 'Reaching which people do not return to this world that is my Supreme abode,'<sup>9</sup> declares Sri Krishna in the Gita.

### III

It is a long and difficult terrain that we have to traverse before we reach God. And mostly it is our own mind that stands as a great hurdle or barrier to our realization of the Godhead as the Dvaitin will say, or to find our identity with Brahman as the Advaitin will put it. Sri Krishna asks us to go cautiously in handling the mind which is too much engrossed in things mundane. First, we have to attain the intellectual conviction of what is ultimately good for us. If once this problem is settled, other things are slowly gathered unto you. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and everything will be added unto you,' assured Jesus Christ. 'Gradually and

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<sup>8</sup>Brihadaranyaka Up. II.iv.5.

<sup>9</sup>Gita, XV.6.

slowly the mind is to be calmed down by the well discriminated intellect, and made to abide in the Atman; one should not think of anything else. As and when the fickle mind wanders there and then it should be controlled and gathered unto the Self,<sup>10</sup> says Sri Krishna. It is known to everyone, who has tried, how rebellious the mind is. Only continuous and constant practice, along with intense dispassion for everything other than God can give us emancipation. There is no short cut to liberation, for nothing worth having even of this world, has been attained without much sacrifice, what then to speak of reaching the highest consummation of life without effort! If anyone assures you to the contrary, that an easier road is possible, beware of such a person. For does not the Rishi categorically state, 'I know that great Purusa who is of the effulgence of the sun, and is beyond darkness. Knowing Him alone one goes beyond death. *There is no other path to reach the Supreme*'?<sup>11</sup>

Lastly the question is: Will this all happen in some other life or has anyone attained liberation here? If it is only a hypothesis which cannot be verified here, you may say that, 'We have no use for it'. If it is a thing attainable here, how to know about it? Saints and sages are the instances of persons who have attained liberation while living. The test of such attainment is in the life of the saint. The scriptures give us descriptions of such a person *in extenso*. 'By them transmigration has been overcome here and now whose mind is in equilibrium. Brahman is faultless and even, therefore, they who are of poised minds are established in Brahman.'<sup>12</sup> 'Seeing the Lord manifest evenly and everywhere one does not harm the Self by the self and therefore attains the Supreme state.'<sup>13</sup> 'The man whose mind is absorbed (in the Atman) through Yoga and who sees the same (Brahman) everywhere perceives the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.'<sup>14</sup> 'To the Yogi whose mind has become calm, whose activity has abated, who is sinless and identified with Brahman, comes Supreme bliss.'<sup>15</sup> These are some of the signs and indications by which one can know the knower of Brahman, a realized soul, a liberated soul.

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<sup>10</sup>Bhagavad Gita, VI.25.

<sup>11</sup>Svetasvatropanisad, 3.8.

<sup>12</sup>Gita, V.19.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., VI.31.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., VI.29.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., VI, 29.



## **LORD BUDDHA AND HIS MIDDLE PATH**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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THE life of Gautama, the Buddha is a beacon that has been shedding light undimmed for two and a half millenniums now, informing, inspiring and illuminating people, and will continue to do so till man values more something higher than the things of the mundane world, till man cares even a little for a righteous kind of life, till man loves to live a peaceful life, nay till man exists. For it was a life of sacrifice intensely lived, in which there was no disparity between the things spoken and things done. It was a life which knew no fear, made no distinction between the high and the low.

Buddha did not lay much stress on the abstruse metaphysical side of philosophy. Perhaps, he thought he should give a practical demonstration of a good life for ages to come than dwell on mere speculation. This trend of his thought is discernible in his reply to the question regarding the existence of the soul. He asks: 'Will you, if you find a man pierced with an arrow, first try to investigate by what hunter it was shot, of what poison it was tipped and so on indefinitely or relieve the sufferer of his miseries by extracting the arrow out and applying soothing balms to the wound?' 'Man' he seems to say, 'is burning in the miseries of this world, show him the path out of it and leave alone all other dry discussions.' His life, therefore, as a most rational one appeals to one and all, starting with the unbelievers, the agnostics and the atheists up to the trustful and the religious. Whatever doctrinal differences, may there have been or still be between his followers and those of other faiths, it cannot be denied that his life has still a charm which thrills people, moves them to the core of their very being. It almost resembles a lyrical song taking you along its current of melodies, now making you see into the depths of despair at his struggle, now lifting you up, on to the crest of joy at his enlightenment, now moving you to tears at the readiness of the Blessed One to sacrifice his life to save that of a lamb, and again making you stand in awe at the sternness in his desire of maintaining the purity of his creed, free of all miracle-mongering.

What pity and compassion must have flowed in those veins, what intense sufferings should have been felt in that heart to be moved so!

Here we find the ununderstandable Upanisadic saying, (*sarvam khalvidam brahma*) "all this is verily Brahman," being literally lived and that not as a practice, but spontaneously as a result of the realization of the Unity of Being.

## II

Now let us make a brief survey of his life, a detailed one being beyond our scope at present. Most of the accounts of Buddha's life that we get is from *Lalitavistara* and such other Pali Canons.

The Buddha is the name by which Siddhartha, the Gautama, was known after his enlightenment. He was born in the year 563 B.C. to the provincial king Suddhodana and his queen Maya, of Kapilavasthu, a township in the plains near the foot-hills of Nepal. Foretold, that his son when grown to manhood would either become a powerful king or moved by the woes of the world turn a religious leader, king Suddhodana in order to avoid the latter tragedy, as he considered it, brought up his son away from the three woes of the world: disease, old age and death. When Siddhartha grew into manhood, the father desiring to bind him securely to wealth and kingdom, had him married to a girl of his choice, named Yasodhara, beautiful and loving and virtuous. They had a lovely child who was named Rahula. Suddhodana was now feeling a little secure as he thought the responsibility of the family and love for his wife and child would hold Siddhartha back.

The wheel of time rolled on. Meanwhile, destiny seemed to have been laughing in its sleeves when the king was endeavouring, vainly, to entangle Siddhartha in the world. Siddhartha, now, desirous to know his people set forth from his palace in his chariot. And as if Providence was lying in wait, just for this moment, to strike and strike hard to shock into rude awakingness Siddhartha's consciousness, which was till then kept in the dark about the real state of affairs of the world. He came across the very three phenomena which the king had all the time kept away from his son. He saw on his way an old man, bent double, made feeble by ravages of time, dragging his burden of the body with great effort. He learnt from his charioteer that that was the way of all mankind, that this same old man was once a joyous, sportive youth but that time had worked its way and reduced him to that state. Then he saw a palsied man, with some fingers of his hands missing, lying on the road side writhing in pain. To Siddhartha's feeling inquiry regarding the man Channa, the Charioteer, explained that the man was stricken with disease. Disease he said comes to human beings in several forms but none knew how. Then Siddhartha came face to face with a dead body being carried on the hearse. To Siddhartha's enquiring glance Channa said that was the end of all human beings; that those who were born had to die one day. Each of these sights had thrown Siddhartha into deeper and deeper contemplation. He was sad. Was there no way out of these triple woes? thought he. As if to

show him the way he next met a Sannyasin, serene and self-possessed and dignified, carrying a beggar's bowl. Siddhartha was impressed and asked Channa who that person might be who could be so calm, and learnt that it was a monk who had 'abandoned all longings and led a life of austerity and lived without passion or envy and begged his daily food'. Siddhartha mused within himself, "well, that seems to be the course of life set for me"; "to become religious has ever been praised by the wise and this shall be my refuge and the refuge of others and shall yield the fruit of life, and immortality!"

He drove back to the palace brooding, unheeding of anything, and when the palace was plunged in the calmness of the night his resolve was made. Bidding farewell to his sleeping wife and child Siddhartha rode forth followed by Channa till he had covered a great distance and then putting off his royal robes and jewels, sent Channa back to the palace and himself went into homelessness. He had then reached the age of twenty-nine.

His first encounter after this great renunciation was with the king of Magadha, Bimbisara. Siddhartha who had gone on his begging round into the city of Rajagriha had attracted attention of the people. When the king came to know of it he went to the place where Siddhartha was and impressed by the beauty of his person and nobility of his bearing, offered to bestow upon him the whole kingdom. Siddhartha refused to have anything to do with the worldly empire but promised the king to teach him his way when he had found it.

From here he proceeded to the hermitage of Ālāra Kālāma, a renowned teacher of the time, and became his disciple and learnt the art of meditation from him. But not satisfied with the metaphysical part of his teachings he retired to a forest and practised austerities, of fasting and mortification, for years until his body was like a withered branch. At the end of six years he considered the state of his mind sitting under a Jambu tree. Mortification had weakened his body and yet he was not in sight of enlightenment. He thought of abandoning the path of fasting and went and bathed in a river but he was so weak that he could not rise from the stream. With great effort he struggled out but on the way to his abode he fell down in a swoon. His companions, the five monks, thought he was dead. But he revived and then he resolved to beg his food, that his health and strength may be restored. Seeing that Siddhartha had broken his fast without attaining enlightenment the monks left him. Now, the daughter of the village headman of Uruvela where Siddhartha was practising his austerities had desired that the great Sakya Muni would deign to receive food from her.

So on the day he was to attain enlightenment she had a pre-vision. She, therefore, carried a bowl of thickened milk cooked with rice and offered it to the Great One. Siddhartha took the bowl, went to the river, took his bath and having partaken of the food and refreshed his limbs made the greatest resolve: 'Let my body dry up, my skin and my nerves and my

bones waste away, yet this body will not move from this seat until I have attained Supreme Enlightenment, which is difficult of attainment even after aeons.' Various were the temptations that came to him at that time, yet he overcame them all and as the dawn approached Siddhartha attained to Supreme Enlightenment, became the Buddha.

It is said that the Blessed One remained in that state for 49 days enjoying the bliss of emancipation. On the forty-ninth day two merchants who were passing by saw his majestic figure full of peace and were moved to make an offering of food to the Blessed One. The Buddha accepted their offering and pointed out to them the way of salvation and they became his first lay disciples.

Now the Buddha deeply pondered whether he should teach what he had realized. For he thought the worldlings will not understand the truth because their happiness was in bodily enjoyments. Yet he felt an inner urge that the Truth so dearly earned should not be lost. And then he remembered his five disciples and coming to know that they were living at Isipatana near Banaras he wended his way there. The monks saw their former master approach but resolved not to show him any respect, as he had broken his vow of fasting. But as the Blessed One approached them they involuntarily rose from their seats in spite of their resolution, bowed down to him and offered him a seat and he taught them. That was his first sermon. To them he taught the ineffectiveness of useless austerities and exhorted them to follow the middle path which he had discovered.

By now he had already a good number of monks in his retinue. From Banaras he went to Rajagriha, to King Bimbisara, and received him into his fold, and preached his Dharma. From Rajagriha the Buddha made for Kapilavasthu being invited by his father. There he converted the Sākya Princes to his Dharma and received his son Rahula—who taught by his mother Yaśodhara, had claimed his patrimony — into the Order. Much later at Vesali he decided to admit women into the Order at the prayer of Ānanda who had witnessed a group of earnest women, sore of foot due to walking, and laden with dust, had come to beg of the Tathagata to be ordained as nuns.

For forty-five years the Blessed One travelled, preached and taught the way to salvation. He had now 1200 disciples who were monks. He had a great following among the lay men and women too. Now, when he was full of years (he was then eighty) and his mission was fulfilled the Blessed One proceeded to Pāra where he accepted the hospitality of Canda, a smith. But the Buddha was attacked by a fell disease soon after he partook of the meal offered by Canda and was in great pain. Yet, mindful and self-possessed the Buddha bore it without complaint. He then proceeded to Kusinara and halted in a Sāla grove. Growing weary he asked Ananda, his disciple and attendant, to spread his couch between two Sāla trees and lay down on his right side.

And as the last moments drew near lo, a seeker came and wanted to be taught and he approached Ananda. But Ananda refused permission

to allow him to go to the Blessed One, knowing that the Master was weary and was not to be troubled. However, Buddha who overheard their conversation and knowing that the seeker was sincere caused the man to be brought and dissipated all his doubts. Thus did the Buddha teach every sincere seeker till the last breath of his life. The Blessed One's last exhortation to the Brethren was: "Decay is inherent in all component things. Work out your salvation with diligence."

### III

Now we come to the teachings of the Buddha of which we shall discuss here only about the middle path. A lot of confusion has arisen in the interpreting of this path and passage of time has not helped to remove these misunderstandings. Rather people were and are still not in a mood to break the cherished images of their own interpretation of these teachings. People are apt to forget that a great spiritual Master's exhortations cannot be construed properly except in the light of his own life. Secondly, we have also to consider the times in which the Master lived and the context in which he spoke the particular words.

We have, as it has come down to us in translation, the Blessed One's teachings on the middle path as follows:

"The Tathagata," said the Buddha, "does not seek salvation *in* austerities, but neither does he for that reason indulge in worldly pleasures, nor live in abundance. The Tathagata has found the middle path.

"There are two extremes, O monks, which the man who has given up the world ought not to follow — habitual practice, on the one hand, of self indulgence which is unworthy, vain and fit only for the worldly-minded; and the *habitual* practice, on the other hand, of self-mortification, which is painful, useless and unprofitable"<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha continues:

"By suffering, the emaciated devotee produces confusion and sickly thoughts in his mind. Mortification is not conducive even to worldly knowledge; how much less to a triumph over the senses!"<sup>2</sup>

First of all, we have to understand that fasting and mortification of the flesh was considered at that time *the* way to salvation. If we recollect what has been said earlier we shall find that the Buddha gave his first sermon to his disciples who had deserted him when he took to begging after being faint with fasting and mortification. The impression of the disciples that he had broken his vow by taking food and was no more a Muni but a man of the world was so great that when they saw him after his enlightenment they addressed him as "Brother", as an equal, and not as their Master. This false notion was to be counter-acted. For the Buddha

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel of Buddhism by Paul Carus, PP. 41 and 42. Pub: The Publication Department, Government of India, Delhi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem

had come as a saviour and he could not but drive out false notions that were prevalent in his time, to save religion from total annihilation. He had to speak the truth and in forceful language too, fitting the occasion that it demanded. Again, mortification was not the goal of man, whereas people of those times saw salvation only in it. Mortifications were, if anything, only the means. Was not then the goal forgotten in vaingloriousness of austerity? That is why the Buddha exhorts how difficult it is to triumph over the senses by mere austerity, which makes man weak and unable to know even the ordinary things of life. Who was a better authority of what is conducive to salvation than the one who had attained enlightenment himself? But the Buddha warns, those who may swing to the other extreme, "Sensuality is enervating; the self-indulgent man is slave to his passions, and pleasure seeking is degrading and vulgar". Yet he does not want to leave undefined what he has got to say about his middle path. So he continues: "But to satisfy the necessities of life is not evil. To keep the body in good health is a duty, for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom, and keep our mind strong and clear.

"This is the middle path that keeps aloof from the extremes."<sup>3</sup>

Those who stop with the Tathagata's instructions regarding austerity and follow not his later injunctions are in a graver danger of losing their foothold on the spiritual path than the others. This is to be remembered by all aspirants. Further, we have to consider the meaning of every word of his sayings quoted above. There is the word "*habitual*" qualifying practice of austerities, which we have put in italics, to show that it is not at all against the injunctions of the Buddha to observe fasts and vigils, occasionally without injuring the body. The idea behind the Tathagata's instructions is clear and unambiguous and should not be twisted to suit our needs. Lest people should be led away by his denunciation of austerities the Buddha remarks: "Let him be moderate, let him eat and drink according to the needs of the body." The "needs of the body" again may be a dangerous term. For in the present times our needs have a tendency of increasing in a telescopic manner. But our ancient idea was, as Swami Vivekananda puts it, 'with how little can we keep the body trim and not with how much can we be content'.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* too gives an almost identical teaching: "Yoga cannot be practised by one who indulges in eating nor by one who completely abstains from food; neither can it be practised by one given to too much sleep nor by one who wakes up all the time. To one who is moderate in his food and rest, moderate in his physical exertions, moderate in sleep and wakefulness yoga becomes easy of practice and a dispeller of miseries."<sup>4</sup> Of course, this does not mean there is no stage when man can abstain from food. The Buddha, himself, if we have to believe in tradition, was without any food for 49 days after his enlightenment, immersed in the joy of that bliss. In our own times Sri

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem

<sup>4</sup> Bhagavad Gita, VI, 16 & 17.

Ramakrishna lived in that state for six months without being aware, of what went on round him, even of his body. Providentially, however, a wandering monk who happened to come to Dakshineswar at that time and comprehended the real state through which Sri Ramakrishna was passing, administered food unto him sometimes even by beating Sri Ramakrishna's person to bring his mind down to the normal plane. But these are exceptional cases where illumination had been attained first. Perhaps, the needs of the body are not so exacting in that state as when man is on the normal plane. But for all others who are still aspirants the middle path prescribed by the *Gītā*, reinforced by the Buddha and reiterated by Sri Ramakrishna is the safest guide.

Sri Ramakrishna, when he was told that a certain person had given up fish and betel leaf, is said to have remarked, 'What has poor betel leaf and fish done? Let him give up lust and gold'. The meaning is, that lust and avarice are the two greatest impediments on the spiritual path. If one performs austerities and yet retains longings for enjoyment here or hereafter he will not be able to attain salvation. Let us not jump to any conclusion without understanding the purport of this teaching. Observe how like a hawk Sri Ramakrishna kept his watchful eyes on his disciples. Sri Ramakrishna was very particular even as to what food, and how much of it each of his boy-disciples took, and never failed to reprimand them if it was more than the needs of the body of the particular individual. That is the middle path which the Buddha also taught. Let us remember this always and be not led astray either way.

## MESSAGE OF THE GITA FOR THE PRESENT DAY WORLD

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – October 1965; Vol. 52; page 259

### I

THE one scripture which fulfils the need of every righteous person and under any or every circumstance is possibly the *Bhagavad Gita*. Of course the Vedas and the Upanisads are the main source of all Hindu faith and therefore cannot be discounted. But the *Gita* has their essence all brought together in one place. It shows you how to live in the world without being tainted by its colour. It encourages every one to follow his traditional duties, or the avocations in which each man is placed, following which, it says, he will come to the highest.<sup>1</sup> This is the foundation of the *varnāshrama dharma*. It shows how every one was considered a useful member of the great family of humanity. The *Gita* has a message for every class and every section of human society. It never tells anyone to lie low and suffer humiliation. Sri Krishna, the teacher, says time and again to Arjuna, and through him to every one that is facing his battle of life, 'to stand up and fight' for the righteous cause. 'If you fall,' he says, 'you will attain heaven and if you win you shall enjoy the earth; therefore stand up firmly determined to fight.'<sup>2</sup>

It has a message for every man, to be honest, to be self-sacrificing, to acquire divine qualities. Its message to the spiritual aspirant has been dealt with, in various ways, all throughout the *Gita* ; and all along the march of time several commentaries — delineating its message to the various types of aspirants in the different denominations of the Hindu religion — have been written, expounded and enlarged upon. It has a message to the rulers, to be undaunted, to rule righteously and be firm against the foe. This message of fearlessness is there in the Upanisads. Though this code is not new to the *Gita*, in its reiteration the *Gita* is most explicit, and thoroughly purposeful. There is no mincing of matters, no dallying of words. It respects no persons in giving out what it intends to teach. Krishna severely upbraids his most beloved of friends and

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<sup>1</sup> Gita, 18.46.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 2.37.



relatives, Arjuna, at the meekness and weakness displayed by the latter. He says, 'Yield not to unmanliness, O son of Prtha, it does not behove you (a man of prowess). Giving up this weakness of the heart stand up.'<sup>3</sup> Here you have a message for the warrior, nay for all. Swami Vivekananda said that this is the message of the *Gita*, not to be weak, not to be cowed down by brute force. It is these and other words that poured forth from the lips of Sri Krishna that slowly roused the wilting heart of Arjuna, as it were by a shower of rain; the gathered clouds of infatuation were scattered and consciousness returned, until at last freed from doubt he was willing and eager to fulfil his part,<sup>4</sup> in the circumstances.

There have been scoffers and there have been sceptics who have belittled or did not believe in the message of the scriptures. It is easy to run down religion, spiritual effort and scriptures, when man is in affluence and peace and happiness prevails. But when a trying time comes and he is pressed on all sides, it is these words of practical wisdom, of calm collectedness and of vigour and encouragement that support him. *Gita* is such a scripture. It has not yet lived its time. It shall last to eternity. Though it was told thousands of years ago, its message has not become obsolete nor even dull. On the other hand, every time we think about it, every time we are faced with a new problem it has a solution for even that new problem, if only we care to go through it, thus bringing to our attention its vitality and usefulness. It is, therefore, incumbent on every Hindu, for the matter of that on every person, who likes to live a life which can be properly so named, to study and imbibe the proper mode of conduct that is becoming to the position and place he occupies. For a life without a purpose, without manliness, according to the Aryan code of morals, is no life at all.

The world today is poised on the brink of a precipice and it requires enormous courage to face the crisis and decide in what manner the situation can be tackled. Here again the *Gita* comes to our rescue. Sri Krishna, by his own example, sets before us an ideal which shows how a problem, a difficult situation can be countenanced. In the midst of the warring parties, the serene and unruffled picture of Sri Krishna holding the reins of Arjuna's horses brings out in no uncertain terms the idea of how man should live in the world, unattached, like the lotus leaf in water,<sup>5</sup> as he himself says. In a beautiful hymn to Sri Ramakrishna Swami Vivekananda also brings before our mind's eye the majesty and grandeur of this picture of Sri Krishna. He sings: 'He who quelled the noise, terrible like that at the time of destruction, arising from the battle (Kurukshetra), who destroyed the terrible yet natural night of ignorance (of Arjuna) and who roared out the *Gita* sweet and appeasing; That renowned soul is born now as Sri Ramakrishna.' Though the *Gita* is sweet and appeasing every word of it dings into our ears the message of courage

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 18.73.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 5.10.

and strength in a lion's roar. We cannot dare ignore its clarion call to arise and awake.

Further, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna: 'Giving up attachment to the fruits of one's actions, and always contented, without depending on anything, though one is engaged in action, one does not do anything.'<sup>6</sup> In this small verse is contained a meaning that can last and support every man for his whole lifetime. The one point that Sri Krishna stresses here is that it is cowardice to run away from duty, from a righteous action, a noble cause. Man, as long as he lives, must perform some action or other, he cannot live idly and one day he must die. Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'Die you must, but have a great ideal to die for, and it is better to die with a great ideal in life'. This idea is contained in the above utterance of Sri Krishna. In another place he says, 'To work only have you the right and not to the fruits thereof. Let not the fruits of action be the motive behind your actions; nor be attached to inaction.'<sup>7</sup> He is the hero who, amidst stresses and strains, can stand up and meet them boldly without caring for what happens to him or for the fruits of his action. But this requires enormous practice and tremendous will power. We have to cultivate it.

'The earth is for the heroes to enjoy,' says a Sanskrit proverb and in every day of our life we come to experience it. The weak and the infirm are trodden down everywhere. Stand up to your rights, that is the call of the age. That is what the *Gita* also teaches. But it also teaches us not to encroach upon another man's right. Righteousness has been the moral code of the *Gita*, of India throughout its history. Swami Vivekananda says India never went to conquer any country. It never subjected any nation, not that it was weak or infirm to do so, but it recognised man's right to live in his own way in his own country. On the other hand, over and over again India has been trodden over, conquered by various races. But it has risen anew showing the very conquerors that they were not able to crush down its infinite vitality to grow and assert its right persistently afresh. That has been possible because of the faith the Hindus had in their scriptures, of the eternality of the soul, of the necessity of spirituality in a world of mundane thinking, because of its firm conviction that Hinduism, the eternal religion, the Sanatana Dharma will live and also because India has a message, not only to its own people but to the people of the world as a whole — that in the framework of this world India has a prominent role to play as a reviver of higher values. Swami Vivekananda observes that India has more than once contributed its spirituality and its philosophy to the regeneration of the world and it has yet to play its part in the world in this capacity. So it is essential that India keeps its banner of spirituality flying high and to do so keep its culture and individuality as a nation intact and sound.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 4.20.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2.47.

## II

Tradition has it that the *Gita* was taught on the battle field to Arjuna. Some say that it is an allegory referring to the eternal struggle that goes on in man's mind between the righteous aspirations and unrighteous desires. Whatever that may be the *Gita* has a word of solace, a word of encouragement, a word regarding one's duty to everyone of us, wherever we may be placed.

What is the message of the *Gita* for the present day world — a world of science and technology, of ratiocination and logical analysis? Here we have to be clear in our minds. It will not do to shut our eyes to the unseen and unexperienced truth, in the name of these high sounding words. A large part of man's life remains hidden from him, and usually science does not take cognizance of this fact. It is satisfied with phenomenological experience and physical reactions. But man is more. Man is not a mere physical entity, he has a psychological being, a spiritual being within him. This fact has to be conceded and unless this is done we cannot adduce any meaning to life. If man was to live like any other of the animal species why was he specially endowed with the thinking faculty more than other animals? Is it to exploit all other living beings? That does not make any sense. Man has a higher purpose, higher value to cultivate, higher and nobler things to know and to assert in his own life. That is why he has been gifted with that power of discrimination, of thinking. It is possible to use this power either in the constructive or destructive way. Mere morality is not all that is meant by higher values. Morality without a spiritual basis is like a house without foundation. It cannot stand the analysis of reason: Why should we be moral? If spiritual values are not taken into consideration you cannot answer this question satisfactorily. No amount of legislation can make a man good, though he may be superficially well-behaved. There must be some principle which he struggles to achieve. There must be an ideal, a goal to attain; without that man is no man.

It is painful to see that in some quarters a wholly wrong interpretation is put as to what is meant by a secular state. They conceive it as a state consisting of people without religion. They want to believe that religion hurts people. They fear that religion, if taught to their children may upset the apple cart of their plans, their designs. In the name of education they want unrestrained freedom to behave as one pleases, as if education means a passport to licence and indulgence. Such may be the practice somewhere, in spite of all effort against it, but if India tries to adopt or imitate such behaviour the country's future would be bleak notwithstanding all the progress it may make in other directions. Restraint and sacrifice are the two essential qualities that the people of a country with a vast population like India must inculcate if it means to maintain morality and harmony in its own land. That is what Swami Vivekananda reiterated when he observed: 'The national ideals of India

are Renunciation and Service. Intensify her in those channels and the rest will take care of itself.' Outward renunciation along with inner dispassion may not be possible for all, but everyone can practise inward renunciation, control over the senses, to a smaller or greater extent. And if one cannot practise it that does not give him any right to water down the ideal or condemn it. It is no use trying to accuse religion for all that is unhealthy in society. On the other hand it is the other way about; it is the spiritual force that still sustains society.

There is enough indiscipline in the student world to require any one to plead their cause for more liberality. A disciplined life, where it is not overburdened by unnecessary dogma or harshness, should be a welcome feature in all schools and colleges and not a matter to be decried or ashamed of. If only we will remember that the students of today are to be the torch-bearers of our culture and the future leaders of India it will be obvious, to anyone with a little understanding, as to how much they should be instructed in restraint of the senses and enabled to form a temperament of sacrifice. For the lack of this spirit of sacrifice, in a sufficient measure, and the overwhelmingly predominant desire for personal gains it is that India had to suffer repeated humiliations at the hands of alien hordes in the past and even today suffers from so many maladies. Let us remember this and learn to live a disciplined life and help the younger generation to do so. Example is better than precept. That is what Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, 'In whatever way the great men act in that way the common man acts as well'.<sup>8</sup> He wanted Arjuna to be an exemplar. Otherwise it would not have mattered whether Arjuna fought the battle or relinquished the kingdom and retired to the forest. Sri Krishna would have brought victory to the Pandavas even without Arjuna. But that would have been a bad example for all time. That is why he infused into Arjuna the spirit to discriminate between the right and the wrong and stand steadfast for the just cause whatever might be the outcome.

Mental poise is another quality that the *Gita* recommends and teaches how to acquire. Not to be swayed by joy or sorrow, happiness or misery, not to be deterred by calamity, but face everything that comes one's way with an unperturbed mind, and determination to do the right thing is a virtue that is always an asset, not only in spiritual life but also in all other walks of life. A man works himself into a fever for a wrong done but in his anger he may forget the very noble characteristics for which he is fighting. 'One who is not elated (at gains) nor hates, one who does not grieve (at misery or adversity) nor desires anything and gives up all good or evil and is devoted to God is dear to Him,'<sup>9</sup> says Sri Krishna. As already said these virtues stand one in good stead in every situation. Depending on the Lord, to work as His tool, leaving all results of one's actions in His hands, can be done only by one who is clear in his mind as

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<sup>8</sup> Gita, 3.21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 12.17.

to the righteousness of the cause. He can then stand up against the whole world, if need be, without even a tremor of the heart. For the world is a strange place where justice and righteousness are bartered away to serve one's needs. As long as it is convenient to have you on one's side it is all right, but the moment you stand up for justice and if it cuts at your friends cloak in however insignificant a manner that friendship goes overboard. But people forget that truth alone triumphs, maybe the injured party has to suffer a great deal, but ultimately truth does triumph, even in secular pursuits.

The *Gita* has been the solace of millions of aspirants; it has also been the strength of many who though not exclusively given over to the spiritual path strive for a good cause. Let us seek its guidance in all our avocations, and be on the right track so that when our day of departure from this world comes, we can leave it without a regret and with the satisfaction of having fulfilled our task.

## MODERN MAN AND RELIGION

Swami Paratparananda

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### I

ONE of the reasons put forward by the modern man with regard to his apathy towards religion is, that it is like a labyrinth which leads you nowhere; where so many sects and philosophies come into conflict, and where each claims pre-eminence for itself; where it is not possible to arrive at anything approaching a universal concept on the metaphysical points such as soul, God and the like. To him this is all confusing and unscientific. Scientists do not quarrel among themselves; they have no two theories about the same phenomenon. If one theory is found to be inadequate in the light of the later researches and discoveries they do not cling to that concept any more but discard it as grounded on insufficient data. But religion, he finds, is not so. The oldest of the discoveries still seem to hold the field and adherents of the several hundreds of sects, of the different religions that are extant, attach themselves to their particular concepts as tenaciously as ever. Modern man notices all this, as also the controversies that go on among the different religions and sects about the supremacy of one or the other particular notion in their philosophies and feels it safe to give a wide berth to religion itself. He thinks religion is mere froth, mere soap bubbles, empty and meant for idle fellows.

What is the concept of the modern man, that we have described here, of himself? He thinks that he is honest in his purpose; that he does not profess to know or believe in a thing which he does not accept wholeheartedly; that before accepting any idea he wants to satisfy his reason. Of course, the first criterion in accepting any idea, for him, would be utility. Of what use is religion? It does not serve any empirical purpose; so discard it. This is his attitude towards religion, being absorbed in his materialistic pursuits, considering them to be the goal of his life. This is one of the types of persons that you come across at present.

There are others who do not close down the shutters of their understanding with as much abruptness as the foregoing. They are open to conviction. Only they want to know that they are not being deceived, that they are treading the right path, that their effort is not going to waste, that they are not like the blind led by the blind. This is a healthier

sign. It is the proper mood with which we have to approach every problem. The Hindu scriptures encourage such a critical attitude and the true teachers invite questions of a genuine seeker. They do not ask any one to accept them or their words without verification, without test. Neither do they fear healthy opposition. And mind you that this is not a new development in the Hindu religion or philosophy. Even as far back as the age of the Upanisads this trend could be seen. No one was taught what was beyond his seeking. None was denied what he genuinely longed for, earnestly sought. The *Praśnopanisad*, for example, is in the form of a dialogue between six pupils and an enlightened teacher. The six disciples, already imbued with the Vedic lore and as such competent to know about the highest knowledge, approached the teacher Pippalada.<sup>1</sup> To them the teacher says, 'Well, I know you have undergone the probationary period of Brahmacharya as required by the scriptures, still I would like you to live with me for a year (as Brahmacharins) and after that you may individually ask me what each one of you desire to know and if I know I shall tell you about it'.<sup>2</sup> That was the method. There was no arrogation of knowledge to oneself by the teacher. Neither was there any regimentation, no one rule, no one method, no one teaching being forced on all. Besides, in such contact, the disciples were given an opportunity to study the teacher, for themselves, at close quarters. Though they had heard of him, they had never lived with him, and that was no good. The disciple and the master had to know one another intimately. Further, the life of the teacher was an illustration of his teachings. Thus ample scope was provided for the pupil and the teacher to come together by this method, where there was no blind acceptance of the one by the other. So we see that even the approach to religion was scientific, as long back as that.

And what about it now? That it is so even now can be known through the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Once Sri Ramakrishna was explaining a certain point in religion to a devotee when he raised a doubt. Questions and answers followed but the man remained unconvinced. At this some one from the audience suggested to the questioner: 'Why don't you accept what he says?' Sri Ramakrishna could not brook such a notion, the very idea was repugnant to him. He therefore came out with a sharp rebuke on the latter, 'What sort of a man are you,' he said, 'to accept words without conviction! Why, that is hypocrisy! I see you are a counterfeit.'

Let us ponder over this before we say that religion is irrational or unscientific. Why did Sri Ramakrishna insist that one should be convinced before one accepted his words? He had not read logic nor heard about the Western philosophers' points of view. Yet he was insistent that one should not accept a man's words before being convinced of their truth. We can presume several reasons. First of all, it was the Hindu tradition to inquire

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<sup>1</sup> Prasna Up., 1.1

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1.2.

and know, as Sri Krishna says in the Gītā: 'Know that by prostration and by inquiry'. Prostration here does not merely mean the physical action but earnestness of the seeker and humility required of it. Secondly, Sri Ramakrishna could visualize the trend of the future age, the age of rationality, and his message being one which was meant not only for the particular times in which he lived but also for future mankind, he had to meet the needs of the inquirers to come. Thirdly, and this is more important for a seeker to know, Sri Ramakrishna knew that those who accepted words without conviction were shallow, were as ready to fall off as they were ready to follow. They, he found, were like trees whose roots do not go deep into the earth but spread just near the surface and are uprooted by a wind, which approaches the nearest sign of a storm. He had no sympathy with such superficial inquirers. He wanted people to dive deep into religious practices, a condition which was not possible for anyone unless he had conviction of the veracity and validity of the truths he was seeking. So the sincerity of purpose and honesty of conviction of the modern man were not unknown to the ancients. These were the first fundamentals of the religious. They are not the modern man's monopoly. These traits were, are and will be cherished by all true seekers in whatever line their search might be.

Now let us see whether the modern man is scientific in condemning that religion is unscientific and so on. Honest scientists do not reject a theory unless it is proved to be false; this is the attitude of science towards its own investigations. Would it then have one set of attitude towards their research and another towards a different field? If so, it is unreasonable, illogical. In such a case biased judgment will be the result. People of the world today suffer because of this dual standard of judgment; it has one standard for the mother-in-law and another for the daughter-in-law, as the native proverb goes. But rationalism and science cannot claim to remain as such, if those who profess these ideologies too have this double standard.

Further, science does not say that what it has achieved is final and that there can be no other fields for exploration. On the contrary it has been forced to admit that man's psyche and mind are things which are beyond the scope of exact sciences. So under the circumstances though one may not practise religion one has no right to vilify it without verifying its statements and propositions, if he wants to remain scientific in his outlook as he asserts himself to be.

Some of these modern men describe taking to religion as escapism. What do they mean by that? Escaping from what? Escaping from responsibility? If so, of what? To whom is man responsible? Of course, to father and mother he owes a duty. Suppose they are not dependent upon him, then to whom is he responsible? Do they mean that he is afraid to face the world? One who renounces is ready to face the world without anything to call his own. So this accusation too falls flat. Perhaps, they mean that he does not become one more competitor in the race for



accumulation of wealth. If that be the meaning of the word, indeed he is guilty of escapism. Otherwise, in no other sense can he be accused of it. On the contrary, what do we see in the world today? 'Each one for himself and devil take the hindmost,' this seems to be the motto and policy of the majority of people. Selfishness and grabbing at what one can lay one's hands upon are the prevailing trends in society. That each one of us has a duty to society is conveniently forgotten by most. So when such people impute escapism to the religious, one does not know what to say; one is simply amused. Jesus said, 'Why seek ye the mote in your brother's eye? Why not you see the beam that is in your own?' But sane advice like this is given the go by. Why? Because the path of self-abnegation is hard and the way of self-indulgence is easy. Also, one cannot see one's own defects unless one be introspective; the whole creation is on this plan. It always presents the objective side, the subjective part is never revealed unless the doors of the mind which lead inwards are thrown open.

## II

After having discussed the short-sightedness and the summary manner in which religion is dealt with in the present age, let us see whether there is any substance in the contention that there are too many theories and too many philosophies in the world and that they only baffle man. We have to remember that religious or spiritual life is mostly dependent on the mental development. And the development of the mind in all people is not the same. None can deny this. It is so obvious. It is the beauty of Nature that it provides you with variety. Even in the human body it has placed differences of colour, height, girth, features and so on. It provides varieties in the animal and plant life too. As it is in the external world, so it is regarding the internal world of man. If it were the plan of Nature that there should be one type of mind it would have done so. Fortunately that has not been its scheme. It has provided variations in the inner world too. Man is neither all reason nor all emotion. He is a combination of both. Only there is predominance of reason in some and in others it is the emotion which takes the upper hand. Therefore it is that the different minds require different types of incentives to develop in their own way. Take for instance the worldly secular occupations. There are so many vocations but all are not efficient to practise any and every trade they come across. There is the aptitude of each person. One may be proficient in mechanics, another may easily master economics. If, however, we were to enforce them to change over their vocations, to which they have no aptitude, we may find that either they will not be able to work so well or will be complete failures. As in the case of the trades so also in man's inclination towards religion there are differences. The Hindu idea has been to meet the needs of all. You will cripple man's development if you force him to change his nature, by not allowing him to develop in his own way, by setting one standard for all.

The real spiritual guide does not disturb the nature of the disciple but helps him to overcome the obstacles in his path. He attempts no transplantation. Try to transplant a grown-up tree, what will be the result? The tree will die. Make the fish live out of water, the same result will follow. So each one has to be nurtured in his own element. We cannot make the tropical vegetation grow in temperate climates. Do we not remember the saying: One man's meat is another man's poison? This is what Sri Ramakrishna too gave us to understand when he cited the instance of a mother cooking various dishes of the same fish to suit the digestive power of her several children. We find from the annals of religion that there is not one path alone to reach the Godhead. We see there are many religions and every religion has produced saints and sages, and that in spite of the several attempts on the part of the followers of some religions, to wipe out other religions from the face of the earth, the seemingly most meek among them, viz., Hinduism, has still survived. Not only has it survived by itself but it has given religion, all the world over, a new fillip, a new lease of life, whenever it was in danger of being smothered by antagonistic forces. Vain are the efforts of those who want to convert the whole world to their own way of thinking, to their own ideology; it is against the very scheme of the Most High whom they adore.

### III

Now then, having found that variety in religious beliefs and practices are nothing abnormal but natural, let us try to comprehend the fundamentals of religion. The first thing that every religion accepts, except perhaps Buddhism and Jainism, is that there is a higher power, by whatever name He is addressed, from whom this universe has come, in whom it rests and unto whom it will finally return; that He is seeking man, as man seeks Him. Secondly, the way to know God, see Him, is by self-abnegation, by giving up our desires for enjoyment here or hereafter. As Jesus said, 'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon'.<sup>3</sup> Hence, desires for enjoyment and religion cannot go hand in hand. One has to give up the one or the other. Again, self-abnegation means cultivation of several other virtues like humility, compassion, forgiveness, etc., which are its corollaries. Thirdly, an intense desire to know the Lord must be present. Every religion lays stress on these fundamentals and to attain this goal it has evolved methods, peculiarly its own.

Religion has three aspects: rituals, philosophy and mythology. People nowadays think lightly of the rituals. But for a sense-bound man they serve as a safety valve, serve to divert his mind from himself to the

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<sup>3</sup> Gospel according St. Mathew, 6.24.

Deity. We shall give here an instance to illustrate how this ritual works. Girish Chandra Ghosh, when he came to Sri Ramakrishna, was leading a bohemian life. Even after coming in contact with the Master he could not give up his drinking habit. Several devotees of the Master, who saw many good virtues in Girish, requested the Master to ask Girish to give up that habit. Sri Ramakrishna's only reply was, 'No, I need not ask him to do so. He will give it up of himself'. A few days later Girish expressed to the Master his difficulty in giving up drinking. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Why should you give up? Only offer the wine to the Divine Mother before you partake of it'. Girish followed the instructions and before long wine lost all its attraction for him. The beauty of offering everything to God, before we partake of it, is that we lose the enormous attraction that we have for the object. The thirst gradually abates and finally God becomes the centre of all our attraction. But let it not be thought that everyone has to go through this path of rituals. Those who are competent to get over the body idea can directly take to the path of knowledge. But they are few and far between.

The next aspect of religion is philosophy which deals with the nature of the ultimate reality and how it can be reached. However, truths of philosophy being obscure, abstract, we have mythology in religion, which by stories and illustrations makes the common man understand those truths. No part of religion, therefore, is to be looked down upon. Each serves its purpose in the release of man from his servitude to the senses. Those who desire this release have to take to religion whether they call themselves modern or not.

## **NATURE OF THE SELF OR THE ATMAN**

**Swami Paratparananda**

*Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – March 1964; Vol. 50; page 594*

It is the greatest tragedy of life that most of the people do not know themselves. This statement may appear as a fallacy. Who does not know himself? Ask anyone and he will reply who he is: son of so and so; a goldsmith, a soldier, an engineer, an administrator, a scholar, a merchant, a diplomat, a blacksmith, or a carpenter; blind or lame, fair or black, wealthy or poor; joyous or sorrowful. What more does he need to know? Is this not enough for his worldly purpose? No doubt a worldly man need know nothing more. But there come in the life of everyone moments when everything seems to go out of gear, symphony of life breaks down, jarring notes impinge on it and the world seems to be what it was not or what it is not to be. Then it is that man wonders whether all that he sees and senses is real. If these moments persist and man takes advantage of his experience to probe deep into the mystery of his own self, he is said to be a wise man. He only can know his true self. 'Having observed the worlds attainable by actions (to be transient) and that this Uncreated One cannot be obtained by karma a Brāhmana should be dispassionate,' says also the *Mundakopanisad*.<sup>1</sup>

Normally, we see that man identifies himself with the body when he says 'I am the son of such and such a person' or that he is black or fair, lame or blind and so on. A vast majority of the populace of the world cannot transcend this body idea. But there are times when man forgets his body also. What does he mean when he says that he is joyous or sorrowful? Is the body feeling that joy? Of course, the body may express it. But where actually is the joy or sorrow? It is in the mind. For the time being, therefore, that person transcends the body. But there is a third experience which cannot be said to be of either the body or the mind—the experience of deep sleep. After awakening from deep sleep the person says 'I slept well. I did not know anything.' Here are two statements — one is sleep and the other is not knowing. The first one shows that the body was restful and the second shows that the mind too was not functioning. But from the statement we come to understand that it is the same person who went to sleep, almost blanked out, that is making the statement and not any other. So we see

a third phenomenon: a principle that is active, which is beyond even the mind, and watches even when the mind is at rest. That one say our Rishis is the Ātman, the true Self and not this body or the mind. These are its outer coverings. And this Ātman is to be seen, to be heard, to be cogitated and meditated upon, say the Upanisads. So here is evidence enough to show that man is not all what he thinks himself to be — not a mere cage of bones and flesh.

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Having come to the conclusion that our true Self is not the body or the mind a natural desire awakens in man to know what it really is; what its nature is; where in the body it resides; how it can be perceived and so on. It is here that we receive immense help from our Rishis and sages, seers and saints, because they have seen the Reality, known it and out of compassion for us handed down their experiences in the form of their talks, and mantras to posterity.

In the *Kathopanishad*, Naciketa asks Yama a very pertinent question, 'There is this doubt among men: Some say that when this body dies there is something that remains, whereas others say this ceases to be. Taught by you I want to know about this knowledge.'<sup>2</sup> This inquiry is the foundation of knowledge. The generality of mankind is satisfied with the things of the world. For them all these inquiries are superfluous. To most of them religion consists in the fulfilment or observance of some dogmas, some rites and following some creeds. And those who are rich enough and have earned wealth by means fair and foul think that they can purchase their place in heaven by building houses of charity and the like. And they believe that is quite sufficient. But very rarely some see through it all and discard them as meaningless, worthless in a greater sense, in the sense of Reality. That is what Naciketa did. Yama offered him long life, chariots, beautiful damsels, heavenly music, immense wealth and vast land. Yet, though a boy, Naciketa replies wisely, 'All these, what you offer,' he says, 'sap the energy of all the senses and even the longest life is but like a dream, very short-lived. Let, therefore, all these be with you alone.'<sup>3</sup> That is discrimination, penetration which helps man to uncover himself. Such a strong determination alone brings us nearer to our goal; makes us comprehend the Reality.

This Ātman is a wonderful thing as the Lord of Death himself testifies. It requires a brilliance of intellect that can illumine the remotest recesses of our heart. Yama in the *Kathopanishad* says, 'Wonderful is the preceptor of this knowledge and equally marvellous is the pupil who learns it.'<sup>4</sup> For it is so subtle to grasp and we are so much

on the gross side of the world. How subtle it is, is described in another place in the same Upanisad thus: 'It is subtler than the subtlest and greater than the greatest and resides in the cavity of the hearts of beings.'<sup>5</sup> It is incomprehensible, yet is the essence of our being. It has been spoken of in contradictory terms such as, 'Though sitting it travels far, though lying down it travels everywhere.'<sup>6</sup> Language fails to describe it, mind fails to grasp it, what it is can be finally said only in negative ways as 'not this', 'not this': 'It is not gross nor subtle; it is neither short nor long; neither red colour nor oiliness; neither shadow nor darkness; neither air nor ether, unattached, neither savour nor odour, without eyes or ears, without the vocal organ or mind, non-luminous, without the vital force or mouth, not a measure, without interior or exterior.'<sup>7</sup> The negative epithets are there to discourage us from imputing any materiality to the Ātman. By denying odour, taste etc. to it the Upanisad maintains its unapproachability through the limited senses. Man has but only his five senses to evaluate the things presented to him and when he has to deal with phenomena that transcend his senses he feels himself at sea. That is exactly what happens when man tries to know about the Ātman.

Further, by saying that it is non-luminous the Upanisad does not mean to convey to us that the Ātman is dull or dark. Luminosity of a material kind is denied to it. The Atman is of the nature of consciousness, how can it be dull! 'There the sun does not shine, nor the moon nor the stars, nor the lightning, what then to speak of this mortal fire. Everything else shines in its wake. In its light everything becomes luminous,' say the scriptures. That is what Swami Vivekananda also meant when he said that every soul is potentially divine.

The second conclusion that emerges out of Naciketa's inquiry is that this Ātman is deathless and birthless. By denying these two changes to Ātman, Yama denies to it all the other mutations like growth and decay also. Another Upanisad more explicitly puts it as 'It is free from decrepitude, death and fear, and is immortal.'<sup>8</sup>

This idea is well brought out in the Gita by Sri Krishna. When Arjuna out of infatuation for his kith and kin refused to fight them and put forward arguments to abandon his duty as a warrior, Sri Krishna smiles at his ignorance. He remarks, 'You are grieving for those who are not to be grieved for, yet speak like a wise man. But the wise ones grieve not for the living or the dead.' He continues, 'It is not true that you, I and these people were not there before and will cease to exist with the end of these outer frames. For the embodied being birth and death are only two other types of changes as childhood, growth, youth and old age. He, therefore, grievously errs who thinks that he is killing

or is being killed. This Ātman is unborn, ever existing, eternal, ancient, and is not killed when the body is killed. This Ātman has not only no death but being immaterial cannot be pierced by the sword, nor burnt by fire, nor drenched by water, nor dried by air. It is all-pervading. It is immovable like a pillar and primordial.’<sup>9</sup> But what it really is can only be subjectively experienced when man transcends all limits, bodily and mental, and attains *nirvikalpasamadhi*.

Sri Ramakrishna many a time attempted to describe what he experienced during his *nirvikalpa samadhi*, — a state where all the accretions of the Ātman are shed away—but thinking about it he would again cross the barriers of this world of ideation and merge into it. At last he said to the devotees, ‘I want to communicate to you what my experiences in that state are but something as it were presses down my tongue.’ Another time he said it is like going into the inner apartments and shutting the door; anything that transpires inside remains a sealed book for the outside world.

### III

The question that next confronts us is that if the Ātman were so subtle as cannot be seen how can we believe in its existence at all. To this Sri Ramakrishna says, well, it may not be perceived by the senses but it can be perceived by the pure mind. Sri Krishna also remarks to Arjuna in the Gita, ‘You will not be able to see Me with these eyes of yours, I shall bestow on you ethereal eye-sight to see My divine glory.’<sup>10</sup> The pure mind develops a special faculty to perceive the Divine that dwells in every being. Constant dwelling on the Self, on the Divine is the only way to purify the mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, ‘If you want to keep your pots and pans bright you have to rub them daily.’ This thinking of the Lord is rubbing the mind of all its impurities, making it pure.

Yājñavalkya exhorts Maitreyi in a similar way when he says that Ātman is to be heard, to be cogitated and meditated upon. For, ‘this Ātman is a rare thing to hear about in this frenzied world, many have not the opportunity and time to do so. And even among those who hear many do not understand it.’<sup>11</sup> Rare indeed is a person who really hankers after it. Sri Ramakrishna often remarked: ‘People shed jugful of tears for wealth, wife and children but where is he who cries for God! Who wants God?’ Man is too much absorbed by the world to think of God or Ātman. But for a person who desires God, wants Him, He comes. The lives of sages and saints are the best assurance about this fact, the greatest testimony.

## IV

Though the Ātman is pervading the bodies of beings it is conspicuously present at the region of the heart. Sri Ramakrishna compared it to a rich man's drawing-room. 'Though the rich man can be anywhere in the house he is mostly present in his drawing-room. The devotee's heart is God's drawing-room,' said he. Though God is present in every being He manifests more in man and among men also His manifestation is profoundly felt among the pure-souled devotees. Yogis, therefore, think of a blooming lotus in the region of the heart where they meditate upon the resplendent Ātman. The Vedas also speak in a like manner. 'That which is in the lotus-like abode (of the heart) in the city of Brahman is a tiny little space. And that which is in that space is to be investigated, that is to be known.'<sup>12</sup> When this proposition was put forward a natural objection was raised as to what can be there in such a microscopic space. To this the sage answered: 'All that what you see without, the space, the air, the sun, the moon, and the stars and everything that is and that is not, is inside it,' meaning thereby that the very same Being which is the Creator, Maintainer and Destroyer of this cosmos resides or is reflected in the heart of a Yogi, just as even the vast sun is reflected in a tiny dew-drop. That this Ātman is none other than Brahman itself is reiterated in every scripture. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, 'The Lord, O Arjuna, resides in the region of the heart of all beings. It is He who residing there moves them as if mounted on a machine.' That is why Yogis and other spiritual teachers tell us to visualize a lotus in the heart as the abode or the seat of the Lord, the Ātman. For rationally inclined people this may seem a little odd, but to them we refer to Swamiji's instruction. Alluding to the process of Dharana Swamiji remarks, 'Dharana is holding the mind to certain points. Forcing the mind to feel certain parts of the body. This Dharana is of various sorts, and along with it, it is better to have a little play of imagination. For instance, the mind should be made to think of one point in the heart. That is very difficult, an easier way is to imagine a lotus there. The lotus is full of light, effulgent light.' Imagination does play a great part in our life. We all know this. So instead of dreaming idle dreams is it not infinitely better to see a lotus in the heart and Ātman as manifest there? Therefore, this imagination is quite in keeping with even the most rational thinking. Sri Ramakrishna too recommends the heart as a splendid place for concentration.

Further, these words Ātman and Brahman are often used interchangeably in the Upanisads in order to impress that these two mean one and the same thing. Nay, there is the definite, positive and unambiguous declaration of the Upanisads to this effect: 'This Ātman is



Brahman who is the experimenter of all.' <sup>13</sup> Sri Ramakrishna too says, 'It is God Himself who plays about as human beings.' From the foregoing evidence both ancient and recent we should have no difficulty to understand the real nature of our true Self, the Ātman.

All that is required is to remember that we are That. Of course, it is not possible to grasp this idea immediately. Even a person like Swetaketu, brought up in the tradition of the ancient knowledge found it rather hard to understand. His father had to repeat it to him with elaborate explanation not less than nine times before he could comprehend the idea. Further, this knowledge need not necessarily upset the followers of the path of devotion. It is enough for them if they feel an affinity, a kinship to God whom they worship. They may establish any relation with Him — of a child, a servant or a friend whichever agrees with their sentiments. The main purpose of human life being to know one's true Self, to see God, it matters little what path one follows to attain the goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Mundakopanisad. 1-2-13.

<sup>2</sup> Katha Upanishad, 1.20.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1.26.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2.7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 2.20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 2.21.

<sup>7</sup> Br. Up., 3.8.8.

<sup>8</sup> Br. Up., 4.4.25.

<sup>9</sup> Gita II. 11 to 13, 19, 20, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Gita, XI.8.

<sup>11</sup> Kathopanishad, 2.7.

<sup>12</sup> Ch. Up. 8.1.1.

<sup>13</sup> Br. Up., 2.5.19.

## ON ENDEARING ONESELF TO GOD

By Swami Paratparananda

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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 Gita<sup>1</sup>. 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'.<sup>2</sup>

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?'<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>4</sup> 'Everything movable and immovable is to be covered by the Lord' says the *Isāvāsya Upanisad*.<sup>5</sup> 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.'<sup>6</sup>

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,'<sup>7</sup> 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<sup>8</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Gita, 16.5.

<sup>2</sup> Bhagavata, I.2.6.

<sup>3</sup> Gita, 6.31.

<sup>4</sup> Br. Up. 4.4.19.

<sup>5</sup> Isa Up., 1.

<sup>6</sup> Bhagavad Gita, XII, 13 to 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3.37.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2.62 & 63.

## ON THE OBSTACLES IN THE SPIRITUAL PATH

Swami Paratparananda

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SRI KRISHNA says in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the Lord residing in the heart of all creatures moves them by His Maya as dolls mounted on a machine.<sup>1</sup> Christ declared, 'The kingdom of God is within you.'<sup>2</sup> The Upanishads predicate, 'Projecting it (this universe) It (Brahman) entered into it.'<sup>3</sup> Again they claim, 'Smaller than an atom and larger than the largest this Being of Atman is hidden in the cave of the hearts of all creatures.'<sup>4</sup> Proclamations like these propounding the nearness of God or Atman or Brahman, by what-ever name He is called, are extant in all the scriptures and in all languages. Can this be merely a form of speech to encourage the aspirant to move forward? Or is it a fact that is verifiable? It is a little bit confusing. Does it not sound like a paradox — to say that it is nearer than the nearest and, at the same time, to be unable to experience its presence? Exactly so, the situation is almost comical. But there is nothing laughable about it. It is a statement of fact. What is nearer than our own face to our eyes. On that account can we see it without the aid of anything else, a mirror or a reflecting surface for instance. No, we cannot. Yet that is not considered strange. It is accepted as a thing well-known. Rather, to put such a question is considered as something stupid, revealing the depth of ignorance of the questioner. In a similar manner, the Lord though dwelling in our hearts remains unrevealed to most of us.

Why is it so? There are several reasons. Now, let us see what is that which reflects all things, that is, takes cognizance of objects presented before us. It is the mind-stuff (*citta*). This mind can be compared to a mirror. Now, the mirror, as we know, has two sides, one the reflecting surface and the other the opaque one, protected by wood. Now this mirror of the mind is facing outwards in the majority of people and the wooden side is turned inwards. The mind, therefore, takes in reflections of the outside world and not of the Lord within, that is, we are awake towards the world and asleep towards the Lord, all-conscious of the world, and all-unconscious of God. What then is the use of complaining that we cannot see the Indwelling Spirit? We have to turn this mirror

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<sup>1</sup> Gita, 18, 61.

<sup>2</sup> Gospel of St, Luke, 17.21.

<sup>3</sup> Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.6.

<sup>4</sup> Kathopanishad, 2.20.

inwards to see the Lord. That is what the Upanishad also affirms when it says, 'Some intelligent one desiring liberation sees the Indwelling Atman, by controlling his senses.'<sup>5</sup>

How to do this? What are the impediments that are in its way? The attachment that has been generated towards the panoramic beauty of the external objects, in myriads of births, is difficult to get rid of. This has formed, as it were, encrustations around the hinges of the mirror of the mind making it difficult to move even to the slightest extent. Along with this attachment there have developed other foibles like anger, greed, lust, pride, malice, vanity and so on. The list is endless and staggering. Yet it can be resolved into two main impediments, as Sri Ramakrishna puts it, 'lust and greed'; or as Sri Krishna says, into desire or lust — lust for gold, lust for sensual enjoyments, lust for power and so on; or as the Upanishads say, into three *esanas* — *putresana*, *vittesana*, *lokesana* — seeking progeny, wealth and enjoyable worlds like the heavens.

Let us analyse this question. What for is this lust and greed? What is the motive? Is it not for happiness? We have to admit that it is so. But is happiness there in the things of the world — that is the question. Where is happiness? Is it in the objects? If it is presumed that it is in the object, it must always be so. Because happiness will then become the inherent quality of the object, just as heat and light are the inherent qualities of fire. But, this, as we see, is not the case. The same object is seen to give happiness at one time and produce misery at another. The heat of the fire on a chill winter night in a cold climate is welcome, whereas the same on a sultry night in summer is unbearable. How then can the happiness be in the object? Now, it will be said that it depends on place, time, and object. Well, given all these suppose the mind is disturbed on account of some calamity that has happened or is impending. Will man then be happy by any number of outward attractions? No. So, it naturally follows that happiness is not in the object but is a condition of the mind. The objects are only instrumental in stimulating happiness or misery. The main part, therefore, is played by the mind.

Again, the mind, under pressure of circumstances, changes its likes and dislikes. This shows that it is pliant and not rigid. If so, why not make it take an interest in one's own being. That is possible. It has been done heretofore and it can be done again. Only the mind should be freed from its entanglements. The mind has mixed itself hopelessly with the world. We have allowed the world too much to get into the mind. To take an illustration from Sri Ramakrishna, the milk of the mind has been too much mixed with the water of the world, for every seer of milk there is five seers of water in it. Such is the condition of our minds. The water is to be dried up if you have to get the taste of pure milk and then only can it curdle. First, we have to free the mind of all desires. It may be asked: Why not satisfy the desires and finish with them? No, that cannot be done

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4.1.



even if we were given millions of lives. For desires are endless. As soon as one of them is satisfied, a hundred spring in its place. A mind with desires is like a desert ever thirsting for water. It is an unquenchable thirst. Buddha found out that this *tanha* (*tr̥sna*) was at the root of all misery. This running after the things of the world — what a host of things it brings in its train! Anger, jealousy, hatred all are its camp followers and makes the mind a seething cauldron of discontent.

Again, to quote Sri Ramakrishna, 'The disease of worldliness is like typhoid. And there are a huge jug of water and a jar of savoury pickles in the typhoid patient's room. If you want to cure him of his illness, you must remove him from that room. The worldly man is like the typhoid patient. The various objects of enjoyment are the huge jug of water, and the craving for their enjoyment is his thirst. The very thought of pickles makes the mouth water; you don't have to bring them near. And he is surrounded with them.'

So the wise said, 'withdraw the mind from the objects of enjoyment'. How can this be done? By restraining the senses that feed the mind continually with the sensations of their objects. The eye looks at beautiful things and tempts the mind; the ear conveys sweet sounds and entices it; likewise the other organs of touch, taste and smell ensnare it. It is by avoiding the sense objects and by directing the mind Godward that the mind can be gradually brought under control, and not by giving free reins to desire. The *Kathopanishad* has resorted to a beautiful allegory to elucidate this point. There the body is compared to a chariot, soul to its owner, intelligence to the charioteer, mind to the reins, sense organs to the horses, and sense objects to the roads. 'The body when conjoined with the senses and the mind is called the enjoyer (*bhokta*) by the wise',<sup>6</sup> continues the Upanishad. What it says in the next verse is a thing that is to be remembered always by aspirants to the higher life. 'One who is ignorant, and perpetually of uncontrolled mind has his sense organs rebellious like the wicked horses of the charioteer.'<sup>7</sup> Sri Sankara commenting on it explains in detail: 'If the intelligence, which is the charioteer, is ignorant, not smart, indiscriminate, as to what to engage in and what to abstain from, and allows the mind, which is in the position of the reins, loose, to wander, then the sense-organs, being like the unbridled and wicked horses, will be impossible of control.' And the result will be that the chariot, along with the owner will soon come to grief.

But the task of retrieving the mind, is difficult, tedious and long. There is no easy way. Let us be clear about it. Never was any treasure unearthed by the mere knowledge of its situation. Never was success achieved in any field without exertion. And how foolish it is of man to think that he will be able to attain the Highest without shedding the sweat of his brow, without spending sleepless nights and restless days in its pursuit! It is only idle fancy of man to think so. It is as Sankara in his

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3.5.

*Vivekachudamani* very pointedly brings out, 'To announce oneself an emperor, without destroying the enemies, without acquiring sovereignty over the kingdom.'<sup>8</sup> Goethe, the German poet remarks, 'Happy the man who early learns the wide chasm that lies between his wishes and his powers.' All this shows that nothing can be obtained merely by wishing.

Now, there are two methods by which one can arrive at this taste for higher life: One is by allowing the mind to experience the sweet and bitter fruits, that it is so fond of, until a very bitter one makes it pause and think as to whether this is all what is meant by enjoyment. The second is by discrimination. The first method is for those who will not listen to sane advice, nor would believe in the existence of a hereafter. The second is for those who had already experienced the meaning of enjoyment either in this life or past ones.

In the first case no amount of outside pressure is of any avail. In their case we have to leave it to nature to work its course. So we pass on to the other. Here definite rules have been enunciated. The mind having been in the world cannot be withdrawn from it all of a sudden. The mind, which has been practised to one way of thinking, cannot immediately change to quite a contrary way. The ephemeral nature of the things of the world, must first dawn on it, then will come the reassessment of values. With it will come dispassion. This dispassion to take firm root should be strengthened by discrimination. Discrimination between the Real and the unreal — that God alone is real and all else is unreal. This idea is to be repeatedly and constantly impressed upon the mind. The idea should also be followed up in practice incessantly and for a long time, until it becomes natural. The mind will resist doggedly; it will try to run in the old ruts, because there is no resistance there. Such a lapse or tendency is to be prevented. It is a life-long vigil. A spiritual aspirant can never afford to be slack or sloth in his watch over himself without the fear of losing his moorings. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Through the discipline of constant practice one is able to give up attachment to "lust and greed". By practice one acquires uncommon power of mind. Then one doesn't find it difficult to subdue the sense-organs and to bring anger, lust and the like under control.' The *Gita* also says the same thing: 'By practice and renunciation can this wavering, fickle mind be controlled.'<sup>9</sup> But Sri Ramakrishna also warns even those who had attained a high state of spirituality to beware of allurements of lust. How then can persons on the lower plane of the spiritual path presume to be neglectful!

Further, along with these two, discrimination and dispassion, a yearning to see God or realize one's true nature should be cultivated. For mind cannot remain in a state of vacuum. It wants some support, something to think about. Therefore, along with dispassion a zeal to realize God will keep it occupied, engaged and prevent it from being 'a devil's work-shop', from back-sliding. And this yearning for God will help

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<sup>8</sup> *Vivekachudamani*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> *Gita*, VI, 35.

to strengthen dispassion. 'As one proceeds towards the east, the west is left behind', says Sri Ramakrishna. So too, as one proceeds toward God the pull of the world becomes less. Or to use another simile, the needle when it comes into the magnetic field is immediately attracted by the magnet. If, however, the needle is rusted or covered with mud and the like it fails to feel the magnetic pull. Constant practice of meditation, along with discrimination and dispassion is like cleansing the needle. But to be caught in the charm of the higher life early, is a grand thing. Such people are then like fresh flowers as yet untouched by the blight of worldliness; a little exertion sets them free. They are like dry matchsticks that catch fire with the slightest friction. They have to struggle only a little.

## II

Man comes into this world with a load of propensities, ill or well. These, as it were, force him into a particular mould of character. They are all-powerful in a normal man, and make him their slave. But these propensities were created by man himself, by his actions in the previous births as man, say our scriptures. For man alone has been endowed with intelligence to distinguish good from evil whereas other animals have not that capacity. Therefore, according to the manner in which an individual had used his intelligence and according to his actions, the propensities were formed in his mind. And this mind does not die with the body. It, along with the subtle body, transmigrates from one gross body to another or from one sphere to another according to the fruits of its actions. With too much of evil deeds or animal-like actions the soul transmigrates into an animal or insect body or becomes even as herbs or plants. Only when the karma is in a balanced state the soul appears in the human body.

Swami Vivekananda says that as man has created these propensities, he can, if he is earnest, as well create fresh and better ones to counteract the old ones. By doing good deeds and thinking good thoughts fresh *samskaras* are created. Thoughts are as much harmful or beneficial as actions themselves. For is it not constant dwelling on an idea that goads man to action? Besides, thought leaves an impress on the mind for the future, as a seed to further germinate when circumstances become favourable. This has been poignantly described by Sri Krishna in the Gita, 'When man constantly thinks of the objects of the world, attachment grows toward them. From attachment is born desire and lust. And when these desires are obstructed then anger is generated. With anger delusion overtakes the mind. This results in the beclouding of memory, and thence takes place the bankruptcy of intelligence, which in its turn leads to the spiritual death of man.'<sup>10</sup> How to counteract these forces has been dealt with in detail on previous occasions. Here we shall

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., II, 62&63.

simply enumerate them. Restraint of the senses, holy company, practice of discrimination and dispassion, as mentioned above, solitude, taking God's name, performance of good deeds, meditation, a loving disposition towards all creatures, developing an altruistic outlook and above all intense yearning for God are some of the means to employ to overcome worldliness.

One more means which Swami Vivekananda has given to us is to do *karma* in the *Gita* fashion. To put it in his own words: 'Work for work's sake,' without caring for name or fame or going to heaven. 'To work just because good will come of it.' Further he adds, 'There are others who do good to the poor and help mankind from still higher motives, because they believe in doing good and love good.' 'Love, truth and unselfishness,' Swamiji continues, 'are not merely moral figures of speech, but they form our highest ideal, because in them lies such a manifestation of power. In the first place, a man who can work for five days, or even for five minutes without any selfish motive whatever, without thinking of future, of heaven, of punishment or anything of the kind, has in him the capacity to become a powerful moral giant.' This is the means which people living anywhere and in any station of life can try to follow, to become morally pure, nay even to attain the Highest.

How to do unselfish work is also taught to us by Swami Vivekananda in the following words: 'We have to begin from the beginning, to take up the works as they come to us and slowly make ourselves more unselfish every day. We must do the work and find out the motive power that prompts us, and, almost without exception, in the first years, we shall find that our motives are always selfish; but gradually this selfishness will melt by persistence, till at last will come the time when we shall be able to do really unselfish work.'

A wholesome advice of Sri Ramakrishna as to how to wean away the turbulent mind from its worldly occupation will be immensely helpful to all *sadhakas*. He says, 'Nothing can be achieved without discrimination and renunciation,' and adds, 'it is not possible to acquire renunciation all at once. The time factor must be taken into account. But it is also true that a man should hear about it. When the right time comes, he will say himself, "Oh yes, I heard about this." You must also remember another thing. By constantly hearing about renunciation one's desire for worldly objects gradually wears away. One should take rice-water in small doses to get rid of the intoxication of liquor. Then one gradually becomes normal.' Worldliness is like intoxication, and hearing about renunciation is like taking rice-water to get rid of this intoxication.

## **ON THE ROLE OF DEATH**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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A CHILD comes into this world disbursing, as it were, joy unto all its near and dear ones. Yes, even, the mother who suffers extreme pain to bring it into being is pleased and forgets all her pains looking at it. But the child itself is born with a cry in its mouth. The child grows into an adolescent and becomes a man, performs deeds well or ill and grows old and lastly bids farewell to this world willy nilly, immersing his kith and kin in sorrow. That is the existence of man. But how does man take his exit? We shall try to recapture that here. Most people do so unwillingly, struggling to escape but unable to get out of the clutches of death. With their minds hovering about the hoard of wealth they have acquired, about the dear children that surround them and last, but not least, about their own bodies, which though corruptible were so well taken care of, though worn out so much more liked. It is a wrench, at the heart to leave the body, unbearable at the same time unavoidable. That is the way most of the people take leave of the world — with moans and groans. The pangs of death are terrible.

Let us not believe, for a moment, if anyone says that all of them who bid adieu in this manner are agnostics, atheists or sceptics even the so-called believers too fare no better. For they had not practised what they uttered their lips spoke but their hearts responded not. They had no faith in their own beliefs, no trust in the God they professed. So they too quit the world in a like manner. Death is an inevitable process <sup>1</sup> of this creation. That is the one thing that is certain in this universe; forests are turned into cities and cities turn into desert dunes; where mountains are, there may form lakes in time. So uncertainty there is about everything, but death is very certain for every being that is born.<sup>2</sup> All else is momentary. You had your forefathers and they again their own but where are they all now! Gone, gone are they into the womb of death.

Let not the sophisticated think that a pessimistic view of life is being presented here. There is no idea in this to weaken man. This is the most realistic view of all the realisms. Why should we be unrealists and blind our eyes to this indubitable fact? For does not death consume everything? It does. Let this be not forgotten. The role of death is therefore to make man aware of his destiny: that however high he may be placed, whatever aid of technology or medicine he may have, his end is either in a coffin or in a handful of ashes. Shall we then mourn our life in sack cloth and ashes? No, that is not the purpose of life, nor of death. This process of

birth and death is going to be repeated until we know God, see God, realize Him in this very life. A pointed reference is found to this idea in one of the Upanisads which comments: 'If you *know* It here you have the truth, you have all. If not it is a great loss — a denouement. Knowing It (Brahman) present in every being the wise ones leaving this mortal coil attain Immortality.'<sup>3</sup>

The passage quoted above implies four things clearly: (1) that there is a life after death, (2) that there is a way of living by which man's life can be fruitful here and a blessing hereafter, (3) that all life lived otherwise than in this manner is a colossal waste, and (4) that the way to Immortality lies in seeing divinity manifest in every being.

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If death stalks the world and we brood over it, how can we take courage to live a life, glorious or not? This question also has been answered in the above passage. Let us see how. We come across here two words *mrtyu* (death) and *amrta* (immortal). After death one becomes immortal. Is it not a contradiction? Apparently it is. But what is it that dies? Can we say it is the body? No. The body is there though the spirit had sped away. What kept the body moving? The spirit. So death is a separation of this material body from something which we as ordinary men are usually ignorant of, but which those who have felt and experienced It call, Spirit, the *Ātman*, Jiva or Self. And this *Ātman* they say becomes immortal. What is the meaning of that? Was it mortal then? No, but in common parlance we can no more describe it than in this way. For man sees the body and thinks that he is that much mass of flesh and bones. Very few can transcend that idea. It is impossible for many even to think that there can be any existence beyond the body. The very idea puts them in a terrible fright. To such it is said that this *Atman* becomes immortal. So, knowing that all does not end with the here, man must take courage to work for the hereafter, immortality.

In olden days this phenomenon of death must have set man thinking as to 'what happens after it', as we notice in the story of Naciketas in the *Kathopanishad*. It is even today a riddle to a great part of humanity. Man dare not peep beyond the world of the senses. For it is dark to him there. He has neither the equipment nor the instruments to probe into its depth. He cannot know anything.

What is beyond is a mystery that death holds in its own possession. Those who are able to force this secret from it will go laughing; they will accept physical dissolution with as much equanimity as they accepted life. Because they have unmasked death. It is the mask that is frightening man. Children are afraid when someone frightens them putting on uncanny masks like that of giants. But a few clever among them will find out that it is the mother that has come to frighten them and being sure of

it go and jump into her lap smiling. Likewise, when once man knows the true nature of death and seen the face of Reality unmasked he does not fear any more. For he finds that the real in himself and the Reality behind the universe are identical or he sees it is the beloved Mother that exists beyond his ken of the senses. He then understands that leaving the world he would not lose anything but gain the eternal company of the Divine Mother or the Lord. Hence how can death have any fear for him? There are instances when people have bidden farewell to this world at the vision of their Chosen Deity, saying 'Coming, Mother, coming ', probably, in response to the beckoning of the Mother. It should not, however, be mistaken as the delirium of a fevered brain, for they were seen to be in full possession of their faculties as they were passing away. After uttering these words, with a smile on their lips they depart and that without any effort, without any regret. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*, 'One who at the end of one's life goes away leaving one's body remembering Me alone that one undoubtedly attains My true nature.'<sup>4</sup>

There is not a single passage anywhere in the Hindu scriptures which speaks or indicates of death as something to be dreaded. Here, in the sloka of the *Gita* quoted above, for instance we have the words, *kalevaram muktvā*, casting off the body and *prayāti*, goes. These expressions point out that there is no extinction of the individual (the Ātman) with his separation from the body. That is the idea that is taught — of travel — a beautiful idea, pregnant with meaning. Who does not know about travelling in these days? Every one travels according to his means and according to his likings. One goes to a holy place, another for sight-seeing, a third one on business, a fourth one is dragged by the bond of slavery from one end of the world to the other and so on. Similarly man according to his desires, according to his likings and inclinations and with the store of merit or demerit at his back travels i.e. transmigrates from one body to another, from one place of enjoyment to another or straightaway back to the Lord, from whom he came, to live in communion with Him. When death is viewed in this light, has man fear of it? It is no doubt good and grand to scorn life and face death laughing in a good cause, to become a martyr. But it is grander and better still to pass away knowing the Reality — a state which knocks off the wheel of birth and death for ever for that person.

How does the realization of God or Reality rescue man from the fear of death? As already stated this phenomenon of death unites the devotee with his Chosen Ideal, the beloved Lord, 'for fear of whom the fire burns and the sun shines and gives heat; for fear of whom again, Indra, Vayu and even Death, the fifth one, run their errands dutifully'.<sup>5</sup> When it is the Lord who directs Death why would the devotee be afraid of it? For when death comes it will be by the will of God. Viewed from the Advaitic standpoint also it is almost the same, for 'after realizing the oneness of everything where can there be infatuation or sorrow'.<sup>6</sup> In this state there is no more going or coming. Sri Ramakrishna discussed this point in a

very penetrative manner. He puts the questions: What are man's duties? What will accompany him after death, in the hereafter? He himself then answers thus:

“True. When a man dies after attaining Knowledge, he doesn't have to go to another plane of existence; he isn't born again. But as long as he has not attained Knowledge, as long as he has not realized God, he must come back to the life of this earth; he can never escape it. For such a person there is a hereafter. A man is liberated after attaining Knowledge, after realizing God. For him there is no further coming back to earth. If a boiled paddy-grain is sown, it doesn't sprout. Just so, if a man is boiled by the fire of Knowledge, he cannot lead a worldly life, for he has no attachment to ‘woman and gold’. What will you gain by sowing boiled paddy? . . . He who has realized God has obtained the fruit of Immortality — not a common fruit like a gourd or a pumpkin. He is free from rebirth. He is not born anywhere — on earth, in the solar world, or in the lunar world.” <sup>7</sup>

This statement of Sri Ramakrishna is amply supported by Sruti and Smṛti. Yājñavalkya was asked by Ārthabhāga: ‘When this liberated man dies, do his organs go up from him or do they not?’ Yājñavalkya replied, ‘No they merge in him only. The body swells, is inflated and in that state lies dead.’<sup>8</sup>

In the prior discussion Yājñavalkya by implication had established that death is swallowed by another death — the death of realization; and he gave the example of fire and water. As fire consumes everything and even this fire becomes the food of water, so death itself becomes the food of self-realization. The *Gīta* too says: ‘Here itself is the transmigration overcome by those whose mind is established in equality; for Brahman is even and blemishless; hence they are established in Brahman,’<sup>9</sup>

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When we say that the Hindu scriptures do not describe death as something to be dreaded, can we suppose that they encourage death by suicide? There is no basis for such a supposition. Suicide is committed mostly by frustrated persons, cowards who dare not face calamities or people who lose their mental balance at least for the moment. But there may have been a few cases where some realized souls ended their physical existence forcibly; but such instances are very rare and they cannot be termed as suicide. Sri Ramakrishna is of this view.

It is here necessary to point out that merely imagining that one has realized God, or because one had some dreams or passing visions regarding God one is not entitled to end his life on this earth. The marks of God-realization are too clear to go unnoticed. To realize God one must be free of desires as in the analogy of the ship of Sri Ramakrishna — ‘all



the bolts and screws of a ship that is passing a magnetic mine are loosened and the ship founders'. Similarly, when once a person realizes the Highest his desires are completely destroyed; worldly or heavenly enjoyments do not attract him: all his doubts and vacillations come to an end; the fruits of all his actions good or bad are annihilated.<sup>10</sup> Here is a test of man's disinterestedness. Generally people crave for the fruits of their actions which are good. If a man can sincerely give up his desire to enjoy the fruits of his meritorious acts — even the desire to gain name and fame — then he has reached perfection, in other words, only a man who has realized God, who is feeling God in every breath that he takes, can alone be so detached. Such a person may cast the body away if he finds the pull of God too intense to be suffered in it, or retain it as long as his *prārabdha karma* lasts.

#### IV

Death is an accoutrement in the armoury of Nature to forewarn man not to entangle himself too much in the affairs of the world. If we consider its role in the most materialistic way, death is a great reliever of distress and disease. Ailments assail man no matter what his age is, according to the merits of his actions done in the past or present life; with age the power of resistance drops and diseases assume frightening magnitude. Yet, the man given to an outward life finds not his desires lessening. Sri Sankara in a graphic description in his poem *Mohamudgara* brings this out: 'With furrowed skin, freckled face, toothless mouth, the old man totters on his stick, yet the bootless mass of desires has left him not.'<sup>11</sup> Such is the fate of the man who ensnares himself in the world that he has built around himself. Sri Ramakrishna cites the example of the silk worm which builds a cocoon round itself and suffers to die in it. Should it however care to, it can break and come out of it to fly free in its beautiful plumage. But such is its infatuation for the house that it has built that it prefers to remain and consequently die there! Man is none better. He is satisfied in indulging with petty jealousies, with his guilted acquirements, and with his wife and children, whom he considers his most near and dear ones. But what happens when he dies. Sankara pathetically depicts it thus: 'As long as the breath resides in the body so long do they enquire about the man's welfare, but when that last breath has left the body, the very wife is afraid of that frame.'<sup>12</sup>

However, such is *maya* that man is befooled to believe that all is well with him. Sri Ramakrishna remarks that even the Lord entangled in *maya* does not like to get out of it. He gives the instance of the mythical Incarnation of Lord Vishnu as the sow. For a long time after the purport, for which He assumed that body, was accomplished the Lord did not return to His abode. The gods were perturbed, messengers were sent but the Lord did not heed them. At last the devas with Siva in their forefront went to Him and found Him suckling the young ones. When He was told

that He should return to His abode, He replied that He was happy there and didn't want to leave the young ones. At this, the story goes on that, Siva drove his trident and demolished the sow body of the Lord and the Lord too with a great laugh returned to His abode. The story may be mythical but it has a great lesson. Man's condition is almost identical. Man too, forgetting his own nature, wallows here in this world, weeps and wails and sometimes smiles to weep again. But when he knows what his true nature is, he renounces all transient things and seeks the Eternal. And till he achieves the Eternal, till he ceases to see, as it were, many things here, he will have to face death again and again, says the *Kathopanisad*.<sup>13</sup> In this respect too the role of death is very conspicuous. If one death itself is unbearable should not man try to overcome these rounds of births and deaths?

What is the way? For the ordinary individual the path of righteousness, *dharma* has been enjoined by the scriptures. When it has been rightly practised man becomes fit to proceed higher. Without a moral base, there can be no spiritual edifice, small or great. 'One who has not rested from wickedness, one who has not gained equanimity, one who has not controlled his senses, and one who has a fickle mind cannot aspire to attain this knowledge (of the Ātman).'<sup>14</sup> That is the verdict of the sages of all times and climes and one who wants to go across this ocean of birth and death has to practise equanimity, morality, chastity and control of the senses. There is no other way. 'Neither by karma nor by progeny or wealth but by renunciation (of all the desires) alone some attained immortality, (went beyond the bounds of death),'<sup>15</sup> declares the Upanisad categorically.

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<sup>1</sup> Gita, II.27.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Kena Up. II.5.

<sup>4</sup> Gita 8.5.

<sup>5</sup> Katha Up. 6.3.

<sup>6</sup> Isa Up. 7.

<sup>7</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 1947, p.640. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4.

<sup>8</sup> Br.Up. 3.2.11. Translation by Swami Madhavananda.

<sup>9</sup> Bhagavad Gita 5.19.

<sup>10</sup> Munda Up. 2.2.8.

<sup>11</sup> Mohamudgara – 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>13</sup> Katha Up. 4.10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2.24.

<sup>15</sup> Kaivalyopanisad. 1.3.

## **PILGRIMAGE AS A MEANS TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – August 1964; Vol. 51; page 242

SPIRITUAL LIFE has a sort of mystery surrounding it. Man does not know by what act of his the inner awakening will come, by what means the doors of his vision will open, what shall illuminate his path. For it has come in several ways to different persons. Gautama's renunciation was due to the sight of misery, disease and death; and in striving to find a way out of these tribulations and sufferings he became the Buddha. In the life of Tulsidas it was the admonition of his wife that brought out the transformation. Young Tulsidas loved his wife extremely. He could not part from her even for a day. One day, however, he had to go on some work, far away from home. On returning at night he found that she had been<sup>1</sup> taken to her father's. Tulsidas set out immediately and reached there late in the night. The wife was vexed; and ashamed of being railed at by people mildly reproached him, 'Ah! what attachment you have for these bones and flesh. If only you had half this love for God you would have realized Him.' That was enough. A flood of light, as it were, fell upon him. That very moment he left his home and hearth. Sri Chaitanya's pilgrimage to Vrindavan brought him in contact with Īswar Puri and that set the chain of events ending in his complete renunciation of the world and the propagation of the Bhakti cult throughout India. It is said that Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, used to follow meticulously the religious rituals whenever he visited temples. He would even circumambulate and ring the bells that hung in the Siva temple at Banaras, as was the custom. When asked by some one why he too followed these superstitions, he seems to have replied: 'Who knows, my boy, by what action the Lord is pleased? So I follow all the customs, every one of them and I don't know, friend, how to express my love for the Lord,' Such then is the idea: anything may help to rouse our sleeping divinity.

Now, in the scriptures pilgrimage has been recognized as one of the means of devotion. Therefore with a minimum of belief in the scriptures and words of the saints, man must set out on the spiritual path. For it is not possible to scientifically and concretely demonstrate the progress or retrogression of a human being after he has done this or that deed, or had performed one or the other pilgrimage. It is possible that the man himself may not feel the change even after a long time. But on that account he should not slacken his efforts or give way to despair.

## ATTITUDE TO PILGRIMAGE

Facility of travel and eating houses at every street corner, even in places inaccessible before, has made pilgrimage a sight-seeing affair with many. Many more are attracted by the sculpture and the art that has gone into the building of the temples. But little do they care to think of the Deity that dwells in the temple. Sri Ramakrishna used to say 'People are enamoured of the garden, but rarely do they seek to know the owner.' Every word of his is being verified as true today.

What a contrast this is to the ancient mode of pilgrimage, even that of a hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago! At that time only earnest persons ventured to set out on a pilgrimage. For they had to travel mostly on foot and their path lay through forests full of wild beasts. So, when they thought of undertaking a pilgrimage they made over the responsibilities of the worldly affairs to those at home, bade them adieu and made themselves over to the care of God, their Lord. They dared not carry money for fear of dacoits; naturally they had to depend upon the hospitality accorded to them by the people on the way. The thought about home never troubled them. Their minds dwelt on the sanctity of the place they were to visit. The Deity, the grace that the Deity had showered on the saints, the lives of the saints who had lived and made the place holier — all these and similar associations would be revolving in their minds. We cannot expect people at the present time to go on foot, perhaps that would be thought of as absurd either to suggest or to follow. But surely the other part for which a pilgrimage is really undertaken, i.e., the constant remembrance of the Lord, is neither impossible to try nor absurd to suggest.

We come now to a very subtle point in the conduct of a pilgrim i.e., how should he behave in a place of worship. This is most important. A man may be a millionaire, he may have a big pedigree, and may be a great scholar. But what is that before the Creator of the Universe — all of his wealth, scholarship and nobility is as nothing in the presence of One who is the Lord of everything that was, is and will be. Yet, how cramped man's thinking is! Even earnest devotees falter here. Once at the Dakshineswar temple some ornaments of the Radha-Govinda image were stolen. At this Mathuranath Biswas, the then proprietor, a son-in-law of Rani Rasmani and an ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, said in his hearing, addressing the image, 'What a shame, O God! You could not save your own ornaments!' Sri Ramakrishna sharply rebuked Mathuranath: 'Does He who has Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, for His handmaid and attendant ever lack any splendour? These jewels may be precious to you but to God they are no better than lumps of clay. Shame on you! You shouldn't have spoken so meanly. What riches can you give to God to magnify His glory?' Yet, that is how man forgets himself in the pride of his wealth. It is difficult to be humble unless we feel the presence

of a Being far far above us in every respect. This feeling is to be cultivated. With it will come the sense of our smallness, of our littleness. Spiritual life becomes a total failure if arrogance rules supreme in the mind. The idea of going on pilgrimage is not to show off but to practise the presence of God. We cannot purchase God's grace by our wealth. It is not by what one says about God but what one does and how one does it that God measures our earnestness and sincerity.

Pilgrimage, therefore, undertaken with a spirit of faith and earnestness and humility should also be accompanied by self-control, restraint of senses. Almost a parallel can be cited from the *Bhagavad Gita* when it speaks of the means to Knowledge, knowledge of God, Realization. It says: 'A man endowed with *shraddhā* obtains Knowledge.' Two words, however, were again immediately subjoined to this statement to qualify the aspirant: (*tatparah*) one who is intent and attached to it and (*samyatendriyah*) of controlled senses. Sankara commenting on this verse says that it is possible to fake humility in outer acts as bowing down and the like, but not so in *shraddhā* (faith). The control of the senses is an added requisite to be possessed by one who aims to scale the peaks of spirituality. In every path this control of the senses and the mind is spoken of as unmistakably necessary equipment. With a mind frittered and senses like unbroken horses the goal would remain as far as it ever was, nay may recede further. Sri Ramakrishna compares a man who has not gathered his mind from the sense pleasures and yet tries to realize God to a drunkard who rows a boat all night without lifting the anchor. He remains where he was though he thinks that he is fast progressing. Attachment to the world is the anchor. Unless man frees himself from that, at least for the duration of his pilgrimage or of practising any other discipline, all his struggle will yield but little fruit.

There is an exquisite instance which remarkably points out how faith works. When some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were proceeding to the shrine of Kedarnath in the Himalayas they saw a blind, old lady too trudging on. They were quite non-plussed as to why this lady who had lost her eyes should undertake such a hazardous journey. One of them asked, 'Mother, can you see'. 'No, my child', said she. 'Then why have you taken the trouble of this journey', asked he again. She replied, 'My child, what if I cannot see, but the Lord will surely see me.' That was the faith of the lady and she was quite satisfied that it would be enough for her salvation if she presented herself before the Deity and the Lord saw her. They were moved by the devotion of that lady.

### WHAT ARE THE PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

To Swami Vivekananda 'if there was any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *punya bhumi*, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for *karma*, the land to which every soul wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land

where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all the land of introspection and spirituality — it was India'. He uttered these words with authority and sincerity. Why did he say so? Was it simply eulogy? It was not mere eulogy but there is a sound reason behind this remark of Swamiji. A holy place, for instance, is one which has been the place of birth, of *sādhana*, of the attainment of spiritual perfection, or ministration of a saint or saints. India has been such a place. Hundreds of saints have been born and have trodden this soil. It was here again that the highest philosophy had its birth and this was Swamiji's reason for considering India as a whole as a holy land. It was his inmost feeling too.

It is said of Swami Ramakrishnananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the first President of the Ramakrishna Math at Madras, that he looked upon every place where Swami Vivekananda was reported to have stayed during his sojourn in South India as holy and used to bow down to it with great devotion. Narada in his *Bhakti Sutras* says, 'These holy ones impart sanctity to places of pilgrimage.'<sup>2</sup> The *Bhagavata* declares, 'It is not the waters nor the clay or stone idols, that have been there for a long time, that make a place holy but the saints who purify them by mere sight (by virtue of God residing in their hearts).'<sup>3</sup> India has produced many saints and sages and that is why there are numerous places of pilgrimage throughout the country. Similarly other religions too have their own places of pilgrimage.

### HOW DO THE HOLY PLACES PURIFY MAN?

As we said earlier, a person going on pilgrimage has to know about the history of the place he is going to visit. With that comes to his, mind the lives of the saints who sanctified it, of the pure devotion of those saints and through them of God Himself by the law of association of ideas. Deep and constant thinking on holy men makes man pure. Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras* states that meditation on a pure heart that has given up all attachment leads to calmness of the mind.<sup>4</sup> It is a matter of common experience that mesmerists and psychologists by suggestion influence persons, may be for a short time but that they are able to do so cannot be denied. Their powers, however, are limited and are used for mundane purposes. The psychologists work by digging into the past of the patient by various means and find a remedial suggestion. Sages, on the other hand, when they are in body create an atmosphere round them surcharged with spirituality and this continues to exist, in the place they have lived, for a long time. It acts like a loadstone in attracting people, even slightly inclined to a good life, to God.

Sri Ramakrishna's own words on this matter are the strongest testimony. He says, 'One undoubtedly finds inspiration in a holy place. I accompanied Mathur Babu to Vrindavan. Hriday and the ladies of Mathur's family were in our party. No sooner did I see the Kaliyadaman Ghat than

a divine emotion surged up within me. I was completely overwhelmed. Hriday used to bathe me there as if I were a small child.'

'In the dusk I would walk on the bank of the Jamuna when the cattle returned along the sandy banks from their pastures. At the very sight of those cows the thought of Krishna would flash in my mind. I would run along like a mad man, crying: "Oh, where is Krishna? Where is my Krishna?"

'I went to Syāmakunda and Rādhākunda in a palanquin and got out to visit the holy Mount Govardhan. At the very sight of the mount I was overpowered with divine emotion and ran to the top. I lost all consciousness of the world around me. The residents of the place helped me to come down. On my way to the sacred pools of Syāmakunda and Rādhākunda, when I saw the meadows, the trees, the shrubs, the birds, and the deer, I was overcome with ecstasy. My clothes became wet with tears. I said: "O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. You alone are absent." No doubt that Sri Ramakrishna was fully penetrated with God, soaked in God, and every *sādhaka* may not expect to reach such heights of inspiration, yet according to their progress each one will reap some benefit, each one will get a push, a lift higher.

Sri Ramakrishna also used to encourage his disciples to do their practices at the various places of his own *sādhana*. The conversation that took place between him and 'M', the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, regarding Panchavati — the place at Dakshineswar temple garden where Sri Ramakrishna performed intense spiritual practices — unequivocally brings to our notice, the value of staying in a holy place. One day he said to 'M', who was staying overnight at Dakshineswar: 'Where will you sleep? In the hut in the Panchavati?' 'M': 'Won't they let me have the room on the upper floor of the *nahabat*?' 'M' selected the *nahabat* because he had a poetic temperament. From there he could see the sky, the Ganges, the moon-light, and the flowers in the garden.

Master: 'Oh, they'll let you have it. But I suggested the Panchavati because so much contemplation and meditation have been practised there and the name of God had been chanted there so often.' Does this not suggest that the Master recommended the atmosphere of the place to help the devotee in his *sādhana*, in his attempt to proceed Godward?

### **IS PILGRIMAGE NECESSARY FOR ALL?**

Now, the question arises: Is pilgrimage necessary for all? Two types of people do not require it. The saint who has realized God and the man who has not risen above the level of animal enjoyments. The latter will not gain any benefit from visiting such places. The attitude and aptitude being absent none of the other ideas help men to become pure, or to realize God even if they live in the sacred places. They are like fish and other aquatic animals that live in the sacred Ganga, or like the trees that grow in the precincts of temples, untouched by their sanctity.<sup>5</sup> 'As the

strength without work to do or work to do without strength are unable to accomplish the deed separately but when combined make the deed a certainty, likewise when endowed with bodily and mental purity and helped by the sanctity of the holy place one attains his goal easily,'<sup>6</sup> says the *Mahābhārata*.

For the saint, again, there is no necessity of any pilgrimage, for he, having attained his goal, has nothing more to achieve. 'If he visits a place of pilgrimage it is only for the purpose of new inspiration,' says Sri Ramakrishna. For people who are in between these two stages of evolvment it is essential to visit places of pilgrimage, with all faith and devotion at their command, as a sort of spiritual discipline. All through the march of time we see even saints and sages having travelled from one end of India to the other enduring all hardships and tribulations; and thus have they sanctified and sometimes discovered anew the exact places of birth and sport of Divine Incarnations. It is said that it was Sri Chaitanya who found out the exact place of sport of Sri Krishna in Vrindavana. They are like spiritual diviners. They feel the spiritual atmosphere in an intense way and are able to leave to posterity a rich heritage, the heritage of a holy place from where successive generations could benefit spiritually. Therefore, pilgrimage should not be thought of as mere waste of time and energy or as an idle *wander-lust*. Further, it is possible to meet in these places some *sādhakas* or perfected souls whose company will help us on our onward march and transform us altogether. Most important thing, however, is to keep the spirit of sacredness burning and to acquire love of God. Then everything will become easy, everything will be helpful.

### **HOW TO CONDUCT ONESELF AFTER A PILGRIMAGE?**

As it is necessary to prepare oneself to visit a holy place, as said already, so also it is necessary to ruminate over the pure thoughts and emotions that are generated in one's mind on the occasion of one's visit to a holy place. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to his disciples on this subject are of deep significance and will be of immense benefit when followed. We shall state it here with the circumstances that gave rise to the remarks.

'On one occasion,' writes Swami Saradananda in *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, 'some of us (devotees) accompanied the Master to Kalighat, to pay our obeisance to the Divine Mother. The special divine manifestation of the Pithasthāna (hallowed place) and Her living manifestation in the mind and body of the Master produced an extraordinary joy in the hearts of the devotees. On our way back, one of us had to go to his father-in-law's place in response to a special request and to spend that night there. On the morrow, when he came to the Master, he asked him where he had passed the previous night. And hearing that he had had to pass the night in the house of his father-in-law, he said, "Ah, what is that? You saw Mother and came back; what a great



difference between 'chewing the cud' of the vision and thoughts of Her, which you ought to have done, and passing the night like worldly people in your father-in-law's house instead! One should 'chew the cud', in other words, continue to cherish the thoughts that arise in one's mind in temples and holy places of pilgrimages. How can those divine thoughts stay in the mind otherwise?"

Such is the way to perform a pilgrimage so as to reap the maximum advantage out of it.

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<sup>1</sup> "Hearing about God, singing His glories, His remembrance, going on pilgrimage or service to Him, worship, obeisance, friendship, and self-surrender are some of the means."

<sup>2</sup> N.B. Sutras, 69.

<sup>3</sup> Bhagavata, X.48.31.

<sup>4</sup> 1-37.

<sup>5</sup> Satvatasamhita.

<sup>6</sup> Anusasana Parva, 108.20.

## **PLACE OF THE GURU IN SPIRITUAL LIFE (\*)**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

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AN INTERESTING question posed by thinkers, who somehow have a vague knowledge that divinity is the true nature of the human beings, is: 'If we are all sparks of the same divine Spirit, what need is there for one man to help another to realize it?' It is an intelligent and sincere poser. One can feel that the inquirer is sincere. Perhaps a little of everything has disturbed such a mind — and there are so many new philosophies springing up, enough to confuse any ordinary man.

What is the answer for such an inquiry? Let us probe the inquirer. How does he know that he is a spark of divinity? Does he know from his own experience or from books or literature or other persons? Well, if he has known that from other persons or books he has defeated his own question. For if he can believe in certain things said somewhere and by some persons what prevents him to believe in the necessity of trusting in the efficacy and usefulness of a spiritual guide, a person, perhaps, more regular in his prayers and meditations, sincere to the backbone in his spiritual life, and of pure and unsullied character? This of course the inquirer cannot answer except by conceding that his assumption was wrong. Still he may feel that his query has gone unanswered. So let us turn to the practical side of the question. Let us take the example of a child busy with its play. The play has absorbed him and he forgets his studies. Is it not necessary that the mother should remind him of his studies? In the spiritual world we are all children until we have reached the summits of realization. We need the guide, the Guru to remind us, nay actually help us overcome the obstacles in our path.

Why cannot we do so by our own efforts? Maybe it is possible in very rare cases where the yearning for God is intense, where the renunciation is like a blazing fire, but for the ordinary aspirants a spiritual guide is essential. It is true that our nature is divine, that we are the children of Immortality. But are we aware of the fact? How many days in a year are we conscious of this fact and how many minutes in a day? We have to confess that it is very rarely that we are aware of it. The idea of spiritual practices is to become aware of this divinity more and more. Again, the spiritual paths are numerous, which one should a particular aspirant select? All these intricate questions are solved by the true teacher by his insight into the life of the disciple. Otherwise, the aspirants will be tempted to try whatever path presents to them as alluring, as easy. It will be like digging for water now here and now there but not sufficiently until one reaches the springs. One has to be persevering and

persisting if one has to achieve any result in spiritual life at all. Merely floating on the water will not get us the gems that lie on the bed of the ocean. One has to dive and dive deep says Sri Ramakrishna.

The *Kathopanisad* warns the would-be aspirers after the spiritual life rather sternly: 'It is not given to many even to hear about this. And even hearing about It many do not understand. Wonderful is the teacher and fortunate is the obtainer of this teaching. Still more wonderful is the one who understands It when taught by a wise one.'<sup>1</sup> Many a ship of life has foundered on the unchartered seas of this life. A wise pilot is therefore incumbent. If even after repeated instructions we are not able to understand the Highest Spirit then how can we by our own effort reach it!

Taking for granted that some day the spark in us may blaze out if conditions become conducive, how do we know that other circumstances will allow it to burn? If, for instance, a huge load of wet firewood is heaped over the dying embers would they be able to consume the firewood? Never. The fire itself may be smothered and die out soon. But supposing one who knew how to kindle that spark, would wisely handle and make it glow brighter by adding dry leaves, were to help, would not then the same fire be able to burn even a forest? Man's condition is almost identical. A host of tendencies are smothering the divine spark and making it impossible to gain a better view of that divine glow. Lust and greed are the two chief burdens which weigh down on his mind making it impossible for him to be conscious of his divinity at all.

Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the grass-eating tiger very aptly describes man's condition. The tiger which as a cub was left in the midst of sheep, even before it had drunk its mother's milk, quietly followed the ways of the sheep — eating grass and bleating while threatened with danger. One day another tiger attacked the flock and when it saw a tiger bleating and running away, it was surprised. However, it caught hold of the grass-eating tiger and asked, 'why are you running away? You are a tiger like myself'. But the grass-eating tiger would not believe it. Then the other tiger dragged the latter to a pond; showed it their reflections in the water and then pushed some meat into its mouth and roared. The grass-eating tiger thus convinced of its nature and having tasted the meat, roared in response. Here is how the true teacher helps an aspirant. We have forgotten our true nature and caught in the meshes of the world believe ourselves to be sheep. So doubts arise in our minds even when we are told that we are divinity itself. The other tiger is the Guru who makes us aware of what we are.

Now, let us take another illustration. Swami Vivekananda gave the example of sowing a seed. 'Do you grow the plant?' he asked. No. The vitality to germinate is in the seed itself. You cannot infuse that vitality into it. 'What you can do is to put it in the proper ground, water it and thus help it grow.' You only remove the impediments and obstacles in its path and allow it to grow of itself. Likewise the divine spark in man is to be felt, not simply theoretically known. The work of the Guru is to help

the disciple feel It, realize It, by finding out and removing the impediments that block his path.

We have only to look at the way in which Sri Ramakrishna trained his disciples to understand this relation between the Guru and the *sisya*. There was first his selection of the proper disciples and then his training of them. He knew the past, present and future of those whom he took in his hand to mould as his disciples. It is not Sri Ramakrishna alone that possessed such powers. Jesus too, had had it before him. Did not Jesus choose some of his disciples from fishermen? The Incarnations could at a glance know the nature of any man with whom they were brought in contact.

Knowing thus their inmost thoughts the Incarnations could correct their disciples whenever they would have gone wrong. Jesus foretold his fold just a day or two prior to his crucifixion: 'One among you shall betray me.' And they were sad that the Lord did not believe in them. But was this prophecy not fulfilled? Again, he said to Peter, 'Thou shalt deny me thrice before the cock crew,' and was it not fulfilled? Did not Peter staunchly deny that such a thing was possible for him? Yet how did it come to happen? This shows Jesus could see not only what was going to take place for himself but also what thoughts were going to rise in the minds of those near him. This proves that the Incarnations of God do have the power to know everything they want to know. Nothing lies hidden to their gaze. That is why they have the highest place as Gurus, as teachers of mankind, for all time.

Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual ministry was a wonderful phenomena. It is like a panorama of everchanging hues, ever attractive and never tiring, the spectral play of colours, however, pointing to the same goal-post viz., God. Sometimes he would make his young disciples roll on the ground with side-splitting laughter by his humour; at other times he would sing to them songs about the divine and transport them to an exalted region. Again, there would be discussions on the philosophies of the different sects at different times. And yet again he would urge them on to meditation and austere living. Once when a disciple said that he tried to meditate but that his meditation was not deep, was not undisturbed, Sri Ramakrishna wrote something on the disciple's tongue and sent him to the secluded Pancavati at Dakshineswar. The disciple even as he went towards the place was losing his outward consciousness and lost all outer consciousness as soon as he sat under that tree. He came to himself, to use a mundane expression, only when Sri Ramakrishna stroked his body from chest downwards. Numerous are the instances in the life of the Master and his disciples wherein the Master did accentuate the spiritual potential of the disciples.

The question may be asked: Why do you then say that there is divinity in every human being if it is to be attained by hard struggle and by the help of a teacher? For the simple and obvious reason that an object cannot change its nature and remain the same. We have not heard

of cold fire or hot ice, except as a way of expression. If fire were not hot, of what use is it then? An object can manifest only what is inherent in it. If man was not divine he could never become one. But our experience is quite the opposite. We see divine personages manifesting themselves and human beings turned divine. So the proposition that man is not divine but attains divinity is also not true. What happens by the efforts is that he uncovers himself, discards the encrustations surrounding him one by one. The only acceptable and rational solution, therefore, is that man is divine, call him a spark of divinity or a child of God or what you will.

Now we come to the assistance that the Guru really renders to the disciple. Spiritual life has some matters that are to be taken on trust, matters which you cannot fathom by reasoning. But it is not a fact that religious living is devoid of all reasoning. Reason is given the fullest scope in the Hindu religion and philosophy. You are free to question and inquire, but when it becomes a case of mere argumentation, there the ancient sages drew a line.

For reason would be blind when there was no comparison to make. Reasoning is possible and helpful as far as the phenomenal world is concerned. If you have to infer, you have to draw a parallel and what is there that can compare with the transcendental life? If the transcendental can be reduced to the phenomenal it would no more remain transcendental; in other words transcendental can never become the phenomenal. The laws of the phenomenal world can, therefore, never apply to the transcendental. The Atman, for instance, cannot be seen by the eye, not even the most powerful microscope can reveal it. But it is the inmost being of man. When man dies something goes out of him. It cannot be held back, for it is not visible. But that something, which was moving the body and making it live even prior to the moment of death, was in the body cannot be denied. Spiritual life deals with that being, the Atman. Therefore, as you would go to learn music from a musician and not from a professor of logic, so we have to learn about the science of the soul from a spiritual teacher alone. Because he knows or will find out what our aptitudes and what our inclinations are and guide us accordingly.

Human beings are not all alike; they have different tastes and various natures. Perhaps, we all agree with this statement. Now, what is better — to allow man grow in his own natural way which comes easy to him or force him to follow a rigid, fixed and hidebound pattern of discipline, which surely will mutilate and destroy his nature? The Hindu sages have thought it better to allow man grow in his own way towards God; they did not try to modify his inherent nature. That is why there are so many paths, to approach God, described in the Hindu scriptures. So also about the form or formlessness of God that the aspirant likes to worship. A particular form of God appeals to one man most and thereby he is able to concentrate his thoughts on God easier, whereas there may be other forms which though of the same Divine Spirit do not awaken any

response in him. It is the Guru who finds out what form of the Deity suits each disciple, selects a mantra or a sacred formula by which he may call on Him, and instructs him how to proceed on his path. All this the Guru does with no motive at all. The Guru's sole desire is that the disciple should realize God, should get away from the meshes of Maya, of the world. It is motiveless compassion, self-less love that drives the Guru to take all the trouble to awaken the disciple's spiritual potential. So we see what a high place the true Guru occupies in the realm of the spirit. He is looked upon as the father, mother, friend, philosopher and guide. Like a father the Guru chastises when we go wrong, like a loving mother he helps when we falter, like a friend he keeps us company in our difficulties and like a philosopher he advises when we are in a quandary.

From all these it is quite apparent that the Guru occupies a supreme position in the life of the spiritual aspirant. A great many hymns have been written on the Guru, of which the *Guru-Gita* is famous.

The *Mundakopanisad* gives the description of a true teacher: a *srotriya*, one well-versed in the scriptures - and *brahmanistha*, established in Brahman.<sup>2</sup> Sri Sankara in his *Vivekachudāmani* enlarging on this concept and in keeping with the Sruti passages says that one possessed of the deep spirit of inquiry and renunciation should approach a Guru, 'who is versed in the Vedas, sinless, untouched by desire and a knower of Brahman *par excellence*; who has withdrawn himself into Brahman; who is calm, like the fire that has consumed its fuel; who is an ocean of compassion that knows no reason and a friend of all good people who bow down before him'.<sup>3</sup> That is the true teacher approaching whom we are certain to find our path and abiding peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathopanishad 2.7.

<sup>2</sup> 1.2.12.

<sup>3</sup> Vivekachudamani, 33. 33.

## PRAYER (\*)

**Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – September 1963; Vol. 50; page 330

With all the pride of civilization and with all the scientific advancement man still, sometimes, finds himself in situations in which neither of these could help him. Why is it so? What then is the purpose of a civilization that cannot stand us in good stead when we are in dire need of help? What is wanting in our civilization that makes it impotent in the face of calamities? Again it has been observed that an inordinate tension exists, specially, in the minds of people who do not lack luxuries nor are in dearth of variety in entertainments. If material benefits and wealth alone could have been the source of illimitable happiness, then why do we find misery in the lap of luxury? These are questions that are engaging the minds of the intelligentsia today. One modern thinker aptly asks, 'Has civilization been able to end poverty, starvation and war?' The very fact that these questions are making headway and demand immediate attention is in itself an indication that all is not well with our civilization; something is lacking, wanting. The causes are to be analysed and treated with utmost deliberation and speed.

Our analysis would be that humanity has been fed, for over three centuries now, with doctrines which teach elimination of the spiritual aspect in man. Man has been asked to subsist on the dry bones of logic, with the consequence that a maladjusted and malformed stratum has emerged in society. There is a mythical story in the Indian epics, the conclusion of which may bear a striking resemblance to this stratum. Let us state it briefly: There was a king named Trishanku. By his misbehaviour he earned the wrath of his spiritual preceptor. However, when he desired to go to heaven in his physical frame he approached the latter to help him. The preceptor would not agree to perform any such sacrilegious sacrifice. He plainly told him that it was impossible for a human being to reach heaven in a mortal body. Dissatisfied with his answer the king went to the preceptor's sons and craved their help. Coming to know of his audacity to approach them when their respected father had refused help, they cursed him that he may be dull in mind, lose lustre and be of uncouth appearance. Sorely disappointed but not still cowed down, he approached a teacher, who had lived in antagonism to his family guru, and poured out to him his tale of woe. That preceptor did indeed help him to go to heaven; but the gods looking at his ugly mien banished him and thrust him out. He fell head downwards from there to the earth. As he fell he cried out to his benefactor to save him. The preceptor, who was no

doubt a man of great powers, asked him to stay where he was. The story tells us that he stayed, but in a place neither here nor there and certainly not in an enviable state. It is said that he still continues to hang with his head down in between the heaven and the earth. That is the precarious condition in which the above mentioned strata of society finds itself today. But fortunately the disease has not yet touched the common man. He has still not lost his moorings. He has belief in a higher Being, to whom he can unload his worries. He has faith that the Lord will answer his prayers if he but truly calls on Him.

There are three things in man which clamour for satisfaction, the body, the mind and the spirit. But the basis of all is the spirit. It is the neglect of the spirit that makes any civilization lame and uncertain about its future. It may for a time appear to thrive but then when it fails, it does so miserably, leaving only broken ramparts and moss-tilled moats to display its onetime vain glory in all its sadness. Yet no one questions one's right to serve one's body or mind. None can deny the value of a healthy body, nor of a sharp intellect; both are necessary. But what is hinted at is that they should not be made exclusive pursuits. The other side (the spirit) also is to be cultivated.

### ***Several paths to the cultivation of the spirit***

And this cultivation of the spirit can be done in several ways, viz. by control of the *Prana* (vital force), by doing work unattached to results, by knowledge of the Self, and by devotion or love of God. Our subject brings us to the last path in particular but it also includes others in a general way. We all know the path of devotion or love of God is meant for persons whose nature is predominantly emotional in character. But let us not be carried away by the thought that we can be exclusively emotional or exclusively rationalistic. It is not possible. A human being is a conglomeration of many faculties. Even the murderous dacoit who is supposed to be cruelty personified, has a soft side to his nature. Perhaps he murders and loots for the maintenance of a loving family at home. So is the case with every other faculty. All the faculties are present in man, only the degree of manifestation of each varies in different persons. According to the degree of manifestation of a particular faculty, one's nature is said to be emotional, rationalistic or active. A man without feelings would be inert, like wood or stone. And a mere emotional man without strength to work, nor intellect to discriminate can only be a nervous wreck. And certainly religion does not propose to turn men into wood or stone nor into nincompoops. To an emotional nature, however, worship singing of devotional songs, and prayer appeal most. He can make rapid progress in spiritual life by having recourse to these.



### ***What is prayer***

Prayer is a supplication to a higher power, invoking blessings or forgiveness for transgressions, trespasses and errors committed. Used in the religious sense however, it has been branded as superstition. But why? Do not men when they are in tribulations or when they want to obtain the grace of a great person, wait on him? Do they not supplicate in the most abject fashion? Prayer, entreaty, supplication are therefore not unknown to man. But the idea seems to be that it is all right if they do it for material gains but it is bad when people do it for spiritual upliftment! Is this not a perverted way of viewing at things? If such an attitude is kept up, we can never arrive at the true perspective of things. First, therefore, be bold enough to apply the same standard of judgment to yourself as you would like to apply it to others. Ponder over it, study it and you will find that in what terms the man of the world prays for worldly things, in the very same terms or even more honourable, the man of the spirit prays for enlightenment. Why then should it be called superstition?

### ***Universal prayers***

It now remains to be discerned whether prayers universal in character exist or can be evolved? What type of prayers can be universal? Hinduism consists of so many sects but there are some fundamentals which are common to all of them. Every sect believes in the authority of the Vedas. The Vedas, which include the Vedanta or the Upanishads, have given us some of the most wonderful prayers which can be chanted by anyone, living anywhere without the least fear of losing their affinity to their own religion. Here for instance, we have the peace incantation which a student offers everyday before he begins his studies: 'Om. Lead me from the unreal unto the real, from darkness unto light, from death unto immortality.' The student prays for enlightenment, to walk in the path of god, to endear himself to Him. God being the only reality he wants Him. God being the only light of all lights he wants to walk in His light. There being no mortality in God he wants to live in Him. A doubt may arise: Where do we live now? Do not the scriptures say we live, move and have our being in Him? True. But are we conscious of it? Not being conscious of it, is darkness. Not being conscious of it, again, is unreality. Do not the scriptures say, 'All this is Brahman'? So this prayer is only to make us conscious of it, at all times and under all circumstances. When man is conscious in this way, consistently and constantly, he is said to have realized God. Then he sees God inside and outside of himself. Thus did our ancient culture lay the basis of our education. From a very early period children were taught to think rightly, as can be seen from this prayer. The peace that the student invokes again, is not for himself alone, it is for the whole society.

Did not then the student ask anything for himself? Yes, he did ask. He even asks for health to enjoy life — only in the righteous way, not at the cost of others, nor in a beastly fashion. He prays: 'O gods, may we hear with our ears, only what is auspicious; may we see what is only auspicious with our eyes O ye worshipful ones; may we sing praises to ye, and by our strong body and limbs may we enjoy the life allotted to us by the gods. May there be peace.' Again: 'Let my speech be established in my mind and mind be established in speech. O self-manifested One do Thou manifest Thyself unto me. May my mind and speech be efficient to reveal the highest knowledge. May I not forget what I have heard. By what I have learnt I shall support myself by day and by night. I will speak the right. I will speak the truth. May That Divinity protect me. May it protect the preceptor.' Here are two of the many Vedic prayers which are of the most general character. There is nothing debasing in them nor covetousness of any sort. The desire to enjoy also is circumscribed and conditioned. He wants protection only if and when he walks in the righteous path. The aim, however, is realization of God. The saints and sages of a later period too have sung paeans of a similar nature, one of which, because of its all-embracing character, we can hardly resist the temptation to quote: 'May all be blissful, may all be free from diseases, may all see what is auspicious, may not any one be miserable.' What a grand conception! Does it not make us—at least for the short time that we will be repeating it or dwelling on it—feel one with the universe, feel the affinity to every creature that is in the creation? Is it wrong to wish for the welfare of the whole universe? If not, how can such prayers be called superstitions?

There are, of course, other prayers by worshippers of different aspects of God in praise of the particular forms of the Deity. In all of them the same inner current of love of God and a desire to open out, to expand beyond one's own self can be seen.

### ***Is prayer necessary for all types of aspirants?***

We shall now revert to our proposition that prayer is necessary and forms an important element of spiritual life. From the universal character of the prayers, above quoted, it is clear that there can be no gainsaying the fact that they are beneficial to all types of aspirants. If a man is of active temperament his desiring to do good will receive added strength from wishing well to every being. A question may arise in our minds as to the necessity of prayer for a man devoted to the path of knowledge. But we forget that it is he who studies the scriptures most and these scriptures enjoin the chanting of the peace incantations before they are studied. Again, it is by repeating the texts which speak of the evanescence of the world and by reminding oneself of them constantly that one discriminates between the real and the unreal. There are a myriad of them — the hymns that speak of the glory of the Self. We shall

give here only one instance of it. It is a morning prayer which runs as follows: 'I meditate at dawn within my heart on the Self-effulgent Atman, the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute, the goal of the supreme ascetics, transcendental and eternal, who is beyond the states of waking, dream and deep sleep. That Brahman I am, not a combination of material elements.'

Then comes the prayer to the preceptor, who is the manifest form of God on earth. He it is who ferries us across the ocean of *samsara* and therefore we are in duty bound to express our gratitude and adoration to him.

Prayers exist in every language and in every part of the world, maybe in poetical form, maybe in plain prose. Even the illiterate have them, handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation in the form of folk songs. Sri Ramakrishna set great store by prayer as a spiritual discipline. He emphasized its necessity and efficacy time and again. He has taught us how to pray, by himself setting an example. As to the form of address he was not particular. He said, 'God like a benevolent father would understand in whatever way you call on Him, and in whichever way you address Him.' Only thing he insisted on was sincerity in our prayer. When someone had suggested that people should be taught how to look upon God, Sri Ramakrishna's characteristic remark had been, 'Who can truly know God? He is One, He is many; again, He is beyond both. One glass of water is enough to slake my thirst, why should I want to know how many gallons of water is in the reservoir? So call upon God in any way you like and even if you do not know what He is, do not despair, pray to Him, "O Lord I know not whether you are with form or formless, please condescend to reveal yourself to me."' This form of prayer would appeal to everyone; even unbelievers saw nothing objectionable in this. They prayed. Their prayers were answered. Thus were they converted and won over to God by Sri Ramakrishna. 'O Lord, I have attributed forms to Thee, who art formless, in my meditation. By my praise O Thou Teacher of the Universe I have denied Thy indescribability. By going on pilgrimage and such other things, I have repudiated Thy omnipresence. These three trespasses of mine, O Lord, pray forgive me,' sings a devotee bringing to the fore the incomprehensibility of God. Therefore instead of trying to know what God is, let us try to gain admittance to His presence.

### ***What should we pray for***

People pray no doubt, but what do they pray for? Usually most of the people want something from God and that is why they pray. Progeny, wealth and the like are some of their positive wants. Getting rid of diseases, overcoming tribulations are some of the negative wants that they desire God to fulfil. But is that what we should pray for? Definitely not. Sri Ramakrishna's prayer in this respect is an eye-opener. He prays

to the Divine Mother: 'Mother here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice, take them both and give me pure love for Thee.' He did not want anything except devotion for the Mother's feet. Swami Vivekananda prayed for discrimination, renunciation, knowledge and love of God, even when the billows of domestic calamities were closing over his head. That is the proper type of prayer — to want nothing except God, desire nothing except His presence.

### ***Efficacy of Prayer***

What is the science behind this prayer, that is, how does it actually act? First of all it is to be remembered that God is not someone who is far, far away, that He is very close to us.<sup>1</sup> Much of the difficulty we experience now to comprehend the efficacy of prayer will be got over if we recall this. He is the Soul of our souls. He dwells in our hearts.<sup>2</sup> Who else can then be more aware of our thoughts, our desires, our intentions and our resolutions than He? Will He then, when He hears our call, not respond? As a loving father He will. So those who trust in God carry their load lightly. A tranquillity spreads over their souls. They neither seek nor avoid company. Human sympathy, they do not desire. For it is so volatile that at the first whiff of the winds of misfortune it all evaporates. But we can depend upon the Lord's succour. He never deserts. He remains constant. We may even make our demands on Him as does a son for his patrimony says Sri Ramakrishna. This however, can be done only if we get to know Him intimately. So through prayer and other disciplines we have to make our way to His citadel, and then everything will be all right.

The Lord finds Himself bound by the ties of love when the devotee prays to Him. Nay, He finds that He owes to the devotee a deep debt and finds Himself entangled in a bond that is indissoluble. Speaking about His love for the Pandavas Sri Krishna says: 'The obligations on My part have ever grown and they can never be repaid, the gratitude can never be taken away from My heart.' Draupadi prayed in anguish to Him for help knowing full well that Krishna was far away at that time. But her prayer was answered. The love of the Pandavas to the Lord even in their direst of calamities has very few parallels. That is why Krishna later says to Duryodhana: 'The Pandavas whom you hate O king are my life breath.'

### ***Earnestness in Prayer***

Generally people want to gain much with little effort, so when they find their prayers—which are naturally half-hearted and endowed with little faith—are not answered, they give up and turn agnostics. They say: 'Oh this prayer and all such things are mere superstition! I have done it all without any result.' But actually had they been earnest in their prayer they would have had a different story to tell. No considerations of wealth or personal gain would have crept into their minds then. An instance of

the type of love that asks nothing except for God Himself is that of the gopis, the cowherdesses of Vrindavana —theirs was not trading in love as Swami Vivekananda beautifully puts it. It was a dedication. And when such dedication comes the prayer that comes to one's lips is a spontaneous one, it wells up as it were from the heart. It is untainted by selfish consideration. The lives of the saints and seers are instances to show what prayer—which is natural to man —can do. Let not false pride stand in our way of prayer, nor let us pray for the sake of ostentatiousness. May we in true faith take to prayer.

**NOTE:** Some notes and references present in the original are absent in this paper because they are in the Sanskrit script.

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<sup>1</sup> Isa Up. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Gita, 18.61.

## **RELIGION AND FANATICISM (\*)**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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Religion, to most people all the world over, consists in belief in some doctrines, in some personalities, in some creeds, and at the most doing good to members professing the same faith or with the hope of getting them converted to their faith. Beyond that they cannot think. This position is understandable in the case of persons of the common run. But it is intriguing when people who profess to live for religion and religion alone also run along the same ruts. By this they not only do harm to themselves but lead their flock intentionally and deliberately astray.

There was a time when these narrow conceptions would not have affected even the fringe of humanity. But now, on account of the vast network of communications, when the world has dwindled in size, as it were, all caution is to be observed when we say things which fail to carry conviction with the rational man of today, or vilify persons, or faiths. Not that the religion or persons thus vilified lose anything of their vitality or influence but the vilifiers themselves expose their ignorance of the trend of events, their insularity, and warped way of thinking, and also do harm to the cause of religion as a whole, by such an attitude. There have been criticisms in certain quarters that 'Vedantins do not know God, as the Transcendent One, the Creator.' We shall endeavour here to show how totally misunderstood, misrepresented and biased this saying is.

### ***What is Religion?***

In this connection first of all it is incumbent on us to know: What religion is, and what our conception of God is. At the very outset we may say, that religion is a way of life that leads us onwards towards God, helps to discover our true nature. This is the elementary definition. In this sense, in Sanskrit, it is called *dharma*. However, this word *dharma* has got different meanings according to the different contexts. It means duty, righteousness, morality, inherent nature, and religion according to usage. Yet it can be seen that all through the several meanings the main purport of the word is not lost sight of. Other meanings are stages for the final end, religion. Duty well done clears vision, ensures righteousness, perfects nature and finally instils conviction regarding the purpose of life.

That is what religions try to do. And about this there is no dispute.

It is also true that almost all religions accept that the soul continues to live after the death of the body. This too is the common ground where there is no disputation. Most religions positively affirm that the soul either goes to a heavenly abode or is condemned to hell, — whatever may be the description of the hell or heaven given by them. Thus the aim of all religions is to elevate the brute in man to a higher pedestal, the human. We are deliberately abstaining from the use of any other epithet, at present, in this context, lest that word should frighten some who cannot view man except as a conglomeration of mind and body. And to lift man from the lower to a higher level a variety of creeds and paraphernalia, symbols and insignia, were introduced by various sages, seers, prophets and Incarnations, to suit the variegated types of humanity. From this it naturally follows that creeds or dogmas are not the whole of religion; neither does mere philosophy or learning constitute it. These are only the pathways to the Highest.

In other words attaining perfection, freedom is the goal of religion. Everything in the world works for freedom knowingly or unknowingly. Evolution of species which had once upset the religious moorings in the West, the Vedanta explains as the proof of the involved soul trying to attain more and more freedom. It is not the matter, dead and inert, that does it but the soul behind it. This is the difference between the living and the dead, that while in the living there is struggle for more and more freedom, in the dead it is all bondage. Swami Vivekananda says: 'This effort to attain freedom underlies all forms of worship, whether we know it or not.' Wherever we find worship, — in howsoever rudimentary form it may be, howsoever crude it may appear to us — there is that desire to obtain more freedom, by propitiating what the worshippers believe as higher and more powerful beings. 'This longing for freedom' remarks Swami Vivekananda, 'produces the idea of a Being who is absolutely free.' This Being who is eternally pure, eternally free, omniscient, and omnipotent is called God. And He is the basic of religion.

Man's concept of God, however, is diverse. Notwithstanding the divergent views regarding God, that there need be no fight over it has been amply proved in recent times by Sri Ramakrishna, by his practice of the disciplines and realizations of the ultimate of those very sects and religions which were considered inimical to one another. At the end of these practices he attained the same goal. Variety need not frighten us. Because there is a unity underlying this variety. Religion anywhere means attaining the Most High. When we have reached It, then only we have religion worth the name. That is why Swami Vivekananda repeatedly said, 'Religion is realization and not learning or argument.' This is the primary meaning of religion. All else is secondary or even tertiary. Have we realized God? Then we have religion. Do we at least attempt to reach Him? Then we are on the path of religion. Mere denunciation or condemnation of another is not religion. Nevertheless, we more often than

not, behave like the blind men who went to find out how an elephant looked. Each touching some one part of that animal, described it as a pillar, a rope, a winnowing fan and the like. Likewise people with prejudiced minds refuse to concede that God can be anything except what they think Him to be. Is God, who they profess is all-powerful, and all-knowing, so small that they can know all of Him with their little minds? But that is exactly what most people are doing. They want to put a ban, as it were, on Him from being anything else. They must be thinking themselves more powerful and wiser than God, for who else can dictate terms, to others than a person more powerful than them. Such a proposition by its incongruity will make even a man in the street laugh.

### ***Vedantin's Concept of God***

What is the Vedantin's concept of God? The Vedantin says: God is *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). Existence that is eternal, knowledge that is infinite, and Bliss that is endless. Even we exist because of that Existence. He is the essence of our knowledge, and even the highest happiness a man enjoys in this world is an infinitesimal fraction of that Bliss. Further, the Vedanta says, 'From whom these beings are born, in whom these created beings live; towards whom they all hasten and into whom they all enter again, know that. That is Brahman.'<sup>1</sup> This is not a solitary instance where the Upanisads try to infuse into us this idea. In the Chandogya Upanisad there is the injunction 'All this is verily Brahman; meditate on It with a calm mind, knowing this to have been come out of It, merges in It, and has its station in It.'<sup>2</sup>

Many more passages can be quoted in support of the theory of Vedanta that this world has come out of Brahman, God; but these are sufficient to convince the critics of Vedanta, if they keep an open mind, and to see for themselves the depth of their folly. As the saying goes, one man may lead a horse to the water but ten cannot make it drink, so in case people have shut the doors of their mind and are determined not to be convinced no one can help them. A sleeping man can be awakened but not one who is pretending sleep.

### ***Where Vedanta Excels***

Vedanta says that the inner core of our being, the life of our life, the soul of our soul is God, is Brahman. Very few can understand this even intellectually. They are frightened when Vedanta boldly asserts that divinity is man's birthright. It is his heritage. Only he has forgotten it. A beautiful illustration has been given in one of the Upanisads to bring home this truism. 'All beings experience this Brahman every day in their state of deep sleep (when the real nature reigns supreme by itself). Yet like the person who is heir to immense wealth, though walking over the place where the gold is hidden, does not attain it, being ignorant of its



existence, so also man, whose real nature, which is Brahman, covered by ignorance in the form of desires (such as hunger, lust and the like), does not know it though daily he goes into (experiences) it.<sup>3</sup>

What a wonderful concept of man is placed before us by Vedanta: 'Heirs of Immortality.'<sup>4</sup> With these words Swami Vivekananda introduced the concept of man according to Vedanta to the audience at one of the sessions of the Parliament of Religions. 'Enough,' said he to the people of India, 'have we been fed by negative ideas. Rise up, be heroes. The divine is in you. Manifest it.' Does a son of an aristocrat, if he knows it, cringe before others for some paltry things? This is the excellent idea Vedanta teaches us.

We are very familiar with our birth-rights; we fight and stake our all in litigation in order to prove our rights, or demand our heritage. But the most precious of all our heritage, our own Atman, we forget to claim and beggar ourselves for a petty this or a paltry that. We cling to our body as the *alpha* and *omega* of our life. This clinging to our false personality is the bane of man. As he believes himself to be a person possessed of body and mind and nothing more than that, he wants to see his God too as a person. Vedanta does not say it is wrong. It even encourages this concept. For it knows that as soon as the man has his perfected nature manifesting itself in him, he will be no more narrow and bigoted. We are reminded here how Sri Ramakrishna taught this lesson to 'M', the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. 'M' had come to Dakshineswar for the second time. Being educated in the Western sciences he was rationalistic in his outlook. 'M' thought that the people who worshipped images should be asked to have God in view while they did so and should not worship clay or stone. The Master's sharp rebuke on that occasion stilled 'M's' nature of arguing for ever. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people — giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?

'He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe; who has made the sun and moon, men and beasts, and all other beings; who has provided means for their sustenance; who has given children parents and endowed them with love to bring them up. The Lord has done so many things — will He not show people the way to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide.

'Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image; doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship. Why should you get a headache over it? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself.'

To those who will hear, Vedanta has something more to give. It says your real nature is Brahman: 'That thou art.'

### ***Misapprehension about Vedanta***

The real misapprehension starts here, at this stage. How can that infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Being be said to have become limited in a cage of flesh and bones? What further blasphemy can there be than this? Ask those to whom this is a strange, and fantastic idea. We all know how even an intellectual giant, like Swami Vivekananda, with a religious bent of mind even from the birth, so to say, at the beginning of his spiritual career had difficulty in accepting, nay rebelled against this concept: 'All this is Brahman'; we also know how the Master brought home this truth to his beloved disciple by his mystic touch; and how later on Swamiji himself scaled the dizzy heights of this realization. No wonder then that if people who are not brought up in the tradition fail to grasp the import of the passage and prattle in their own way. However, if there is a genuine desire to know, if there are not the preconceived ideas to obstruct, hamper and mutilate their vision, it is not so difficult to understand this grand notion, intellectually at least. By this we do not mean that every one should become a Vedantin. It is not possible. Being fully aware of the fact that all men are not of identical taste and mental development, the Vedas themselves have prescribed, such things as sacrifices to prepare man for the highest end. Now what the Vedantin asks of all is not to be dogmatic, when they say man is this or that, when they want to say that God is such and such. Remember the saying 'in my father's house are many mansions'; we may be living in one and our brothers in a second and a third. Should we on that account hate or despise those who live in other mansions? The Vedantin has no quarrel with anyone except bigots and fanatics who are out to kill the spirit of religion itself.

### ***Real Import of the Mahavakyas***

Now let us understand what is the actual meaning of the mahavakyas which are of so confusing a nature: *Tattvamasī*, *Aham Brahmasmi* etc. First of all, if we know to whom those truths were taught in the days gone by, much of the cloudiness and mistiness which enshrouds our understanding will clear away. Of yore the disciples, at a very impressionable age, sought the teacher, lived with him, served him and learnt from him, as well as by his life. That was the mode of teaching then. The teacher knew the student thoroughly, his propensities, his aptitudes, his intellectual acumen and more than that his spiritual potentials.

In the *Prasnopanisad* there is a story. Six disciples approach a sage named Pippalada seeking knowledge. The sage asks the disciples: 'Live again here observing austerities, chastity, with shraddha and serving the guru for a year more. After that ask questions on subjects which each of you desire to know, I shall answer, if I happen to know them.'<sup>5</sup> This was

the method of approach: To teach what one desired to know.

Thus the flint would be getting ready by discipline under the teacher and when the opportune moment came the teacher struck, and the fire of knowledge was kindled. When this ground had been prepared, when the disciple was thoroughly tested and found fit, he was taught the highest truth. So 'That thou art' or 'I am Brahman' does not mean that the individual who is called Mr. So and So is Brahman. To understand these great teachings in this manner would be disastrous to one's spiritual life. An example of this perverted understanding is also presented to us in the *Chandogya Upanisad* in the form of a story, as a fore-warning.

Once Prajapati (the Creator) announced, 'the Atman, which is untouched by impurity, devoid of old age, deathless, griefless, not liable to hunger and thirst, whose desires come true, whose thoughts come true, is to be sought after, is to be known. One who understands It having been taught (by a teacher), obtains all the worlds and all desires.'<sup>6</sup>

Hearing about it Indra among the gods and Virochana among the demons approached Prajapati with due respect and after living for sometime and serving Him requested Him to teach them that highest knowledge. Prajapati said: 'The Purusa that is seen in the eye that is the Atman. This is immortal, fearless. This is Brahman.'<sup>7</sup> They asked which was the Atman, that which was reflected in the mirror or that which was reflected in water. Prajapati first asked them to see as they were in water and again after adorning themselves with ornaments etc. Being still not of the required purity of mind, they could not assess the meaning of these instructions of Prajapati. Describing the reflection each time they asked whether that as the Atman that he meant. Prajapati only repeated his previous formula 'This is the Atman, This is Immortal, fearless. This is Brahman.'

Pleased at heart both of them went away thinking that they had known all. Prajapati seeing them go away satisfied said; 'They are going away without understanding the Self. But whoever goes away, whether gods or demons, without understanding this knowledge will perish.'<sup>8</sup>

Of the two Virochana firmly believed that what Prajapati meant by Atman was the body, and went away perfectly satisfied and taught his followers to build up their bodies. But Indra being a little more thoughtful doubted this doctrine and approaching again and again, learnt the real import of Prajapati's teaching. Now who was responsible for Virochana's fault? His own lack of reflectiveness, lack of introspectiveness. So, if some in the world even in the present day cannot understand the true import of these great teachings or thoroughly and purposefully misunderstand them, the Srutis are not at fault, neither the teacher who imparts the teachings, but those people themselves.

### ***Body, mind and soul***

The Hindu concept is that man has a body and a mind. This

difference becomes more explicit if we take an example. When a person dies the Hindu says he has given up the body. This usage is significant. Here it is clear that the Hindu considers this body as an instrument of the soul. When the soul had worked out the usefulness of the body it discards that one and takes another. Thus it transmigrates from body to body until it reaches that perfection, which is its inherent nature. Then the soul is said to have been liberated. This element which is apparently shifting its centre time and again, is called the Atman by Vedanta. We have now two, rather three things that go to form 'man': the body, the mind and the soul. Out of these the first two are, say our scriptures, material in composition; body is made of gross matter and mind of subtle matter. Soul is the essence of man and being of the nature of consciousness it makes the body live, move and have its being. This is the preliminary stage of Vedanta. Sruti believes in the gradual progress of man, leading him from 'lower truth to higher truth'. Just as a few only can stand the sudden and extreme changes in climate, so too, very few can sustain the shock of sudden transformation. It is also true that all cannot climb to the storey of a building by pole-vaulting, many require the staircase. This is the plan of the Upanisads also.

Now, the second stage is that the Atman (the self or the Soul) is a part of the infinite Brahman, of God. 'As from a blazing fire myriads of sparks identical in appearance fly out similarly from this Immutable varied beings are born and again absorbed into it,'<sup>9</sup> says the Sruti. If and when people come to distinguish between their Self and body, this theory will not be so hard to digest. And then, the words like 'Heirs of Immortality', 'each soul is potentially divine', may not sound so bewildering. On the other hand there is every possibility that people who were first frightened at these words will understand them (now) in the clearer context.

But the aim of the scriptures is not to have a half-way house. They stand for truth, and truth does not depend on anybody's acceptance or rejection of it. The law of gravitation was there and would have been there even if Newton had not found it out. Sruti then goes on to the final stage. It asserts: 'All this is Brahman.' 'There are not many things in this world.' 'That Thou Art.' These are the teachings which preach the identity, rather unity in the variety. No doubt, this is a big leap into the Unknown, only not into the dark but into light. Few are fit to achieve it, but on that account we have no right to demean it. 'Accept all ideals as true, but stick to your own,' said Sri Ramakrishna. If we follow this advice there arises no necessity to pass strictures on others' views.

### ***Religion is not Fanaticism***

Finally it is not to be forgotten that dogmatism, bigotry and fanaticism have nothing to do with religion. There is a vast gulf of difference between the former three and the latter. Fanaticism is incompatible with true religion. Swami Vivekananda pointed out, 'Fanatics

cannot work, they waste three-fourths of their energy. It is the level-headed, calm, practical man who works.' Again on other occasions he remarked, 'These fanatics may do some good, according to their light, but much more harm.' Bringing out the childish impishness dominant in fanaticism Swamiji said: 'When I was a boy I thought fanaticism was a great element in work, but now, as I grow older, I find out that it is not.'

An incident in Swamiji's life, which he related to an audience in the West, brings out the meaning of fanaticism clearly: 'I had a book sent me, which said I must believe everything told in it. It said there was no soul, but that there were gods and goddesses in heaven, and a thread of light going from each of our heads to heaven! How did the writer know all these things? She had been inspired, and wanted me to believe it too, and because I refused, she said, "You must be a very bad man; there is no hope for you!" This is fanaticism.' What a toll of human life fanaticism has taken can be best known from history. 'Fanatics make only hatred.' warned Swamiji. History has proved this. Rivers of innocent blood have flown on this earth, inquisitions have been held and all this was done for fanaticism's sake. Can real religion have anything to do with these things? Religion preaches, 'love thy neighbour as thyself' and what does fanaticism do, quite the reverse. Let us, therefore eschew fanaticism from our midst and learn to live amicably.

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<sup>1</sup> Taittiriyaopaniṣad, 3-1.

<sup>2</sup> Chandogya, III.14.1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.VIII.3.2.

<sup>4</sup> Svetasvatara Upaniṣad,2.5.

<sup>5</sup> Prasna Up., 1.2.

<sup>6</sup> Chandogya Up., 8.7.1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 8.7.4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.8.4.

<sup>9</sup> Mundaka Up., 2.1.1.

## RELIGION AND THE YOUTH

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – March 1965; Vol. 51; page 527

THERE IS a beautiful verse by Sri Śankara which depicts how man escapes God. Aye, man does evade God. God is ever attentive and seeks man with all His might but finds him happy with the red bright toys of the world. He calls but man does not listen, does not respond or at the most says, "wait, I shall finish this game and then I shall attend to you". 'As child he is engaged in play, as youth in mirth, as old man in deep worries, alas in the Supreme Reality no one is engaged, none interested,<sup>1</sup> says Śankaracharya. The old man's worries are numerous: 'How shall I live; how will my body get over this disease or that feebleness', and similar myriad other worries peck at him. Man sees all these, perhaps, laughs at the old man's clinging to life, yet does not think that he also will one day have to pass through the same path and face a similar situation. Youth has vigour and therefore being optimistic loses himself in enjoyment and mirth. To a certain extent the parents too encourage him to lose himself in the world, for they are afraid to put anything that speaks of religion in his way, lest he should leave them all and seek God.

To many religion may mean a following of a certain code of conduct, an observance of certain rituals and creeds, a practice of particular dogmas, one or all of these; but that is not what we mean here. Religion is an experience which results in the conversion of man to the Divine. However, this does not mean we ask any one to throw overboard all rituals and creeds. They are necessary and essential but are only steps of the ladder to religion. Let us hear Swami Vivekananda about what real religion is: "Realization is real religion, all the rest is only preparation — hearing lectures, or reading books, or reasoning, is merely preparing the ground; it is not religion." All morality, all ethics, all good works, all rituals and creeds are a preparation for religion to dawn into our hearts. Others are only the chaff while the seed is realization of the Ultimate Reality.

There is a maxim going round at present, 'Catch them while young'. And this has been made effective use of in very many fields of man's activity, especially in the most hazardous tasks such as mountaineering. This enthusiasm to infuse into the youth a spirit of adventure, a spirit of responsibility is very good and is being tried in scientific fields also. But

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<sup>1</sup> Charpatapanjarika stotram.

this idea is not anything new to India or religion. In a minor Upanishad there occurs a passage which says: "Be religious while still young; otherwise pointless, aimless will be man's life."<sup>2</sup> An aimless life is like wild grass, it grows and is uprooted but grows again, serving no one's purpose. Naciketa, in the *Kathopanishad* impresses on his father the necessity of following the righteous conduct: 'Seeing,' says he, 'how the righteous acted in the past and how also the saintly ones act in the present try to follow them in the proper way of life. Grieve not that you are sending me to the abode of *Yama*. As corn ripens and falls and then grows again man is born and dies.'<sup>3</sup> What remains to man is what good or bad he does in this world; for that goes to shape his future life. So a man who aspires for the eternal life which never undergoes any change, that is to say, wants to realize the Absolute Existence, must stick fast unto truth. For none can hope to gain truth by error. Man travels from the lower truth to higher truth and never from error to truth. So, if we are not careful to cultivate the lower truths here and now, how can we hope to reach the higher truths later!

However much the present generation may encourage the youth to secular adventure, it thinks that serious attempt at religious life may be left out for a future date, and an indefinite future it always becomes. Once when a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was asked by someone, why he should renounce the world at such an early age, he put the inquirer the counter question : 'What certainty is there that I will live up to a ripe old age — the age when you say I can give up?' The questioner was silenced, for it was an irrefutable statement though unpalatable. But truth does not wait to sweeten anyone's taste. Sri Krishna says, 'That which in the beginning appears like poison but in the end tastes like nectar, that joy, born of the clear understanding regarding the Atman, due to purity of the mind, is said to be of the *sattvika* type.'<sup>4</sup> Verities and values of life must be weighed, understood and acted upon in this light.

Why should man be religious while still young? Not only from the standpoint of uncertainty of life but also for other reasons men, who really seek God, should be religious while they are still in the prime of life. For once an attachment is cultivated, once character is formed it is any body's guess that one could reform oneself. That is why, Sri Ramakrishna used to praise his young disciples so much. He would say, 'Their minds are untarnished with worldly desires . . . They are like kneaded clay which can be moulded into any shape . . . Their minds are like new vessels into which milk can be kept without fear of turning sour.' That is why people must be earnest in spiritual life while young, before they receive impressions of the world. Swami Vivekananda has repeatedly stated how every thought we think, every action we do goes to form a part of our character. These acts and thoughts leave an impress on the mind which

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<sup>2</sup> Bhavasantaropanishad, 1.41.

<sup>3</sup> Kathopanishad, 1.6.

<sup>4</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 18.37.

sinks to the sub-conscious. So, though these impressions are not always manifest they lie on the ocean-bed of the mind to rise again at a call, as it were, when circumstances become favourable. So what would you like to have in your mind? Definitely every one will like to be good. But will this goodness come if we don't work for it? Can one be a musician or an artist if he does not assiduously practise even supposing that he has a natural bent towards it? If any one says he can, the lives of the musicians and artists all over the world give the lie to such a supposition. So, one must work at the foundations, then only can a strong and beautiful edifice of character be built. And that foundation is the young age. Lose the chance and you lose a great deal. For this birth in a human body is very rare indeed.

Our sages have declared this time and again. Sri Śankara in the opening verses of the *Vivekacudamani* makes this very explicit: 'For all beings the human birth is difficult to obtain, more so a male body; rarer than that is Brahmanahood, rarer is the inclination to lead a life according to the Vedic religion; erudition in the scriptures is still more rare; next in the higher scale of things come discrimination, to differentiate between the self and the non-self, Realization, and being established in the state of identity with Brahman. This kind of Liberation is not to be attained without the merits of a hundred crore of births.'<sup>5</sup> The Upanisads too emphatically lay down that a man who passes away without realizing the Atman loses a great deal. Witness what the *Kenopanishad* exhorts: 'If a man realizes (the Atman) here, then it is a fruitful birth, if not it is a colossal catastrophe.'<sup>6</sup> The catastrophe is not only due to the loss sustained of this life but is also due to involving oneself inevitably into the round of births and deaths; for no man can escape this cycle except when he realizes God.

Yājñavalkya brings home this truth to the sages, assembled in the court of Janaka, when he relates to his questioner, Gargi, that 'one who departs from this world without knowing this Immutable, is miserable.'<sup>7</sup> Śri Śankara commenting on it observes that such a one is miserable like a slave bought for a price. Why should he be miserable? Because when one departs without realizing God he remains bound by the fruits of his actions and would be dragged into this world repeatedly like a slave. That is misery indeed.

Now, there is a false notion, current among many, that religious life is meant for the old and the infirm, the decrepit and the weak. It is a gross misrepresentation of facts. Swami Vivekananda asks a pertinent question, "which is the greater of the two strengths: (1) to allow the horses run headlong or (2) rein them in effectively; which one is the stronger: one who is carried along the current or one who swims against it successfully?" Religious life is swimming against the current; it is a reining in of the mad horses of the senses. As every one knows it is easy to

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<sup>5</sup> Vivekachudamani, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Kenopanishad, 2.5.

<sup>7</sup> Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 3.8.10.



slide down an inclined plane; it is easy to let yourself be carried away along the current but to swim against it is a very hard job. Similarly it is easy to say that one can work on the path of religion in the old age. But it has never been done unless one has been steadily working towards it from a very early period. From a distance a mountain looks very smooth but try to climb it and you will find what a quantity of thistles and thorns, pot-holes, ups and downs and ditches and mounds you have to tread. The spiritual path is like that, from the outside it looks so easy but come to brass tacks with it and you will feel its hardship. It is like walking on the sharp edge of a razor, so difficult is the path.<sup>8</sup> One should be ever on the alert, one cannot afford to be relaxing in the least, on this path, if one wishes to make some progress.

It is only when the senses are subdued and when the mind is brought under control that a real taste for the higher values of life develops. A strong physique alone can help a mind to be strong, to be unyielding to temptations. Is this possible for a weakling? A weakling may not be able to err on the physical side but he is also unable to stand the strain of spiritual disciplines. The Upanisads declare, 'This Atman is not to be attained by the weak, nor by false steps, nor by mere knowledge without renunciation. The Self of the wise one, who strives by these alone enters the abode of Brahman.'<sup>9</sup>

By *these* in the Śruti text are understood (1) strength, both physical and that born of the intellectual conviction regarding the existence of the Atman, (2) to remain aloof without being caught in the net of the world, (3) intense thinking and austerity, and (4) renunciation. In the face of these tested truths does it not look like childish insistence to say that religion is for the weak and the infirm? What is the equipment of the old man: a bundle of habits deep-rooted as to assume the propensity of not only second nature but of the first nature. Is it possible for such a one to break easily through that nature? Such a man's thoughts perforce run into the old ruts, so assiduously cultivated by him. A least deviation from the thoughts, which have become basic, will be resisted by his mind vehemently. Let each man, therefore, try for himself and see how difficult it is to get over even a simple and single habit. Let him encounter the struggles and annoyances he would have to undergo to overcome this habit, and then let him visualize, the time, the effort and heart-wrenchings one has to suffer to reform one's life. Unless one gets into the practical field one will not understand how idle is anyone's hope to gain the kingdom of heaven through indolence. Except you get into the water you will not know the difficulties of swimming. It is so in the field of religion also.

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<sup>8</sup> Kathopanishad, 3.14.

<sup>9</sup> Mundaka Up., 3.2.4.

## II

It is no doubt a matter of common experience that man has some inherent tendencies in him. They are inborn, are there from his birth. And this is one of the fundamental conceptions, not only of Hinduism but also of Buddhism and Jainism — we mean the theory of Karma and rebirth. It has already been discussed on a previous occasion and therefore need not be repeated here. It has also been found out that it is the best explanation that can be given for the wide diversity that we see in the world. Diversity not merely regarding material possessions but also regarding physical dispositions, intellectual accomplishments and the like.

Now we may ask: If man is bound by the fruits of his past actions how is he responsible for his present doings? To a certain extent this may be true but man having the capacity to shape his future must not leave things to themselves. In him there is also the capacity to resist all the powers that press him down. Does he not fight against all odds to improve his material conditions? Therefore, if past actions went to form man's present birth it naturally follows that his present actions can make or mar his future. 'Never a doer of good actions, O Arjuna, comes to grief,'<sup>10</sup> assures Sri Krishna in the *Gītā*. So instead of wailing at one's circumstances one should put in all efforts to proceed onwards from where he is placed.

## III

A great many factors influence man from his childhood onwards. It is the example of the parents that influences the child in the beginning and childhood is the most impressionable age. At that time the child simply imitates its elders. So it is very necessary that the parents and elders who happen to come in contact with the child, every moment of its life, should be of commendable character. There is a story in the *Mahābhārata*, of a queen, Madālasa, who sang to her babies even from the cradle about the glory of the Atman, which was their true being. They were so much impregnated with the idea that when they grew up they renounced the kingdom and the palace and everything to realize God. It happened in the case of the first boy and the second and the third. The king was flabbergasted. He did not know how to prevent a repetition. The fourth time the child was taken away from the mother to be brought up elsewhere to become a king. 'As he was leaving home the mother gave him a piece of paper which he was to read when he grew to manhood. On the paper was written, "God alone is true, all else is false; live alone or keep the company of holy men ". When he grew to manhood he read the note and renounced the world.' That is the way children are influenced.

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<sup>10</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 6.40.

Even a queen in those days thought it her own responsibility and duty to bring up her children, to nurse them and serve them herself in every way. Under such circumstances the tendencies of the mother percolated, as it were, into the child and the influence abided for ever.

Second comes association. It begins from the days of the child's toddling. Here too the responsibility of the parents is enormous. They should see that the child mixes with children brought up in a congenial atmosphere. This is the formative period of the child's life and due care should be taken to avoid its falling into bad company. If good impressions are formed the child, as he grows up, will pick his associates carefully.

Then comes the teacher. In ancient India his influence was tremendous. The pupils lived under him for a long time and therefore it was incumbent that his life should be exemplary. Though the same system of education does not prevail now it is possible that a teacher can influence his students by his life even at the present age.

Next comes contact with holy men. This is where today's youth can begin. For they cannot undo what has already happened. But they can and must make a beginning somewhere. They must create in themselves a lively interest for religion. And that can be done in two ways, by reading books and associating with holy people. Books will give theoretical knowledge but in holy men you will find the truths illustrated. Contact with them will strengthen one's belief in the scriptures, in religion and spirituality.

#### IV

Some aspirants try to combine *yoga* with *bhoga*, spirituality with enjoyment. Real progress in spiritual life is an impossibility if anyone thinks that in this way he can work the religious path. Sri Sankara has unambiguously put this forth in his *Vivekachudamani* thus: "Whoever seeks to realize the Self by giving himself up to the nourishing of the body, is like the man who proceeds to cross a river catching hold of a crocodile, mistaking it for a log of wood."<sup>11</sup> For these two (*yoga* and *bhoga*) are like the two opposite poles of the same magnet, are like light and darkness, like fire and water. They can never come together without detriment to each other. Remember the advice Christ gave to the rich young man, when the latter had approached him with the question, 'Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?' 'Keep the commandments,' Jesus had said. 'That I have ', the youth had replied and asked, 'What lack I yet?' Christ's reply to this should clarify all doubt, should set at rest all vacillation. Jesus almost seems to say, "to be good and moral and loving and kind is excellent indeed! But if there it ends, you will be a good man and no more. You would have prepared the

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<sup>11</sup> Vivekachudamani – 84.

ground to be religious but the seed is yet to be sown; you have to take the last step," when he said 'If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me.'<sup>12</sup> "Give up", that is the last but the most important commandment of Jesus but the least followed. What does this "following me" in the text mean? To be like him. A definition of what it is to be like him is contained in his exhortation, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."<sup>13</sup> This means, to be without attachment to anything here. An illustration of it is Christ himself, which is substantiated in his saying: "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."<sup>14</sup>

Again, study the life of any great spiritual luminary,—a Buddha, a Śankara, a Ramakrishna, a Vivekananda. What does it teach? All these, as if, with one voice declare, "give up all that is worldly and cling to God alone". Confronted with this obvious truth the youth should abstain from committing the mistake of trying to combine *yoga* and *bhoga*.

## V

To sum up: One should cultivate an intense liking for the religious life even while young. A whole-souled application to the practice, with all the vigour at one's command, is a necessity towards any achievement. It is more incumbent in the case of religion.

Swami Vivekananda had great hope in the youth of India. He wanted them to come forward not only for the material regeneration of the motherland but also for its spiritual invigoration. It was a call to serve both, viz., the mankind and oneself. Will the youth understand and respond to his call?

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<sup>12</sup> Gospel according to St. Mathew 19.16-21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 22.37.

<sup>14</sup> Gospel according to St. Luke, 9.58.

## **RELIGIOUS LIFE AND SRADDHA (\*)**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – October 1962; Vol. 49; page 242

In the Rig Veda there is a hymn devoted to *Sraddha*<sup>1</sup>, as a goddess in which the Rishi prays to her, that he may have devotion to the sacrifices he performs and the work that he does in this world. Sayanacharya commenting on this *sukta* says, '*Sraddha* is a special affection which is imbedded in man.' Continuing he terms it as a distinctive reverence, for a particular object or principle. The author of the *Vedantasara* puts it as 'the faith in the words of the scriptures as taught by the guru or teacher.'<sup>2</sup>

We experience that without a little faith, a little trust no action, be it secular or religious, is possible. We take on trust many things. We put faith in a great many people and then alone transactions become feasible, life becomes a possibility. We believe in certain principles as conducive to our welfare and strive to work them out in life. How tenaciously and persistently do not people hold on to their particular political views! That is faith. Unless one has faith in what he does, he would not be able to turn out any work satisfactorily. Religion, therefore, does not claim any special allegiance when it says you should have *sraddha*, faith, in the words of one whom you have accepted as a teacher.

The Hindu scriptures are not dogmatic that you have to subscribe to some particular creeds for your emancipation. Nay they go a step further and say that one has to go beyond the scriptures, one has to go beyond all laws, if one has to be liberated. For, everything within law is a limitation, freedom is beyond all law, but the way lies through the scriptures. Simply knowing the truth intellectually and harping on the eminence of one's own scriptures is not enough. We have to verify the propositions, the principles, enunciated in the scriptures in our own lives. One who has true *sraddha* in the statement of the scriptures, waits not for any one to goad him onward. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Suppose there is a thief in a room and he has come to know that a great treasure lies separated from him only by a thin wall, can he rest content only to know about it? Will he not try to possess it?' *Sraddha* is like that. It makes one restless to possess what one prizes most and it serves as the motive power which makes man jump into the fray and fight on courageously towards the noble end, God-realization.

Like the scriptures, the true teachers do not demand unquestioned obedience, they are ever ready to satisfy the doubts of a genuine seeker. What they demand is, that the seeker should be sincere and not simply a stoic who argues for the sake of argumentation. Swami Vivekananda in a telling manner implants the idea of faith, when he says: 'What use is

belief in God if we do not see Him? What use is the faith that we have a soul if we do not experience it?' That kind of firm belief is *Sraddha*.

With the advance of science and technology, faith of the people in religion has waned. Physical science has usurped, as it were, the place of the scriptures. Now this physical science says: man is no more than an animal. Why? because it cannot see man except as a body. The other part, the real being, of man lies hidden from its view, is beyond its ken, since it is not material. Scientists in the beginning doubted the existence of soul, as they did not come across anything like it during the process of dissection of the bodies. They called the idea of soul and religion as idle fancy of some deranged brains. The first psychologists or to quote a Western scholar 'the medical materialists' said with impunity that the soul-flights of the saints were 'nothing but' expressions of their organic disorder. But the science of the soul, religion, smiled at their vain prattle and allowed them to rattle on, never for once disbelieving in its well-verified conclusions. Religion firmly asserted that man is divine. Swami Vivekananda boldly declared, 'Man is potentially divine'. The Upanisads say, 'Thou art That'<sup>3</sup> (the Infinite Being)' from whom the whole universe is projected, in whom it is maintained, and into whom it dissolves again.

Here a little digression is inevitable. It may be asked, 'Will not man become egotistic thinking himself to be the creator, the preserver, and the destroyer of the universe?' A little thought bestowed on the above statement will surely set at rest all such questions. Can any thoughtful person comprehend this universe to have emanated from his body? Can he ever think that the whole universe, with its varieties of manifestations outside himself, is maintained in his body? Does he dare believe that the whole universe will last only as long as his body lasts? An emphatic negative will be the reply. The Upanisads, therefore, certainly do not refer to the body when they say 'Thou art That', but to the Atman, the Indwelling Spirit, the 'self'. So there is no way, for a man who knows this truth, to be egotistic and no man can be said to have known this truth as long as he identifies himself with the body. The Atman of course should have recourse to a vehicle to manifest Itself, just as we have to take the aid of some conveyance for any journey, short or long. Now the body forms the vehicle for the Atman.

Man, however, identifies himself with the vehicle, the body, and forgets himself in catering to its needs. It is true that man as a body is no more than an animal, so when he identifies with the body he displays all the qualities of an animal. The instincts of self-preservation, sense-enjoyment, distrust, malignity, passion and the like are most prominent at that time. But, even in the life of the vilest man some moments come when he evidences magnanimity, affection, compassion and beneficence which are his inherent divine qualities. These are the moments when the flashes of the real man come to the forefront overpowering the animal nature. The struggle in life, the goal of religion, is to convert these rare moments into a continuous experience: to subdue the animal nature once

and for all time. And here it is that *Sraddha* helps as a great asset.

### ***Sraddha as distinctive reverence***

Of the above three definitions of *Sraddha* we shall first take up *Sraddha* as distinctive reverence. He who performs sacrifices or does works or endows gifts without reverence for the sacrifice, or the cause for which he works or donates, only wastes his time and energy. He does not reap any fruits either here or after death, says the Bhagavad Gita<sup>4</sup>. The Upanisads are categorical in this respect. They prohibit man from giving when he has no reverence for the cause<sup>5</sup>. Kathopanisad illustrates this by a story: There was a person named Vajasravas. He performed a sacrifice. One of the conditions of the sacrifice was to give away every good thing that the sacrificer possessed. But this man was a miser. So after the sacrifice he gave as fee to the Brahmanas only old, jaded and dried up useless cows<sup>6</sup>. He had a son. Though a boy he found that what his father professed and did, did not tally. The Upanisad says, '*Sraddha* entered into this boy at this time<sup>7</sup>'. The boy found that his father had no *Sraddha* in the sacrifice or in giving gifts. The father hankered only after the merit. He wanted to save the father from going to a region of eternal misery by giving such useless gifts. He questioned, 'Father, whom are you going to give me!' The father kept quiet. A second and third time the boy repeated the question. The father got annoyed at the audacity of the boy and said, 'I am giving you to Yama, the King of Death'. Undaunted the boy started for Yama's abode straightway. The father was disconsolate. The boy, however, consoled his father saying that everything born, like vegetation that grows and dies and sprouts again, had to die, and so there was no use in worrying over the bygone. Now, *Sraddha* brought the boy Naciketas to the abode of Yama and from Yama he learnt self-knowledge, the way for liberation and returned an enlightened soul.

Again the Rig Veda *sukta* referred to here, in the beginning, says one should kindle the fire, for sacrifice with *sraddha*<sup>8</sup>. The oblations thus offered with *Sraddha* obtain for the sacrificer results in abundance. The sacrificer endowed with *Sraddha* is himself referred to by the name of *Sraddha* when he goes to heaven. For it is that reverence and faith in the sacrifice and the scriptures, that makes him go to heaven<sup>9</sup>. So whether one seeks enjoyment or liberation one should have reverence and faith in the duties he does.

### ***Sraddha as affection***

*Sraddha* as affection we come across every day of our life. The mother serves the house-hold, and the guests with *Sraddha*. Love and affection cannot generate without *Sraddha*. Indiscipline is rampant in the schools and colleges today. Why? because students have no *Sraddha* in the education they receive, nor in the teachers. Education (*vidya*) in olden

days was considered as the highest gift,—next to spirituality—one could give. It was looked upon as the boon of goddess Saraswati. That *Sraddha* has left the portals of the 'Temples of Learning' in the present age, and therefore, we suffer. Revive the affection, the *Sraddha*, for the education and the teacher, and everything will set itself right again. That *Sraddha* itself will direct our steps.

### ***Sraddha as faith in the Guru's words***

Though a distinction has been made in the definitions of the three types of *sraddha* for the sake of illustration, it is not possible to say where one begins and the other ends. All these qualities are inseparable. One supplements the other. When any one is present, the other two effortlessly follow. *Sraddha* is child-like faith.

If the mother says pointing to a man, 'He is your elder brother' the child believes that the man is his brother: Similarly in every action the child implicitly believes the mother. Many are the stories which Sri Ramakrishna told the devotees to impress upon them the necessity of *Sraddha*, faith, in the words of the guru. He once said: 'There was a boy named Jatila. He used to walk to school through the woods, and the journey frightened him. One day he told his mother, of his fear. But what could the mother do? She was too poor to provide a servant. Yet she was a devotee of the Lord. She inwardly prayed to the Lord to protect her child. She replied: "Why should you be afraid? Call Madhusudana." "Mother," asked the boy, "Who is Madhusudana?" The mother said, "He is your Elder Brother and lives in the woods." One day after this, when the boy again felt afraid in the woods he cried out, "O Madhusudana." But there was no response. He began to weep aloud. "Where are you Brother Madhusudana? Come to me. I am afraid." Then God could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said: "Here I am. Why are you frightened?" And so saying he took the boy out of the woods and showed him the way to school. When He took leave of the boy, God said: "I will come whenever you call Me. Do not be afraid.'" One must have such child-like faith in the words of the teacher, and such yearning to realize the goal.

### ***Efficacy of Sraddha***

Efficacy of faith can never be over-estimated. The foregoing stories bear ample testimony to this fact. But lest it should be thought that these are mere fables and fairy tales for enticing the child-minds, let us narrate some recent events. Sri Girish Chandra Ghosh, the father of the Bengali stage, was leading a Bohemian life before he met Sri Ramakrishna. But his meeting with the Master proved to be the turning point in his life. He was more and more attracted towards Sri Ramakrishna. His estimation of the Master increased with every visit. Gradually the conviction grew upon



him that the Master was none other than God Himself come down to redeem mankind. That faith had a great effect on his character. His vices left him one by one until at last to remember the Master became the one ruling passion of his life. A sinner was transformed into a saint. That is the miracle of *Sraddha*.

Again, Swami Adbhutananda, Lata Maharaj, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, though he began his life as a servant boy in one of the Master's devotee's house, soon ascended the pinnacle of realizations by simple faith. A childlike faith he had in Sri Ramakrishna. The Guru's words were like mandates from on High. He unquestioningly followed them. He had no doubts. The Master, was his pole-star. Like the proverbial oyster that sinks down to the bottom of the sea after receiving a drop of rain to turn out a beautiful pearl, he shut himself within himself and following the teachings of the Master became a saint in his own right. Literally illiterate though he was, no philosophy was a closed book to him. This was, as it were, confirming the famous passage of the Gita: 'A person of firm faith attains knowledge being devoted to it by restraining the senses; and obtaining the knowledge he attains peace that passes all understanding.'<sup>10</sup>

Again it is common knowledge that the doubting Narendranath converted himself into the world-shaking Swami Vivekananda by his wonderful *Sraddha* in the Master's words.

### ***Different types of Sraddha***

*Sraddha*, again, is of three types. Every-one has faith according to the propensities with which he is born and as is his faith so does he become<sup>11</sup>. Man, according to the Sankhyas is made of three constituents, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. In every person all these qualities are present in a more or lesser degree. The difference between man and man is because of the predominance of some one constituent. If *sattva* happens to preponderate such a man's faith will tend towards respect to elders, towards worship of God, and the like. If *rajas* were to be prepotent the person will lean towards the worship of other gods; will be having great avidity for name and fame. If *tamas* were to be inordinately prevalent his inclination will be towards the worship of ghosts and spirits. Man's all activities can be attributed to the working of these constituents. The proportion in which they exist in man goes to form his nature, which Sri Krishna calls as prakriti, and is commonly known as character.

### ***Perfection of character the goal of all religion***

Now this character or nature has to be cleansed of its dross, is to be perfected so that it may give place for the play of higher and nobler faith. All the scriptures aim at this. A man cannot be truly religious if he

happens to be imperfect in character. True *sraddha* dawns only in a perfected nature. So in the initial stages *sraddha* is to be cultivated and for that all concomitant forces or qualities are to be developed. When the perfection in character is attained then does one realize God. Only on realization of God, adamantine faith, complete *sraddha* in God takes firm root. Till then all belief in God is subject to vacillation. Our aim in life should be to have that adamantine faith. *Sraddha* is thus the guiding factor of religious life from the beginning to the end. Without *sraddha* religious life amounts to nothing. With *sraddha* it is everything.

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<sup>1</sup> Rig Veda, 10 Mand. 151 Sukta.

<sup>2</sup> -24.

<sup>3</sup> Chandogya, VI.viii. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Gita, 17.28.

<sup>5</sup> Taittiriya Up. 1.11.3.

<sup>6</sup> Katha Up. 1.3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 1. 2.

<sup>8</sup> 10.151.1.

<sup>9</sup> Chand. Up. 5.4.2.

<sup>10</sup> Gita, 4.39.

<sup>11</sup> Gita, 17.3.

## REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – November 1965; Vol. 52; page 299

ONE of the effective ways by which one can obtain release, attain liberation, from the trammels of this world is by the constant practice of the presence of God, say the saints of all religions and of all times. Ordinarily man is aware of the physical world, the world that can be grasped by the five senses: of hearing, touch, seeing, taste, and smell. His estimate of this world in the present age is that it is only a material entity. He does not see it even as God's creation. No doubt he is moved and lured by its constantly changing panorama. The beautiful sunset on a lake or the sea, the wonderful hues and sweep of the rainbow, the cool moonlight on a silent night, each of these, may put him into a rapture. The gentle murmur of a brook and sweet chirping of the birds soothe his nerves and sometimes send him into an ecstasy, as it were. Yet all these may touch only the superficial part in him, that is to say, his senses and to some extent his mind also. He may remember those moments all throughout his life as moments of un-inhibited and inexpressible joy. But they do not enable him to make a deeper dent in his personality if they cannot touch something of the spiritual being in him. Such a person's susceptibility to Nature is only fleeting. The next moment, of such a lofty experience, he may plunge himself into some dastardly act, or perverted action, without any qualms whatsoever, if he does not believe in a higher purpose of life, in a nobler destiny of man, in a Being that lives in all beings and witnesses everything. Nevertheless this influence of Nature is not discounted in spiritual life. In fact Sri Ramakrishna's first ecstasy, which happened when he was a boy of seven, may be said to have been induced by Nature, when a flock of white cranes passed flying across the sombre clouds in the vast expanse of a village sky, unimpeded by skyscrapers and the dust, and smoke of industrialized cities.

But, more often than not, man does not strive to look beyond appearances, beyond the phenomenal world. That is why his desserts too are of the world. One cannot reach the Beyond, the Eternal by having recourse to the ephemeral<sup>1</sup> says Yama, the Lord of Death, to Naciketa in the *Kathopanisad*. It is also the experience of all in this world: as you sow

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1 Kathopanisad, 2.10.

so you reap. What then should one do? Should he give up everything? Sri Ramakrishna says to the house-holders that they should give up mentally. He says, 'Hold on to God with both hands when you are not engaged in your duties. And do even your duties with one hand still holding on to His lotus feet'. And those aspirants who are not encumbered are asked to give up not only mentally but outwardly also. What happens to a man who clings to his possessions and relations is graphically described by Sri Ramakrishna: 'Even on his deathbed a person attached to his wealth, asks those around him to lower the wick of the lamp and not to waste the oil so much'.

People speak of giving up everything at the end of their life, as if it is so easy as casting off one's worn out clothes. Attachments to things grow gradually into one's skin, as it were, nay they go even deeper, they penetrate into the very marrow of one's bones, it involves one's whole being. And to think of giving up these attractions and possessions at the evening of one's life will be like having one's bones broken or breath stifled. Even when in full vigour of youth and life our thoughts revolve round our treasure chest. Is it then possible to give up that clinging when old and infirm? Let the youth not delude itself by thinking that they can devote the fag end of their life to God. We must heed the wise ones who exhort: 'Apply yourself diligently to what is auspicious, for truly, who knows when death will snatch us away'.

There can be no two opinions about the duration of life. Even a hundred and twenty years, which is perhaps the limit that a man can live healthily, is quite insufficient to fulfil all ambitions and desires in this world. That life is short, is conceded even by agnostics and atheists. It is left to man to make proper use of his life, to get beyond transmigration, to stand away from the wheel of *samsāra*. Again, if we believe in the scriptures, which are authorities in respect of all that is beyond the human ken, we have to accept that those whose actions are more akin to those of the beasts in this life are likely to take the birth of beasts in the next birth. 'By good deeds one goes to higher births and by wicked deeds to lower births and by a mixture of these one attains human birth',<sup>2</sup> says the *Praśna Upaniṣad*. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* asserts that 'persons with meritorious deeds to their credit are born as Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, or Vaishyas, (i.e. men of pious temperament) and those who are of wicked deeds are born as animals such as dogs, pigs and the like. But those who do not fall under either of these two categories tread the third path, of short-lived duration, such as insects and worms, again and again'.<sup>3</sup>

It is also reasonable to assume that whatever one constantly thinks

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2 Pr. Up. 3.7.

3 Chandogya Up., V.x.7-8.

of, that one becomes. If there are some desires in man which cannot be satisfied in man's body, it is but natural that a suitable body will have to be projected, after the dissolution of the human body, to enjoy those desires. Sri Krishna categorically declares, 'By dwelling on whatever thought one leaves the body to that form alone one goes, because of his constant contemplation on that form'.<sup>4</sup> This is the reason why Sri Sankara in the beginning of the *Vivekachudamani* extols human birth so highly: 'Rare is this human birth; rarer it is to be born as a man; much more rare it is to be born with good tendencies; still more rare is the inclination towards the right conduct enunciated by the Vedas and higher than this is the erudition in the scriptures; higher than these are the faculty to discriminate between the Self and the non-Self, the experience of Brahman and continuing to be established in It. (And that is liberation.) This Liberation is not to be obtained except through the well-earned merits of a hundred crore of births.'<sup>5</sup>

Having been born into this imperfect world, we have to somehow get rid of the limitations placed on us on every side and in every way. And overcoming these limitations once and for all time is termed *mukti*, liberation.

From the foregoing discussion we have come to know how it is that we become bound. But in it is also the way out. If we become entangled and enmeshed by thinking of ephemeral things it naturally follows that by contemplating on the Divine, on the Supreme, on the eternally pure, on the eternally conscious, on the eternally free Being we also imbibe all these qualities in some measure until at last the lure of the phenomena fades away into the background and we begin to see that all-pervading Being everywhere.

No doubt, it is difficult to reach the goal, but on that account one should not totally neglect the path. Sri Krishna says that even a little act of righteousness saves one from a great catastrophe.<sup>6</sup> Everyone in this world is not endowed with equal gifts of health, strength and intellect. So each one can start in his humble way to tread the path and the easiest of all ways is the remembrance of God.

How to do it? We, every moment of our life, are doing something, imagining something or planning something. Not a moment is it possible for us to live without activity, either mental or physical. Even the laziest man will be actively dreaming of some great fortune. Inactivity is an impossibility in this world, except for a very few, whose number can be counted on the fingers' ends. 'Your very existence will be in jeopardy if you do not work',<sup>7</sup> says Sri Krishna to Arjuna. Work, therefore, cannot be

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4 Gita, 8.6.

5 Vivekachudamani, 2.

6 Gita, 2.40.

7 Ibid., 3.8.

an excuse not to think of God. 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever sacrifice you make, whatever gift you give, whatever austerities you perform, O son of Kunti, offer all that unto Me'<sup>8</sup> stresses Sri Krishna. When you begin a work you invoke His blessings and when it ends you offer it to Him. You hanker for no results. The results are also dedicated to Him. Thus you become free from the fruits of your action. Work and its result has no more power to bind you. You have nothing to gain and nothing to lose. You are only His instrument. This attitude is most beneficial. It subdues, and if this submission is constantly practised, it even annihilates the ego.

It is not possible to remember God always if we contemplate on Him just for the sake of seeking some benefits and forget him totally afterwards. In every act and thought He must be remembered. Even what we eat is to be offered to Him. That is the time when people are apt to forget God either attracted by the savour of the food or due to other circumstances. A poet sang, 'Consider what you eat as an oblation unto the Divine Mother'. That is the attitude we have to try to cultivate. The Lord says in the Gita, 'As Vaisvanara (the stomach-fire) I live in the bodies of beings'.<sup>9</sup> Here is a suggestion for our contemplation: that what we eat can be considered as an oblation unto Him.

'When you are lying down think that you are prostrating before the Lord.' When you are giving gifts think that you are offering them to God. Does He not live in all beings? This world is His creation and everything in it should remind us of Him; instead we are enamoured and caught in its glamour and forget its Creator. It is there that we miss the grip over our mind. The mind tries to take us away from our real being, away from God. Why does it do that? Because, says the Upanisad, it was created with a tendency to go outward, along with the senses.<sup>10</sup> The senses present the mind with so many charming things and if it is not well controlled by the discriminative faculty it falls a prey to those rosy pictures and inevitably forgets God.

We make pilgrimages, make sacrifices with an ulterior motive: to obtain progeny, to enjoy the pleasures of heaven or obtain name and fame here on this earth. Well, what does all these come to? None of them, work or progeny or wealth, can set you on the path of liberation. Only by renouncing all these can man attain it.<sup>11</sup>

Man, given as he is to live in the world, cannot all of a sudden obtain perfection in any method of approach to God. He must strive and struggle. There should be no letting up of efforts. It is like swimming against the current, the moment you cease your efforts you are carried down a mile or more before you are able to understand it or recover your

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8 Ibid., 9.27.

9 Ibid. 15.14.

10 Kathopanisad, 4.1.

11 Kaivalyopanisad, 1.3.

breath. Sri Ramakrishna gives the example of a boatman to illustrate how one must struggle to see God. As long as the boat is in the winding alleys of the stream and the wind is against him, he rows and is alert, and he steers clear of the sandbanks and hidden rocks, but once he gains the main current he can leave the rowing, unfurl his sail to the favourable wind and enjoy a smoke. The main current means to be fully imbued with the thought of God, the favourable wind is God's grace. When these two things are combined nothing can disturb the devotee. He can be sure of reaching the goal.

Sri Ramakrishna in this connection cites another example: of a goldsmith at his task of melting gold. The goldsmith uses the bellows, the pipe and the fan to generate the proper heat to make the gold melt, but once he accomplishes his task, he sits back and enjoys rest as long as he needs it.

Patanjali says that one's progress in spiritual life is proportionate to the struggle that one makes. Sri Ramakrishna says that nothing can be achieved by those who say that everything will happen in time and do no practice at all.

A doubt may arise here: Men have practised long and arduously before having a glimpse of God. Is it then possible to see God by merely practising His presence or remembering Him constantly? Well, there have been saints who attained that state merely through the remembrance of God. But their remembrance was genuine. To use an expression of Sri Ramakrishna, there was 'no theft in the chamber of their heart'. They gave themselves up wholly, without any reservation, to Him.

Remembrance of God may appear as an insignificant practice, worth not the trouble. But if we think a little deeper we will come to know that it is not so easy as it appears to be. Engaged in the duties of the world man forgets God completely. And even if he takes His name, the lips only might move, but the heart would not be touched. Its adoration will be somewhere else. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell a story to illustrate this point: Once Narada, who was proud of being a great devotee of the Lord, went to Vaikuntha (the abode of Narayana). The Lord coming to know of Narada's thought said, 'Narada, go to such and such a place. A great devotee of mine lives there. Cultivate his acquaintance; for he is truly devoted to Me'. Narada went there and found a farmer who rose early in the morning, pronounced the name of Hari (God) only once, and taking his plough, went out and tilled the ground all day long. At night he went to bed after pronouncing the name of Hari once more. Narada said to himself: 'How can this rustic be a lover of God? I see him busily engaged in worldly duties, and he has no signs of a pious man about him'. He went back to the Lord and spoke what he thought of his new acquaintance. Thereupon the Lord said: 'Narada, take this cup of oil and go round this city and come back with it. But take care that you do not spill even a single drop of it'. Narada did as he was told, and on his return the Lord asked him, 'Well, how many times did you remember Me in the course of

your walk round the city?' 'Not once, my Lord', said Narada 'and how could I, when I had to watch this cup brimming over with oil?' The Lord then said: 'This one cup of oil did so divert your attention that even you did forget Me altogether. But look at that rustic, who, though carrying the heavy burden of a family, still remembers Me twice every day'. Our devotion is not judged by what we profess but by the way we live. The Lord looks into the heart of the devotee and does not judge merely by what he outwardly does. If there is no consonance between the inside and out, the practices one does cannot yield the desired results. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth should speak and out of the fullness of the heart also the hands should act. True remembrance makes a god of man. His very proximity makes those near him feel the presence of the Most High. Such remembrance, however, comes after a long period of *sadhana* and is born out of the true love of God. Nevertheless this method is open to all, the high and the low, the poor and the rich. Let us practise it and be blessed.



## SCRIPTURES AND THEIR PURPOSE (\*)

**By Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – December 1963; Vol. 50; page 455

In an age when literature of every kind has grown enormously and is being read throughout the world, the part books play in the formulation of man's ideas and ideals is not difficult of comprehension. Yet when it comes to the question of religious books there has been a sort of hesitation and an injudicious assessment of their value among the intelligentsia, specially during the last few centuries. Perhaps, hesitation is reasonable, even doubting is permissible but outright condemnation of all that is religious as superstition and sophism is something that is perplexing; it shows an attitude of intolerance and self-righteousness. A position that is not enviable. For are these not the very modes of thinking they impute — we do not know with what measure of justification — to the religious man? But these things apart, it should be obvious to anyone now that religion, in spite of all the forces working against it, has come to stay. And true religion can never be annihilated however much other forces may try. For religion is Truth and Truth can never be destroyed. Religion as Swamiji has often stated is not in mere dogmas or creeds but in God-realization, in the realization of the Spirit. And as Sri Ramakrishna posited from his own experience, God is but one by whatever name He may be called and by whatever way He may be approached.

### ***Relation between Scriptures and Religion***

There is a very intimate relationship between the scriptures and religion. For the scriptures are nothing but the records of the intuitive experiences of the sages. They have been verified in the lives of saints and prophets and they are verifiable even today by those who earnestly and intently seek to find Truth. They are as the travel guides in the chartless ocean of spirituality. They are the compass, the sextant, the rudder, the sounding line, the barometer and the charts of an aspirant's ship in the religious sea. That is why some of the religions which had no scriptures, no books, quickly dwindled out of sight. When there is no authentic document people are likely to interpret and twist the utterances according to the individuals' tastes and pass them off as real stuff so that there remains nothing in them of the original, in content. It becomes a mass of superstition, fabulous, with the grain of truth miserably lost in the mudheap as it were. Within a short time everything gets coloured by interests and tendencies of individuals. This happens sometimes even in the case of the written sayings, what then to speak of those which were

handed down by word of mouth. Sri Krishna says in the Gita, 'This eternal yoga, O Arjuna, I taught to Vivaswan and Vivaswan taught it to Manu. Manu taught it to Ikshvaku. Thus traditionally handed down it was known among the Rajarshis. But by the passage of time this yoga was lost in this world.'<sup>1</sup> It is to counteract this tendency to corruption and loss that the scriptures are necessary.

A doubt may now be raised whether or not the Vedas, which were presumed to have been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, had undergone such mutation. We have several reasons to believe it has not, chief of them being the reverence with which they were held. It made them sacrosanct. Tampering with them was considered blasphemous. Besides, these truths were tested by later saints and sages. If therefore anyone says to the Hindu that what is told in any particular scripture alone is correct and that it is beyond any man's capacity to verify those teachings, the Hindu forthwith gives up that man. For he was taught differently. He was told that given the urge, intensity, time and attention needed for realization, the teachings could be verified and that every one of us could grow into a Rishi and sense those teachings as the Rishis of old did. To become a Rishi is the only way to liberation says Swamiji and he adds, until one becomes a Rishi one has not become religious. So we see that irrespective of the age in which these eternal truths were discovered, they must be open to probation, testing in every other age, nay at all times.

### ***The Hindu Scriptures***

Now among the scriptures of the Hindus the Vedas occupy a supreme position. They are variously called as Sabda, Sruti etc. That which was first uttered was Sabda (the word or the sound). That which was first heard by sages in the depths of meditation, and in the profundity of their being was Sruti. There is another class of books, which are called Smrtis — that which was remembered or the traditional law. These latter were composed later to govern society for a particular period. The latter have changed as changes in society occurred. The former contain the eternal truths and these truths never change. That is why the Vedas are said to be without beginning or end. One beauty of the Vedas is that you find in them all the ideas of religion — beginning from God in the far beyond, God as omnipresent and omniscient upto the unity between the creature and the Creator. This has, of course, led to the formulation of several sects, each contending what is to its liking in the Vedas as the important part, and others as secondary. But as Swamiji points out, 'Each is but a different stage in the journey, the aim of which is the perfect conception of the Vedas.' The Rishis of the Vedas were fearless, so they did not do away with the lower ideas as they came into possession of the higher revelations. They preserved these lower truths so that others who were to come after them may not be bewildered at the heights to which

they had reached, but come up by stages. Most of the people in the world, at any given time, will be like babies as far as spirituality is concerned. They require to be taken step by step. Hence even at the risk of being accused of confusing the issue, they let these lower truths be. These several statements of the Vedas may appear to the lay man as perplexing but the sages were sure that others like them would be born to show a way out of this maze of ideas. Perhaps in their own times they had no difficulty in dispelling the doubts and confusion that might have arisen in the minds of their contemporaries. Although the scriptures describe a variety of things they chiefly speak of one thing — of God and of the means to attain Him. May be there are some seemingly conflicting ideas about Him. But they are not sustained when put under the microscopic test of profound intuition. This in brief is the content of the scriptures.

### ***How to reconcile the so-called contradictions in the Vedas***

The apparent contradictions in the Vedas have to some extent puzzled seekers. This doubting, this feeling at sea, is not a new phenomenon. We meet with this type of doubt in the Upanisads too. When Svetaketu was asked by his father, 'Have you known that One by which everything else is known,' he was genuinely perturbed. He had never heard of such a thing before. He protests and asks to be satisfied. However, the father leads him slowly, by examples and experimentations, to the highest Truth. To know about the Highest even intellectually is a difficult task. For there we find all contradictions meeting. Let us take an instance from the discussion between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi. Yajnavalkya while explaining how the individual jiva, after shedding its *upadhis*, incrustations, gets merged in Brahman, like the lump of salt thrown into the water and cannot be separated from It, says: 'After attaining oneness, my dear, there is no more consciousness.'<sup>2</sup> This perplexes Maitreyi. She seems to think, 'How can this be? He has first said that Brahman is Pure Intelligence. Now he says after attaining oneness there is no more consciousness.'<sup>3</sup> Why does he talk in this conflicting language?' She asks Yajnavalkya, 'Sir, just here you have thrown me into confusion by saying that after attaining oneness the self has no more consciousness.' Yajnavalkya then expounds to her that the self that had attained oneness with Brahman loses the 'particular consciousness' superimposed on the self due to its identifying itself with the body, mind and the like and not the Cosmic Consciousness. And when thus explained only Maitreyi's doubt was cleared.

A similar doubt is being raised by Arjuna in a different context. When Sri Krishna urged Arjuna to fight the battle of Kurukshetra in support of the righteous cause, and simultaneously talked highly of renunciation, the latter got confounded. Arjuna asked: 'By apparently contradictory words, it seems as if you are confusing my understanding.

Please tell me that one path by which I can attain the good.'<sup>4</sup> Sri Krishna in reply says that there are two paths and these are for two different types of people. He further adds that one cannot practise renunciation unless one had rid oneself of all desires. So that was not the path for him. Thus, we see that every great teacher had had to speak not only for one class of people but several, and therefore he had to say things which suited those particular types of persons. If these teachings are taken together, without the idea of the context in which they were uttered, it is natural that they appear to be opposing each other in content.

There is a beautiful story in the Upanisads which rightly illustrates this point. It shows how the same syllable conveys different meanings to diverse types of people: Once the three classes of sons of Prajapati — the gods, men and Asuras — lived a life of continence with Prajapati. After sometime the gods requested Prajapati to instruct them. Prajapati uttered the syllable "Da" and asked whether they had understood what he meant. They replied they had; that Prajapati was asking them to control themselves. After some time the men too having finished their period of probation begged to be instructed. To them also Prajapati said the word "Da" and asked whether they had understood. They too said, 'Yes, you ask us to give.' Lastly came the Asuras and to them too Prajapati repeated the same syllable "Da" and asked what they understood by it. The Asuras replied, 'You ask us to be kind.' To all of them Prajapati had said that they had rightly understood Him.<sup>5</sup> Does it not sound incoherent? No, a little explanation will prove it. In Sanskrit the words, control, give and be kind begin with the letter "da" viz. *damyata*, *datta*, and *dayadhvam*. Now the devas or the gods were too much given to enjoyment, men to hoarding and the Asuras to killing. By living a life of celibacy with Prajapati all these three had understood their own particular defects and when therefore Prajapati uttered the syllable "da" they knew what he wanted of them. The gods were to abstain from enjoyment, men were to give and the Asuras were enjoined to be kind and all this was conveyed by the utterance of that single syllable "da". Does this not show that the scriptures serve the purpose of all genuine seekers?

Similarly in the Vedas, which are meant for all, we find apparently contradictory ideas but suiting men of different tendencies. These contrary views are actually only visions of the same Reality from different angles, from varied heights. So, an earnest seeker has only to find out which path and which ideal appeal to his nature, suit his temperament most. But he has to see unity in the diversity. For diversity makes for creation and unity goes back to the source, makes for our own abode. Scriptures, therefore, do not confuse us but tell us everything and we get bewildered because we have not the acumen to grasp their import.

### ***Purpose of the Scriptures***

Having dealt with the content of the scriptures, it is not difficult to

presume what their intention is. It has already been explained that they do not intend to confuse man. This should be always remembered. Secondly, their intention is to guide mankind on the path of spirituality, to help man upward from whatever level of development he is. Like the scientist who does research with the data already in his possession, the aspirant with the help of the scriptures engages in research in the spiritual field. One can verify one's experience — the results of one's research in the laboratory of the spirit — with the conclusions already arrived at in the scriptures. They are like reference books, where we can compare notes. If one's experiences are not in compliance with the eternal truths one has missed one's way somewhere. But this does not happen when one is under the guidance of a competent teacher.

However, there is every chance of the principles of the scriptures being misinterpreted and misused if they fall into wrong hands. We shall cite an instance here to show how the theory of Karma was tortuously treated by glib talkers: When Swamiji was staying at Calcutta in 1897, a preacher belonging to a society for the protection of cows had an interview with him. When asked about the object of the society, the preacher said that it was to protect the old, decrepit and diseased cows from the slaughter house and provide infirmaries for them. Swamiji while commending their work asked the preacher what help his society — which had enough resources — had rendered to the people in central India, where due to famine nine lakhs of people had died. The preacher's non-chalant reply was that the famine had broken out as a result of men's Karma, their sins.

Can perversion of the principles go any further? Swamiji who was furious with indignation at such indifference of the preacher towards humanity, suppressing his feelings said that he had not the least sympathy with associations which did not feel for men even while they were dying of starvation. Let us beware of such misguided people who make a travesty of truth.

### ***Extent of the usefulness of the Scriptures***

As already stated the scriptures can help you, guide you but they cannot take you to the goal. Records of other peoples' realization cannot make you realize. You can tread their path, feel their way but you have to struggle for yourself to reach the goal. All effort is yours. The books cannot ferry you across the ocean of life. No one can do that. Even the teacher can only guide you. Sri Sankara referring to mere scriptural knowledge, in an exquisite couplet in Sanskrit, says: 'If the highest Truth is not known all study of the scriptures is in vain. When, however, the highest Truth is known then also the study of scriptures is futile'<sup>6</sup>. Does he then discourage Shastric studies? No one can make this allegation against Sankara. For we meet in his commentaries on the Upanisads very often, the statement, 'Atman is to be pursued vigorously through the

teachings of the Shastras and the Guru.’ What he purports to convey to us is that if the knowledge of the scriptures is not utilized, not put into practice, then that knowledge is acquired in vain. Again, once the Highest is realized all further study of scriptures is useless, for all of them are only as a means to attain the Highest, and not for their own sake. Once the purpose — the attainment of God — is fulfilled there remains nothing more to be gained.

Sri Ramakrishna deprecating too much of studies said, ‘Suppose you have received a letter from your home asking you to buy certain things. And suppose you have mislaid it. If the contents of the letter are known to you, will you worry about the letter or try to collect the things stated therein?’ Another time he exhorted one of his young disciples: ‘What is there in the Vedanta that you study it so much. Is it not that “Brahman alone is real and all else illusory”? Work for its realization.’

Swamiji remarks in one place, ‘Books cannot teach God, but they can destroy ignorance; their action is negative.’ Even the Vedas cannot show you God, cannot make you realize your true self. ‘By what can you know the knower,’<sup>7</sup> say the Upanisads. Your essential being is the self-luminous consciousness. What is required is to dispel the ignorance that has cloaked it. Remove the covering and you see the light. If we are in a dark room we will have only to throw open the doors and windows to see the sun. We do not require another light to see the sun. He is self-luminous. When he rises we see him. Not only can we see him but we can also dispense with all other lights which we might have lighted to see other objects inside or outside our dwellings. And this Atman, or Brahman, which is the essence of every creature, nay everything that is in the universe, is the source of all light, even of the sun, moon, stars and all, say the Upanisads.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

Too much study of scriptures makes man vain-glorious. It leads him away from the goal. The goal of life is God-realization. All scriptures tell us that God alone is real and all other things are transient. They also show us the way to God. What we have to do after knowing the purpose of the scriptures is to work for its realization. Or as Sri Ramakrishna says, what is required is to dive deep down into ourselves and make our life fruitful by realization of our true nature, like the mythical pearl-oyster which after collecting the rain drop, when the star Svati is in the ascendant, dives down to the bottom of the sea to produce the beautiful pearl.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhagavad Gita IV.1.2.

<sup>2</sup> Br. Up. II.iv.12.

<sup>3</sup> op.cit. 13

<sup>4</sup> Bhagavad Gita III.2.

<sup>5</sup> Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, V.ii.1-3.

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<sup>6</sup> Vivekachudamani, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Br.Up. II.iv.14.

<sup>8</sup> Katha Up. V.15.

## **SELF-ABNEGATION (\*)**

**Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – July 1963; Vol. 50; page 82

### ***Life as Architecture***

'Man is the architect of his own fate', said Swami Vivekananda. Life is really an architecture. It substantially answers to Ruskin's description: 'Architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power and pleasure.'<sup>1</sup> But here the edifice is the character of man. It not only gives pleasure to the builder but even those who occasionally come in contact with him. His power is not for enslavement or destruction but for ensouling and enriching. It is not sensual pleasure that one derives by coming in contact with a pure life. It is, we can almost say, other-worldly, ethereal. It is uplifting and ennobling. Again as Ruskin says about building and architecture, there is a vast difference between an ordinary life and a life built up with a purpose: though all people live, they alone live fruitfully who live with a perspective, a vision.

### ***Mind as a tool***

Architecture does not come out of nothing. It requires material and tools to produce it. What are the tools and material that go to form this architecture of man's life? As we said, the edifice of man's life is his character. It is a structure that is not perceived by the physical eyes but by the mind. To quote Sri Ramakrishna, 'Man does not grow two horns' when he becomes great. Neither the aura around him dazzle or pierce the eyes of ordinary mortals like the sun's rays. More practised eyes, that of a yogi, are necessary to discern such a phenomenon. In short no observable physical transformation takes place in man when he builds up his character; but the inner alchemy will be marvellous. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'the touch of the philosopher's stone transforms the iron sword into gold. The shape does not change but it can no more cut'. Similarly the resulting peace that flows in the wake of a pure life is its only indicator, its only criterion.

Now, the structure of character being subtle it naturally follows that the tools also must be of a finer grain. Mind is such an instrument. In Indian philosophy it is aptly named the *antahkarana*, the inner instrument. It is the one instrument which to a great extent controls the other instruments, the senses. Instruments also and not merely material,



enter into the formation of a product. The excellence of the product and the speed with which it is turned out depend to a large extent on the precision instruments made available to the worker. Without the wheel and the rod a potter may manufacture some pots but they will not attain the finish one expects. With a blunt chisel we may break a stone but cannot carve an image. Likewise with a dull mind or a mind that rests satisfied with worldly things, nothing of value shall materialize. Such minds require chastening: sharpening, subduing and sometimes treating with heat, beating into shape and tempering. The architect does all this with his tools either by himself or sends them to a smith. But the mind being subtle cannot be physically subjected to rigorous tests as you do with these tools.

### ***Sacrifice as whetstone for the mind***

What is the way? Our ancients found out the methods. The scriptures almost said: 'If you want to enjoy, why be satisfied with these mortal things and for a brief period? Go to heaven and enjoy divine imperishable things for a long time. But there are some stipulations. You have to restrict your enjoyments here. You have to acquire divine qualities. You have to acquire merit to go to heaven, to be one among the gods,' and for this they prescribed certain duties, and sacrifices. Ordinarily man thinks of himself and is very self-centred. He hugs to his bosom his wealth and is loathe to part with it. He hoards it and the more he hoards, the more he longs for it. He does not think beyond his own family circle. And when acquisition becomes the one aim of his life he throws propriety to the winds and stoops to any means. Such a tendency is dangerous, nay volcanic. This was to be counteracted. So man was taught to live a life of merit: 'to put by treasures in heaven'. On him was enjoined certain duties: Duty to the parents, to the Rishis, to the devas, to the neighbours and even to the animals, each of which went to liberalize him, to open the windows of his closed mansion of the mind, and brought in new visions. It drew him out of his shell; made him share his things with others and become humane. It helped him rise above the animal level. Thus sacrifice played the part of the fire, the hammer and the whetstone to mould, temper and sharpen the mind.

### ***Meaning of sacrifice***

In this idea of sacrifice is found the seed of self-abnegation, self-denial. For, whatever was considered most covetable on earth by man was enjoined to be offered to the Lord. Man was thus taught to renounce his claims on things desirable, not only ungrudgingly, but voluntarily. May be, there is a desire lurking in the heart of the sacrificer at the outset for gain in the next world, but by degrees when he comes to know that even heavens too are impermanent, that even what he enjoys in those regions

is nothing better than here, these desires for enjoyment here and hereafter are annihilated. Having once learnt to give up, no sacrifice becomes too great for him then. He puts the need of the other man before his own. 'Thus by doing works alone should one desire to live a hundred years here. This way alone is open for you who desire not to be entangled by the effects of action here,'<sup>2</sup> says the Isavasya Upanisad. Sri Krishna forcefully puts this idea in the Gita thus: 'In this world work done other than for sacrifice leads to bondage.'<sup>3</sup>

Whatever may have been the meaning with which the word yajna (sacrifice) was used in the beginning, it has come to have a wider import with the passage of time. The sense is no more restricted to the performance of some rituals in the fire. Sri Krishna extends and amplifies the meaning of sacrifice when he accepts, 'Others there are who sacrifice through gifts, others again who sacrifice through penance, still others who sacrifice through yoga and some others of austere vows are there who sacrifice through study and knowledge of Scriptures.'<sup>4</sup> His list does not end here but what he implies is, that whatever helps man to extend his mental horizon and expand his heart is a sacrifice. All ethics, all morality, all religions teach this one thing: self-sacrifice. Swami Vivekananda says: 'This Nivritti is the fundamental basis of all morality and all religion, and the very perfection of it is entire self-abnegation, readiness to sacrifice mind and body and everything for another being.' Again he repeats: 'First kill your self and then take the whole world as your self; as the old Christians used to say, 'The old man must die'. This old man is the selfish idea that the whole world is made for our enjoyment.' When we say 'Thy will be done' we must have sacrificed our self to the will of the Lord. That is self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, the supreme sacrifice that man can make. Without this sacrifice none can be truly religious. It is becoming completely unselfish. Buddha taught nothing but self-sacrifice. He was ready to offer himself for the sake of even an animal. There was no limit to his self-abnegation.

### ***True self-abnegation***

Swamiji tells us a beautiful story to impress what really constitutes a sacrifice, a summary of which we give here: 'Once the Pandava brothers performed a great sacrifice. Rich gifts were given and much wealth was spent. People were amazed and declared that the world had not seen the like of it before. But there came a little mongoose half of whose body was golden and the other half brown. And, it began to roll on the floor of the sacrificial hall. Suddenly it cried out, "This is no sacrifice." People were astonished, they demanded from it the reason of such an uncharitable remark. In reply it said. "There was once a little village, and in it there dwelt a poor Brahmin, with his wife, son and the son's wife. They were very poor and lived on small gifts made to them for preaching and teaching. There came in that land a three years' famine, and the poor

Brahmin suffered more than ever. At last when the family had starved for days, the father brought home one morning a little barley flour, which he had been fortunate enough to obtain, and he divided it into four parts, one for each member of the family. They prepared their meal with it and just as they were about to eat, there was a knock at the door. The father opened the door and there stood a guest. The poor Brahmin invited the guest and set his own food before him. The guest ate the food but his hunger was not appeased. Then one by one the other members of the family placed their food before the man and when the last morsel was exhausted the guest departed, blessing them. That night those four people died of starvation. A few grains of that flour had fallen on the floor and when I rolled on them half of my body became golden, as you see. Since then I have been travelling all over the world, hoping to find another sacrifice like that, but nowhere have I found one; nowhere else has the other half of my body been turned into gold. That is why I say this is no sacrifice." We are apt to miss the moral of the story if we read it casually as a fable. Every word of it is significant. The setting of the story is in a little village, the persons depicted are poor and the scene is a time of extreme trial. There was no fanfare of a sacrifice; no crowd to applaud, not even the remotest chance of any one knowing it. It was a sacrifice silently done and with no motive. That is self-abnegation; that is true sacrifice. We shall be able to follow better the trend of Swamiji's thought if we juxtapose with it another marvellous utterance of his: 'Even idiots may stand up to hear themselves praised, and cowards assume the attitude of the brave, when everything is sure to turn out well, but the true hero works in silence.'

### ***Utility of self-abnegation***

Now we come to the question of utility of this virtue of self-abnegation. The present generation is very calculative. It wants to know what it will obtain in return for any effort that it may put in. And necessarily it wants the return to be in a tangible form. For, it has lost faith in the existence of the other world; the heavens have no more lure for it. The people of the age want everything here and now. Under the circumstances self-abnegation apparently seems to be of no earthly utility. If one had to sacrifice everything for another, what joy, what pleasure does one derive in this world? But our scriptures declare quite to the contrary. 'By giving up all this may you enjoy. Do not covet any One's wealth.'<sup>5</sup> exhorts the Sruti. What is meant by this? Does it not sound peculiar? Has any one enjoyed by giving up? By way of answering these questions we have to counter question ourselves. Whoever has enjoyed fully? Whoever has said 'I had my fill; I want no more; I am at peace by enjoying the things of the world'? Where is that man who can say he has been all blissful throughout? Let us take that instance in Buddha's life when a young mother felt very sore at the death of her only

child and came to Buddha and prayed to him to revive her darling. 'Mother,' he had said, 'get me some white mustard seeds from a house that has known no bereavement and I shall revive thy child.' Thus he let her find out for herself that sorrow and joy alternated in this universe, and that there was more misery in it than joy. She would not have listened to Buddha if he had given her a sermon when her sorrow was acute; when the wound was fresh. But when she knew for herself, by her search, that not a home existed where there had not been some catastrophe at one time or other, the few words that fell from the lips of the Blessed One were enough to cure her of her sorrow and to impress upon her the evanescence of these worldly objects. Earthly treasures cannot give one joy. Even if the wealth of the whole earth were made over to a man, he would desire still more. There is no end to his desire. Therefore it is only poetic to say that man enjoys by satisfying his desires. Pure bliss is not of this world. And about the bliss of the other world and the state of bodilessness (*jivanmukti*) we can know only from the scriptures and realized persons.

At this stage we may be asked: What then about those who do not believe in a God but in being mere moralists? Even in their case, we have no hesitation to repeat, what we have already stated, that self-abnegation forms the very basis, very foundation of all morality. As long as man says 'I' first and all others next there cannot be any morality. If everyone was to clamour for his own exclusive right and priority there would be no morality but brutality, the strong would overpower the weak, would try to crush them. Swamiji's categorical remarks in this context are worth noting: 'The watchword of all well-being, of all moral good, is not "I" but "thou". . . . Forget yourselves; this is the first lesson to be learnt, whether you are a theist or an atheist, whether you are an agnostic or a Vedantist, a Christian or a Mohammedan. The one lesson obvious to all is the destruction of the little self and the building up of the Real Self.'

Again it is not a fact that men are not aware of this idea of self-abnegation or that it is totally absent in the generality of mankind. The world would have gone to pieces if such were the case. In each individual we can find these two forces, acquisition and abnegation existing side by side. Even in the animals we can observe these traits. The tiger that plunges its fangs in the human blood is ready to give its life for its young ones. The man who commits murder is ready to sacrifice his life to serve his wife and children. Therefore what is wanted is the extended application of this idea of self-abnegation. Do not limit it to the circle of the family, whom you consider your own; or if you have to, make the whole world your family, your own; or 'enwrap everything in this universe by the Lord,'<sup>6</sup> as the Upanisad states. For, as Swamiji observes, 'This renunciation is the only positive power in the universe. The other (acquisition) is only the misguided employment of the power of love.'

And it is a tremendous power — this self-abnegation. All heads bow down before a man of self-sacrifice. It was the ideal of the Brahmana in

the days gone by. He never amassed money, never took to earning money. His profession was to read the scriptures and teach them free — not for any consideration — to those who came to him. The slender gifts that he received went to maintain himself and his students. Thus Brahmanahood symbolised supreme self-sacrifice. His was a life of austerity and penance, and that was why the Brahmana was given so high a place in society.

### ***Self-abnegation versus selfishness***

Our valuation of self-abnegation will not be complete or impressive if it is not contrasted with its opposite acquisition. Before proceeding to say how harmful this acquisition is in spiritual life, let us see how it has helped or ruined the world. History tells us what this demon of acquisition has done when it once entered into the veins of nations. Countries were overrun, blood flowed in rivers, cities were pillaged, people were enslaved and butchered. Man, the living image of God, reduced himself to a being much worse than a despised beast. The seeds of the world wars can be traced to this acquisition, to this selfishness. In the case of religion too it has been the same, only this selfishness went by the name of fanaticism in its case. This is the stark, ghoulish picture of selfishness. Which then will be humanity's choice, acquisition or self-abnegation? On this choice will rest the future of mankind.

In the life of the individual too it is possession that makes man selfish. Selfishness makes for attachment, makes us slaves, and this in turn engenders misery. Our goal is freedom from misery, liberation. Therefore, certainly acquisition is not the way to it. Sri Ramakrishna, with his characteristic simplicity and directness, narrates a parable to show into what turmoil these desires force us: 'It is narrated in the Bhagavata that the Avadhuta had twenty-four gurus, one of whom was a kite. In a certain place the fishermen were catching fish. A kite swooped down and snatched a fish. At the sight of the fish about a thousand crows chased the kite and made a great noise with their cawing. Whichever way the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed it. . . . As the kite began to fly about in confusion, lo, the fish dropped from its mouth. The crows at once let the kite alone and flew after the fish. Thus relieved of its worries, the kite sat on the branch of a tree and thought: "That wretched fish was at the root of all my troubles. I have now got rid of it and therefore I am at peace." ' Likewise man's miseries do not come to an end as long as he does not give up his desires which spring from the idea of possession, of selfishness, of 'I' and 'mine'.

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion, we shall recollect what Swami Vivekananda says about self-abnegation. He unequivocally declares: 'Without this renun-

ciation no yoga is possible.' By giving up this little self alone can we come to know of the Higher Self. Attaining that, man becomes blessed, liberated, and enjoys 'peace that passeth all understanding' even here on earth. What better utility can there be than this? Further, the possessor of complete self-abnegation becomes a power that sheds light on the pathways to God. Such is the virility of the virtue of self-abnegation.

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<sup>1</sup> Seven Lamps of Architecture. Pub.: George Allen, London, Seventh Edition (1898), p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Isa Up. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 3.9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 4.28.

<sup>5</sup> Isavasya Up. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Isa Up. !.

## **SELF-EFFORT AND SELF-SURRENDER (\*)**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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Self-effort and self-surrender, are two meaningful words which are often loosely employed; and are more often than not mistaken as contradictory to one another. Self-effort is usually associated and aligned with the follower of the path of jnana and self-surrender with that of the follower of bhakti. Under such circumstances it will look paradoxical to say that both these attitudes can, nay should be found in a spiritual aspirant. To say that one supplements the other, one completes the other, or one is the corollary of the other will appear as absurd. But many things that look incongruous at first sight, on a superficial valuation or a cursory examination reveal quite contrary natures on more sustained and penetrating investigation. It is so in the physical world as well as in the metaphysical.

It is necessary for us here to know how this popular error, that these two attitudes of self-effort and self-surrender are for two distinctive types of aspirants, crept into the human mind. On first examination there seem to be sufficient grounds for this view. We all know that the path of jnana yoga is a severe one. The aspirant has to begin with the negation of the phenomena. He has to fight every moment with his mind and restrain it from identifying or associating itself not only with possessions and relations but with his body, mind and ego too. This is a tremendous task. Herculean efforts are needed to counteract the propensities that the mind has gathered for ages. And as Swami Vivekananda puts it, 'It is swimming against the current,' the hardest job. Sri Krishna too concurs on this point when he says, 'The difficulties encountered by those who are attached to the path of the Unmanifest are greater.'<sup>1</sup> Mark the word *greater* here. It is only a relative term, a comparison with the other path, that of bhakti. Due to the enormous effort that was required to be employed in order to follow this path, self-effort naturally came to mean the path of jnana. Thus far none will contradict this contention. In the path of devotion, on the other hand, the devotee is required to surrender everything, his body, mind and soul to God. Consequently the laity took it as the path of self-surrender. Neither can it be said that it is a misnomer if the two attitudes are not considered exclusive. All the miscomprehension starts when each is precluded and segregated from the other.

We shall now consider, the how and why of the above statement. We have seen that the path of knowledge requires inordinate efforts and

it appears that there is no ghost of a chance for surrender there. But let us examine the implications of these efforts. A follower of jnana denies that he is the body or mind. That is his discipline. What then does he postulate? What does he consider himself to be? He says he is the Self, the Atman, which is of the nature of eternal purity, knowledge and freedom. But there is a thing called ego which stands as a barrier from an aspirant's realizing this nature. Though one may have overcome the idea for the time being that he is the body he usually identifies himself with this ego, the lower self. But the ego is not the real Self. This ego is to be merged in the Higher Self, the True Self, the Cosmic consciousness; in other words the self-effort which the aspirant was considering as his should enable him to surrender his small self to the universal Self, Brahman, then alone will his efforts have a meaning. Then alone he would have gained his end. If however, he denies outwardly his body but holds on to his ego, the ego may swallow him up, bind him to the world as do the body and mind in the case of the ordinary man. Let us be more explicit: The proper and true knowledge is 'Atman is not the doer; not the enjoyer, not touched by whatever happens to the body.' Now as long as any idea of doing or enjoying remains in the aspirant, he cannot be called a follower of the complete and true *jnana marga*. When nothing is his how can the efforts alone be his? If he is not the body how can the efforts of the body be his? If he is not the mind, how can the efforts of the mind be his? But this does not mean that he should give up efforts but should give up the idea that he is the doer. When it comes to this we pause to ask: What then does it amount to if not surrender, surrender to the True Self, the Universal Self? We have thus seen that actually self-effort and self-surrender go together in the case of the path of jnana.

The other path which we take as that of self-surrender requires perhaps a little less of effort but as much of perseverance and tenacity as the first. But, because the efforts are a little less it cannot be taken to mean that there is no place for self-effort at all. It will be puerile to understand it this way. Even in the physical world, we observe, every living being struggling and making effort for its very life, for its very preservation; and wherever efforts in this direction dwindled in that proportion these beings disappeared from the face of the earth. There is a saying in Sanskrit which impresses this idea vividly: 'Beasts of prey do not enter the mouth of a sleeping lion,' that is to say that even the lion which is considered as the king among the beasts has also to prowl and hunt if it has to live. Without effort nothing can live. We shall cite another saying in Sanskrit which brings out this meaning: 'To a person who is lion-like in self-exertion, Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth reaches. But idlers allude to it as "destiny, surely destiny". Denying destiny do manly endeavour, and if you fail then where is blame for you?' One should apply this advice in spiritual life too. People there may be who think that self-effort on the mundane plane is not only good but incumbent but in the psychological plane self-surrender is the best. It is as good as saying, 'I



shall enjoy life and God will look after my soul, if there is one.' This is the hedonist's view and not self-surrender. This is the greatest pitfall, nay this view is the graveyard of spirituality. It is hypocrisy or at the most deceiving oneself. This way none was saved. It does not settle the issue of life, nor of death. It is neither here nor there.

There is a beautiful parable of Sri Ramakrishna which brings out this kind of hypocrisy in its true colours: 'A Brahmana, succeeded in rearing up a beautiful garden with much effort and great pains. One day a cow entered the garden and began to graze and destroy the plants. The Brahmana was infuriated. He so violently assaulted the cow that it died. He was seized with fear. He thought, "Alas, I, a Brahmana, have killed a cow—which is the greatest of sins." The Brahmana had read a little of the Vedas and remembered that human sense organs derive their power of functioning from the gods and as Indra was the presiding deity of the hand he pacified himself by thinking: "It is Indra who has moved my hand and killed the cow."

'Now the sin due to the killing of the cow came to enter the body of the Brahmana. He said, "Go away, you have no place here; Indra has killed her, go to him." So the sin went to seize Indra. Indra said to the sin, "Wait a little please, let me go, speak a word or two with the Brahmana and come back. Seize me then if you like." Saying so, Indra assumed a human form, entered into the Brahmana's garden and saw him standing close by looking after the plants and trees. Indra began to praise the beauty of the garden in the Brahmana's hearing: 'Oh, what a beautiful garden it is! With what good taste have the plants and trees been planted, each in its proper place.' He approached the Brahmana and said, "Sir, can you tell me whose garden it is? It is so beautiful." On hearing the praise of the garden, the Brahmana was besides himself with joy and said, "Sir, this is my garden; it is I who have planted all these. Come let me show you round." While he was thus taking Indra round and praising himself all the time, he came inadvertently to the place where the dead cow was lying. Startled, as it were, Indra asked, "Whew! Who has killed the cow here?" The Brahmana, who was all the while taking the credit of planting the garden, was at a loss what to say and remained utterly silent. Indra then assumed his own form and said, "Ah! you hypocrite, you have done whatever is good in the garden and it is the killing of the cow alone that devolves on me. Isn't it? Here is your sin of cow-killing. Take it." Saying so, Indra disappeared and the sin came and took possession of the Brahmana's body.' Such is the surrender that some practise. It is therefore better that as long as one tends the body, one attends to the soul also and that more solicitously than one does the body.

Again surrender is not running away from duty. Sri Krishna in the Gita chastises Arjuna for posing as a wise man and trying to escape from his duty to fight the battle. He enumerates several reasons why Arjuna should fight. First of all he says: 'You talk like a wise man but grieve over

those who should not be grieved. For, a wise person grieves not for the dead nor the living.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, 'For a Kshatriya there is no greater good fortune than fight a righteous battle.'<sup>3</sup> Even while one worked one should remember God, for having continuously and constantly kept Him in one's mind, the thought of Him will persist even at the last moments of one's life, which will enable one to reach God. This is the reason why Sri Krishna exhorts Arjuna, 'Remember Me and fight.'<sup>4</sup> Lastly he says, 'Even the maintenance of your body will become difficult if you become inactive.'<sup>5</sup> Doing duty has its own merit. Swami Vivekananda says: 'You should cultivate a noble nature by doing your duty. By doing our duty we get rid of the idea of duty; and then and then only we feel everything as done by God. We are but machines in His hand. This body is opaque, God is the lamp. Whatever is going out of the body is God's. You don't feel it. You feel "I". This is delusion. You must learn calm submission to the will of God. Duty is the best school for it. This duty is morality. Drill yourself to be thoroughly submissive.'

What then is the real meaning of self-surrender? Who can really surrender? These are the burning questions one should seek answers for, before talking of surrender. Self to a devotee means the *jiva* who resides in the body. There is the Lord, Iswara who presides over all the *jivas*. The surrender of this *jiva*, i.e. body, mind and soul, to Iswara is real self-surrender. It is the calm submission to the will of God, without fretting or fuming. It is the implicit belief in the goodness of God and one's capacity to view everything that happens to oneself, whether good or evil, as a blessing from God. Once a great saint, Pavahari Baba, was bitten by a snake. The saint fell unconscious. After he revived and regained his consciousness some one asked him how it was that he who did no harm to any creature was bitten. His reply was: 'It was a messenger from the beloved, the Lord.' That is how a devotee views even a catastrophe. There is no room for egoism in self-surrender; one has nothing to call one's own having submitted everything to the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna gives the analogy of a kitten, depending on its mother, to illustrate self-surrender. The mother cat carries the kitten in its mouth, securely holding it, and sometimes puts it on the master's bed, sometimes on the roof behind a pile of wood. But whatever it does, it does for the good of the kitten. That type of dependence is complete surrender, complete reliance, on God. The aspirant yearns for God and God alone. He does not want anything but God. He does not calculate how much material gain he can reap by his surrender. There is no trading in his surrender. Our Epics like the Mahabharata are replete with stories which delineate such self-surrender. Prahlada and Ambarisha are some of the shining examples they have held before us.

In recent times Sri Durga Charan Nag and Girish Chandra Ghosh, the two householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna stand out, prominently as illustrations of this attitude of surrender. Nag Mahashaya was superb. There was no peer to him in humility, and his love of God was unique. But

the miracle of the Master was Girish Chandra Ghosh. Girish at the time he met Sri Ramakrishna was leading the life of a Bohemian. But by his simple and unbounded faith and absolute surrender he was turned from a sinner into a Saint. How was this alchemy performed? When after meeting Sri Ramakrishna Girish evinced interest in spiritual life and asked the Master how he should conduct thenceforward, Sri Ramakrishna, a teacher *par excellence* as he was, far from making any violent attempt at reform asked him to live as he was living but take the Lord's name morning and evening. But even this simple discipline Girish could not promise to carry out. Sri Ramakrishna then asked him to take the name of the Lord at least while taking his food. This too Girish could not bring himself to assure because he did not himself know in what state he would be at that time. At last the Master asked Girish to give him the 'power of attorney' and said he would do whatever was necessary for his salvation. Girish jumped at the suggestion and gladly accepted it, thinking that he wouldn't have to do anything. But one day when he was talking in the presence of the Master he said 'I would do it'. The Master immediately corrected him. He said 'How can you say that? Have you not surrendered yourself to the Lord? Then say that if the Lord wills I shall do it.' From that day onwards Girish had to remember Sri Ramakrishna before he could do anything or say anything. Girish later on said 'How could I know that giving the "power of attorney" was such a difficult task? Much remains to be understood even now. I find that at some time there is an end to the spiritual practices like japa, austerities and devotional exercises but there is no end to the work of a person who has given the "power of attorney"; for, he has to watch his every step and every breath to know whether he does so depending on Him and His power or on this wicked "I".' So difficult is absolute self-surrender.

Swami Vivekananda remarks, 'If every body can truly live always in this mood, then he is a free Soul. But what really happens is that for the 'good' I have the credit, but for the 'bad' Thou, God, are responsible. Without the attainment of the fullness of Knowledge or Divine Love, such a state of absolute reliance on the Lord does not come.' It is therefore, better to be realistic, measure our shortcomings and exert truthfully and perseveringly to eliminate them; better to be honest than to be simulating reliance on God. Sri Krishna, though in a slightly different context, points out: 'He only has no work whose enjoyment is in the Atman alone whose satisfaction is in the Atman, whose bliss is in the Atman alone.'<sup>6</sup> Only such a person soaked in the thought of God, permeated through and through by His presence, 'who sees God inside and outside need not do any tapas.' Until one attains that stage one should earnestly endeavour, has to put in all efforts.

It is obvious from the above that absolute self-surrender is possible for the highest type of devotee, of which there are very few at any one time. We have to know then as to what is the path for the generality of aspirants. Sri Krishna in the chapter on bhakti yoga in the Gita gives a list

of paths one could follow according to one's capacity. He asks Arjuna, 'Fix your mind on Me, rest your intellect in Me, when you will, without doubt, be able to live in Me. If however, you find it difficult try the Yoga of practice; if that is impossible, work for Me. Even by doing work for Me you will attain the goal. If you are unable to do that also, taking refuge in Me and being self-controlled, renounce the fruits of all actions.'<sup>7</sup> It is necessary to awaken love of God within our hearts by any one or all of these methods. And once divine love dawns there is no danger for the aspirant. Till then it is a hard uphill task and we have to face it. There is no easy way in religion. It is idle fancy to imagine that God's mercy will suddenly descend upon us. If it comes, well and good, but let us purify ourselves to receive it, and do our part of the work. We are well aware of the saying 'God helps those who help themselves,' and we do remember it in our earthly pursuits. Let us apply it in our spiritual pursuit as well. There should be no stint or hesitation on our part to exert, at the same time there should be no eagerness for result. For, God, the all-merciful Lord, under Whom we seek shelter is the Dispenser of all fruits. He will do what is good for us, and when we love God, exertion will not be exertion, it won't be tiresome. If we do all work as a dedication to God, there would be joy in it.

Lastly we come to the question, what exertion or effort is a devotee required to put in. The *Bhagavata*, the bhakti sutras and saints have dealt with this subject at great length and may be separately discussed. Yet it will not be out of place, if we mention here one significant verse of the poet-saint, Kulasekhara Alwar, which exquisitely portrays how every limb of our body can be utilized for, and every function of the body be sublimated by worship and adoration of the Lord. Though much of the charm and beauty of the verse will be lost in translation we give it for the sake of those who cannot follow Sanskrit. Addressing the different limbs the saint says: 'Sing, O tongue Keshava's glory; think O mind of Muraripu; O hands worship Sridhara; hear O ears the stories of Achyuta; O you eyes see Krishna; bend your steps O feet towards Hari's abode; smell, O nose the tulasi-leaf offered at the feet of Mukunda; bow down O head to Adhokshaja.'<sup>8</sup> Every name of the Lord used here is pregnant with meaning, thinking about which man becomes imbued with devotion. Hence, resting our will in the Lord and remembering Him always we should do *sādhana*.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 12.5.

<sup>2</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 2.11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2.31.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 8.7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.17.

<sup>7</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 12, 8-11.

<sup>8</sup> Mukundamala, 10.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF SOLITUDE IN RELIGIOUS LIFE (\*)**

**Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – May 1963; Vol. 50; page 2

The term solitude instantaneously brings to one's mind the majestic Himalayas, with its snow-capped peaks, its aromatic herbs and shady trees, its magnificent fauna and flora, its birds of beautiful plumage, flitting occasionally through the forest lisping sweet notes, its swift flowing currents and cool waters. The Himalayas has attracted and been attracting world-weary souls for ages now. It has sheltered in its bosom hermitages of Rishis; and has preserved its holy atmosphere vibrant with the notes of the Vedic hymns and Vedantic lore, in all its purity of accent as were uttered by the teachers of yore. Away from the bustle of cities it had maintained all through the ages the dignity which strikes awe in man and has compelled recognition from poets. Kalidasa, the famous Indian poet, goes into raptures while he speaks about the Himalayas. He says: 'There in the northern direction lies the godly king of mountains, called the Himalayas, entering the seas on the east and the west (with its rivers); and stands lofty and high, as if it were the earth's measuring rod'.<sup>1</sup> He runs on in this strain for another twelve verses, in his memorable work *Kumarasambhava*. Rarely were the sacred precincts of the Himalayas disturbed in the past by the changes in the political atmosphere or by social upheavals. It was the haven of rest and abode of peace for the restless and the enquiring. In the then national set-up when the aged ones withdrew from the responsibilities of the world, after fully meeting the demands made on them by the world, it was the Himalayas which charmed them by its quietude, vastness and solitude, its picturesqueness and calmness. What does this signify? It signifies two things: that outer calmness and solitude are the essential factors which contribute to inner calmness; and secondly that it is in the lap of nature that man learns to be natural, to shed his artificiality.

### ***Solitude, a prime necessity***

It is possible that the moderns, attuned as they are to the hectic life of the present civilization, and feel one with the ideas expressed in Cowper's poem:

'O Solitude where are the charms  
That sages have seen in thy face?  
Better to live in the midst of alarms

Than dwell in this horrible place.'  
*Alexander Selkirk, Stanza 1.*

may interpret this retirement of the aged to the forest, in the past, as an admission of failure to face the problems of life, or take it as an indication of setting in of senility at a certain age. This argument seems to make a travesty of facts. For it is a matter of conjecture alone as to how many senile people can leave their homes, at the fag end of their life's journey willingly, to take to a harder and uncertain life. Moreover, it is security and not insecurity that men seek even in the bloom of youth, at the height of their vigour and strength — even if we take the present trends as the standard. What to speak then of the infirm old age? This postulation therefore falls to the ground being baseless. On the other hand it stands to reason to presume that there was a genuine desire in those who relinquished the responsibilities of the world, when at the height of their fame, to know the Reality. It was almost an impossibility for them, moulded as their lives were in the hoary tradition, to forget or lose sight of the aim of life. The goal of life kept constantly renewing and reviewing before their minds' vision so that when they had reached the point of satiation in their desires, rather attained dispassion towards them having been discriminately engaged in fulfilling them, they no more sought to be entangled into the maze. Solitude was what they longed for: to think of the Creator, Who sent them into this world, from Whom they were separated and unto Whom they yearned to be united again.

Religion apart, solitude is a felt need in all thoughtful avocations. It may be the mathematician working at his table, the scientist busy in the laboratory or the student at his studies, in every case solitude is a thing that can never be dispensed with. Observe how prudently, the diligent students shut themselves up to pore over their studies! How deliberately the scientists go into seclusion to think and work out their hypotheses! When we see that even in secular life isolation is at times necessary, we must pause to ask: how much more conscientiously should not religious aspirants seek loneliness?

### ***Solitude of the mind***

Solitude again can be classified into three types: solitude of the forest or mountain caves, solitude of the mind and solitude of the Atman (Self or Soul). Although outer calmness aids man to attain inner peace, the outer aids alone without the active cooperation of the mind are of little avail in spiritual life. The mind must first be educated to dissociate itself from its desires and then cultivated to think of the Supreme. It is said that man may obtain the grace of the preceptor, the grace of the Lord and also be blessed with holy company but if he has not the grace of his own mind all this will not help him in any way spiritually. Bhartrhari in his *Vairagyasataka* most tellingly describes how tenaciously the mind

clings to desires: 'My food is what is collected by begging that too insipid and taken only once, bed the bare earth, body the only servant, clothes the old tattered rags, yet, alas, the desires for enjoyment won't leave me.'<sup>2</sup> So strong are the desires of an uncultivated mind left to associate freely with the objects of the senses.

It is a long way to attain solitude or one-pointedness of the mind but on that account none need be dispirited, none need lose heart. As we have instances of despondency, we also have models of grit and grim determination. It is said of Vacaspati Misra, the writer of the well-known commentary *Bhamati* (on the Brahma Sutras), that at a very early age he took to the writing of this commentary. After he had begun his work he was married to a young and beautiful girl. But he was so absorbed in his work that he did not know when the day dawned or the night came. He did not know who looked after his bodily needs. When tired he would lay down his body to rest on the mat near his writing desk and when he got up he commenced his work. His wife, however, dutifully and without a murmur looked after his needs. This went on for years and years until he had finished his work. Then when he lifted his head to look at the world he saw beside him a grey-haired woman. He asked her who she was and when he came to know that she was his wife and that she it was who had served him faithfully all through, he out of gratitude made her immortal by naming his *magnum opus* after her. This is an instance of one-pointedness of the mind. From this we learn that all that is wanted is aptitude and resolution. The same concentrated mind if given to God can contact Him too. That is how the saints and sages attained realization.

Sri Ramakrishna is very emphatic about having recourse to solitude for the purpose of practising spiritual disciplines. He says that we should practise disciplines in the forest, in a secluded corner of the house or in the mind. Again he remarks 'If you ask me how long you should live in solitude away from your family, I should say that it would be good for you if you could spend even one day in such a manner. Three days at a time are still better. One may live in solitude for twelve days, a month, three months, or a year, according to one's convenience and ability.' This advice he gives to householders who cannot devote all their time to God. What then to speak of aspirants who have forsaken their all for the sake of God? And what type of solitude does he prescribe. He exhorts: 'When you practise discipline in solitude, keep yourself entirely away from your family. You must not allow your wife, son, daughter, mother, father; sister, brother, friends, or relatives near you. While thus practising discipline in solitude, you should think "I have no one else in the world. God is my all".' Continuing Sri Ramakrishna remarks, 'The mind is like milk. If you keep the mind in the world, which is like water, then the milk and water will get mixed. That is why people keep milk in a quiet place and let it set into curd, and then churn butter from it. Likewise, through spiritual discipline practised in solitude, churn the butter of knowledge and devotion from the milk of the mind. Then that butter can easily be

kept in the water of the world. It will not get mixed with the world. The mind will float detached on the water of the world.'

To control and train the turbulent mind we have not only to withdraw it from the senses and sense-objects but also direct it towards God. For, the mind requires some support to cling on to. You cannot make a vacuum of the mind all at once. The moment you try to do it all types of thoughts will enter it. The one thing the mind foolishly believes is, that it will be able to hold on to the gross objects. It envelops that object with its veil of attachment. But soon it gets disillusioned, the attachment snaps due to the loss of or estrangement from the object of attachment. Then it is that frustration sets in. Again and again the mind tries to settle itself on gross sense-objects and sensations, and repeatedly it is disillusioned. With each blow thus received man withdraws into himself little by little until at last he leaves off hankering after worldly things and completely turns inward for solace. With some this process takes a long time, with some others a few disillusionments are sufficient to awaken them to reality.

### ***Taste for solitude***

A taste for solitude is generated when the clamourings of the senses are silenced and the senses themselves are rudely shocked out of their gear by the internal blows the mind receives or the external sufferings the body endures. When this taste develops and is directed to God a great part of the battle of life is won. But mind being what it is requires constant watching. Discrimination is the only watchdog man has to prevent his sheep of thoughts from straying on to forbidden ground. With discrimination alert and taste for solitude active we can brace ourselves for the life's fray. If ever anyone by the grace of the Lord is able to quieten his mind and develop taste for solitude it will be the height of folly on his part if he does not utilize the occasion to naturalize this taste, make it his own. This solitude is man's highest treasure. It will not be preposterous if we say that it is in a way the bestower of health as well. For does not man everyday of his life long for rest and sleep? What is deep sleep? What keeps him company there? Alone, alone he is in that state. Yet he is not afraid to go into it. This sleep is the redeeming factor. It soothes many a shock, embalms many a wound and helps the body to recover its strength. It is the solitude of the deep sleep that restores much of the energy that man wastes while in his waking and dream states.

The question is how to cultivate the taste for solitude. No hard and fast rule can be laid down about it. Broadly speaking it can be obtained by practice and dispassion. Dispassion can be arrived at by discrimination. What is this discrimination? Between what are we to discriminate? 'Two types of objects, the good and the pleasant, come to man. The wise one weighing the pros and cons of both, chooses the good alone as it



outweighs the pleasant, but the shortsighted one thinks only about the life on this earth and accepts the pleasant,<sup>3</sup> says the *Kathopanishad*. The discrimination is to be between the good, which leads one to liberation and pleasant, which makes for bondage. How to know the one from the other? There are two ways: one is to listen to the words of the scriptures and the wise, other to learn by experience. How to distinguish between the two experiences is told us by the Bhagavad Gita: 'The joy which in the beginning appears like poison but in the end tastes like nectar is *sattvika*, for it is the outcome of the pure mind's intense contemplation on the Atman. The joy one experiences due to the contact of the senses with the sense-objects which appears as nectar in the beginning but turns out to be like poison in the end is termed *rajasika*. There is again a third type of pleasure called *tamasika* which in the beginning as well as in the end deludes man by inducing sleep, lethargy, and negligence.'<sup>4</sup> Herein we get clear indications as what to expect when we follow a certain path. Whatever joy one gets from the contact with the outside world, is of a transient nature and produces an unfavourable reaction. It saps our energy. In other words whatever ennobles one's character, expands one's heart, augments one's forbearance, increases one's love to fellow beings, that is the path of dispassion and the opposite is the way to bondage.

### ***Solitude a great cure for artificiality***

Many opinions have been expressed for and against solitude. We need not discuss here their merits or demerits. Sufficient it is to say that, according to one's experience whether sweet or bitter one expresses one's opinion. Again there is good and bad in every thing. A man may read the *Bhagavata* by the light of a lamp and another may forge a document by the same light. Can we then blame the light for the latter's abominable act? Similarly if some few tend to become beastly in their behaviour after retiring into solitude, the blame need not be placed at solitude's door. There is, however, one good thing in solitude which all must concede, viz. one cannot deceive anyone else except oneself in solitude, but in society you cannot be so sure. Observe the world and we can see how artificial it has become. Convinced though we be of a wrong being done, or a wicked act being perpetrated, we either wink at it or try to justify it. Again society frames some norms, some rules, and every one pretends to follow them. Let them get the least chance of evading these rules and it is doubtful whether ten to one could withstand the temptations of utilizing the opportunity to aggrandize, to enrich, or to earn name for themselves at others' cost. Man's character gets exposed at that time. In the solitude of his mind, he may harbour much ill-will towards a person but in society he shows much affection towards him. The better a person can hide his ill-feelings and odious thoughts and look polished and good, the more he is thought of in this world. It is therefore said 'judge a man not by the great works he does but by his little acts.

The former he does for praise, the latter unwittingly reveal his character'. Let a person go into solitude for a few moments daily and analyse his own acts and we believe that it is possible that he may turn a new leaf in his life. The main point is, the feverish activity which engages man of the modern times all his day and all his life leaves him no respite for introspection. He is more a machine, more like an automaton than a thinking individual. In this age of specialization man's thinking also is done by some one else for him. He only follows the dotted line. And when this happens it is easy to be led astray than when one thinks for himself. Many of man's artificialities would disappear if only he is a little introspective.

### ***Solitude of the Atman***

Now we come to the solitude of the Atman, which is the natural culmination of the other two. For no calmness, no peace that depends on created things, can be eternal in duration. Man seeks spirituality for attaining permanent release from the three sorts of miseries, viz. *adhyatmika* (misery due to bodily and mental ailments), *adhibhautika* (caused by elements or created beings), *adhidaivika* (caused by supernatural agencies). Each of these miseries, however, can be mitigated or got rid of for the time being by other agencies also; for instance, misery due to bodily ailments can be cured temporarily by medicine; mental worries due to any wants may be overcome by fulfilling that want. Likewise other miseries too can be overcome for a time by other helps. All these, however, keep on repeating and hence there is that great desire to be entirely free from them. We have to take recourse to the spirit, the Atman the uncreated Being to go beyond misery. When we realize the solitude of the Atman, and find bliss in the Atman alone we are free. When no other object remains to attract us, 'when we find that the Atman alone has become all this, where is infatuation and where is misery for him who sees oneness everywhere,'<sup>5</sup> says the *Isavasyopanisad*.

In spite of all this when man is alone he gets frightened. What is the cause of fear? The reason is not far to seek. Man's congenital tendencies are too strong. He has long been accustomed to live in groups, in constant turmoil. He is addicted to the charms of society so much that he finds it difficult to live alone. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Can a man who has been used to the turmoil and the rush of life live at ease if he comes to a quiet place? He suffers and perchance he may lose his mind.' So mere intellectual grasp of the Upanisadic truths is of no avail. A constant rumination over them besides the actual practice of solitude is essential to become fearless. The *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* gives a description of how Prajapati also, at the beginning of creation was deluded and afraid. It says: 'In the beginning this (universe) was only the self (Viraj), of human form. He reflected and found nothing else but himself. . . . At this he was afraid. Therefore even now a solitary one is

afraid. He then reflected, "as there is none else than myself what am I afraid of." On reflecting thus fear left him, for what was there to fear? It is from a second entity alone that fear comes.'<sup>6</sup> Sankara in his commentary on these verses says: 'Because this Purusa was endowed with a body and limbs, he was afraid of his extinction, owing to a false notion. And as in our case the way he adopted to get rid of this false notion, which was the cause of fear, was by acquiring the right knowledge of the Atman.' Sankara here stated that we too are deluded by the false notion of our extinction with the death of the body and the only way to get over this fear is to know our Atman in its true perspective. How to have the right knowledge? By reflection in solitude on the teachings of the Srutis. The *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* says elsewhere, 'Wherever duality is seen there only one sees another, one hears another. But when this duality vanishes then who will see whom, who will hear whom.'<sup>7</sup> All our troubles and miseries start with seeing duality and all disappear with the realization of Oneness, which is in the Atman.

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<sup>1</sup> Kumarasambhavam.

<sup>2</sup> Vairagya Sataka, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Katha,2.2.

<sup>4</sup> Bhagavad Gita, Chap. 18, 37 to 39.

<sup>5</sup> Isavasyopanisad. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Br.Up., I,iv,1&2.

<sup>7</sup> Br. Up. ,II.iv.14.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLS IN SPIRITUAL LIFE**

**Swami Paratparananda**

*Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – April 1964; Vol. 50; page 634*

Symbols and ensigns have been in vogue from time out of mind. They have not become obsolete with the advance of time or science. Probably today more symbols or signs are used in the world than ever before — nations have their particular flags, military personnel have their ensigns, manufacturers have their trade marks, governments have their seals, political parties have their symbols. The signs and symbols, connected with a nation remind one of its peculiarity, its status in the world, its contribution to the welfare or hardship of the world. The manufacturer's trade mark is an assurance of the genuineness of the products, if they, the products, have proved their usefulness. So also every other emblem brings with it the memory of the thing it represents so vividly as if its whole history had been presented to us in a nutshell.

Another type of sign has, traditionally, come to be recognised as representing a particular sentiment or wish — the white flag in battle indicates surrender; an olive branch is taken as a token of disposition on the part of the bearer for reconciliation; red signals mark danger ahead and green presents a clear way. There are again some distinctive signals which the crew of an aircraft have to understand in its approach to an airport. In short, symbolism is weaved into the fabric of man's life ancient or modern, scientific or unscientific.

Religion also has adopted this method of symbolism and is as old as religion itself. For instance we have in the Rg Veda, which is acknowledged as the oldest written record of spiritual revelations, the *Purusa Sukta* where the Divine is conceived of as a person with millions of heads, myriads of eyes and legs, pervading all the universe and also transcending it.<sup>1</sup> Human beings are on the highest scale of evolution according to any estimate, not excluding that of biological science. Most of the people, therefore, can understand God only as a person. The conception of the ordinary man cannot go beyond it. He can understand Him as a benevolent, beneficent, munificent Person, always ready to help His children. This is an anthropomorphic conception no doubt, but that is nearest to the Truth. But here again the Vedas excel. The very idea is put in a way as to mean more than what meets the eye. It does not mean that an actual form like that of a person was conceived by the Rishis. The real meaning is that the Divine manifests in all beings of this universe and is beyond also. This is made clear in the next two Rks. 'This whole

universe that we see is only that Purusa (the Divine). That which is past, and that which is yet to come that also is only Purusa. He is again the Lord of immortality. He manifests in the form of this world for the experience of the *jīvas* but on that account this is not His true essence. All this is only His power, Purusa transcends all. This universe and all its beings are only one fourth of Him, the rest immutable portion rests in His own bright self-illuminated nature.<sup>2</sup> Here again the proportion is only figurative, just to show that the expanse and extent of the Purusa is immeasurable. He is infinite — that is conveyed by these hymns. So though the idea appears in the beginning as anthropomorphic, a little deeper investigation belies this theory.

Again, this symbolic methodology was used both in the Yajñas or sacrifices and Upāsana or meditation as well. In the Aswamedha Yajña, for instance, the body of the sacrificial horse was considered to be the body of the Virat Purusa, the Cosmic Being. Every part of it represented symbolically some aspect of the Cosmic Being — the dawn was represented by the head of the horse, the sun by its eye, the air by its vital force, the fire by its open mouth, and so on. So even while the sacrifice was being conducted the goal aimed at was to impress the constant thought of the Divine. Man lives usually on the mundane plane; very gross are his enjoyments. So the Vedas said that he can have better and more enduring enjoyments if he laid store in the other worlds. He would go to heaven and live happily for a long time there if he did certain sacrifices. They even said that he became immortal, in the sense that the duration of the life there was infinite compared to his mortal span. Among sacrifices the Aswamedha was pronounced to give the highest fruit — attainment of the highest heaven, the Brahmaloaka. But it entailed heavy expenditure and collection of rare ingredients which were possible only for kings and emperors. On the other hand there were some obligatory sacrifices to be done by a Brahmana. The life of the Brahmana was a life of abstinence and sacrifice. He had to perform every month two sacrifices known as Darsapurnamāsa, for a long period of thirty years, from the day he 'lights the fire, or in some cases for the rest of his life. Each sacrifice took two days; and on these days he had to abstain from meat and other carnal pleasures. Besides he had to perform the Agnihotra sacrifice, twice daily, once immediately after sunset and again just before sunrise, all through his life. Again there were other sacrifices which a covetor of heaven would have to do. The sacrifices, the performance of which required observance of great austerity and self-control, helped to cleanse the minds of the sacrificers. The purified mind in its turn reflected the truths of religion clearly. So though the sacrificer might have started with the most earthly of motives, he would soon get over them and long to know about the Eternal Truth. This was the purpose of the *karma kanda* of the Vedas — to sublimate man by leading him gradually from gross to the subtle.

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In respect of Upāsana one proceeds from subtle symbols to subtler ones. Once, Narada approached Sanatkumara, one of the first four recluses and a mind-born son of Brahma, and requested to be taught. Sanatkumara wanted to know what Narada already knew. Narada replied, 'I have studied the Vedas, the puranas, the itihisas' and so on. In brief, every science that was then extant was known to him. But he added 'I know only the mantras (the words, and their word-meanings) but do not know about the Ātman. I have heard from persons like you that a knower of Ātman overcomes grief. Respected Sir, I am still under the sway of pain and pleasure. Please ferry me across this ocean of grief.'<sup>3</sup> Knowing the meaning of the texts of the scriptures is not knowledge of Ātman. It does not make one perfect; does not free one from the pairs of opposites. Narada felt it keenly in spite of all his knowledge of the different Sastras.

'This (that you know) is all name only. Meditate on it as Brahman,'<sup>4</sup> says Sanatkumara. By meditating on it one can reach to whatever is named. 'Is there anything higher than name?' asked Narada. 'Definitely there is. Speech is greater than name. Through speech only you understand everything. Meditate upon speech,' replied the preceptor. Narada again asked whether there was anything greater than speech. The preceptor by and by instructed that mind was greater than speech; will was greater than mind; *chitta* was greater than the will; meditation was greater than *chitta*; knowledge was greater than meditation, and so on until he came to *Prāna*. Narada who was every time questioning whether there was anything greater than what the teacher was describing, failed to ask whether there was anything greater than *Prāna*. For he thought *Prāna* as represented by Hiranyagarbha was the final reality. Though the disciple did not ask, the preceptor knowing his worthiness, of his own accord instructs Narada not to be satisfied with the knowledge of the *Prāna*, that there was something higher than *Prāna* which was to be known. One does not go beyond disputes (*ativādi*) by knowing *Prāna*. One should seek the Truth to become a true *ativādi*.

Narada seeks refuge again with the preceptor and desires to be illumined. 'That which is the vast, that is bliss. There is no happiness in these little things. In the Great one alone is bliss. That vast one is to be known.'<sup>5</sup> And what is that vast one? 'When one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, knows none other, that is the Great one.'<sup>6</sup> When one goes beyond duality one knows the Great one, Brahman.

In this episode, mentioned in the Upanisad, we see how gradually Narada was asked to seek higher and higher truths. Though Name (the *Sāstras*) was not itself Brahman, he was asked to meditate on that as Brahman, then on speech and so on. These were projected as symbols of Brahman, and such meditation had their own results, far superior to the mundane things. But they were not final. The finale was to be reached only in Brahman. Why did not the preceptor immediately enlighten the

disciple? The truth is elusive, almost impossible to understand and there is the danger of misunderstanding when taught to immature minds.

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A brilliant example, of how difficult of assimilation subtle truths are, is found in Prajapati's instruction to Indra and Virochana in the *Chāndogya Upanisad*. The story runs thus: Once Prajapati, the Lord of the Universe, announced that he who knows the Ātman, which is untouched by taint, unageing, deathless, free from sorrow, devoid of hunger and thirst, whose desires are true, whose wishes are facts, attains to all the worlds and obtains all his desires. This declaration led the gods and demons, who were naturally hankering after enjoyments, possessions and overlordship of the worlds, to depute their kings Indra and Virochana to learn that knowledge from Prajapati. It was the tradition in those days to go to a teacher with all humility and serve him. The preceptor would, when he thought that they had been sufficiently long with him to understand the knowledge he was going to impart, ask them with what intention they were living with him. Prajapati also followed the rule. He allowed them to serve him and stay with him for thirty two years, on the completion of which period he asked what they wanted to know. They expressed their desire to know about the Ātman. Prajapati said: 'That Purusa which is seen in the eye that is the Ātman; It is immortal; It is fearless; It is Brahman.'<sup>7</sup> The purport of Prajapati's instruction was to make them understand that, the Ātman seen by the Yogis of controlled senses and annihilated desires, is Brahman. But the disciples, because of their want of penetration, understood Ātman as the reflection seen in the eye. The symbolical expression was overlooked and the literal meaning was taken.

The disciples — however it should be said to their credit, to make sure that what they understood as the Ātman was correct — asked whether it was the same Atman which is reflected in the water and in the mirror. Prajapati, not to embarrass them by saying that they were completely wrong, said that it was so and that was 'seen in all these'. Ātman being the innermost of all beings and nearest to the mind could be seen inside all. But again the disciples missed His point and took it too literally. Prajapati again tried to impress on them that they were mistaken, by asking them to see their reflection in water first as they were — with beard and hair unkempt and dressed in ascetic robes — and again after they had shaven and adorned themselves. Yet by then they were so convinced of their grasp of the subject that they did not take any particular note of the instruction. They took their outer form to be Ātman and left.

Virochana had no speck of doubt as to the clarity and veracity of his

understanding. So he went and proclaimed to his subjects that the body was Ātman and that It should be well fed and taken care of. Indra on the other hand, when he had gone a little distance, reflected over the two images he had seen. He thought, 'If this body is Ātman, then it too changes — when the body is well-adorned Atman becomes adorned, when well-clothed It becomes clothed, when cleansed It looks clean, likewise when the body is blinded Ātman also becomes blind, when the leg becomes lame Ātman also becomes lame, if so with the death of the body Ātman also dies. Then where is the result promised by Prajapati?' Thus cogitating Indra returns. Prajapati asks: 'You had gone well-pleased with yourself along with Virochana. What brings you now?' Indra replies, 'Lord, You did not mean, that this reflection was Ātman when you said that which is seen in the eye is Ātman.' 'No, certainly not;' replied Prajapati, 'live another thirty two years with Me and I shall teach you.' Indra did so, and Prajapati again spoke to him: 'That which you see enjoying many things in the dream that is Ātman.' Indra was satisfied and started for his abode. But he mused, 'Though this Ātman is not affected by the modifications or maimings of the body yet it also is sometimes as if sorrowful, as if weeps. So this also cannot be the Ātman that the Lord meant.'

A second time he returns and asks to be enlightened. Prajapati asks him to live with him again for another thirty-two years, at the end of which He says, 'that which you see in deep sleep, when even dream is not seen that is Ātman.' Indra departed delighted at having known, what he considered as the secret about Ātman. But again doubt assailed him. And he returned and said: 'Lord, in the state you have described now to me, I do not see anything as to say "This am I" neither do I see these creatures. It is almost dark, everything seems, as if, destroyed there. In this I do not see any of your promised fruits.'<sup>8</sup> 'Yes, it is as you say; reside another five years with Me and then I shall teach you,' exhorted Prajapati.

At the end of the period Prajapati said: 'It is true that what you perceived with your eyes and other senses, as also the mind, evaporate into void in deep sleep. You should not be sorry for it. For this body (senses and the mind) are beset by death. It is subject to destruction, but it is the abode of Ātman, which is incorporeal, and immortal. As long as the Self is embodied and identifies itself with the body there will be pain and pleasure. It is unavoidable. Pain and pleasure do not touch him alone who transcends the body idea.'<sup>9</sup> A glimpse of which one feels in deep sleep.

We have now seen how the same advice was differently interpreted by different persons, due to the lack of acumen to understand and absence of the required purity of mind to reflect. That is why a graded course and proper symbols are a necessity in the beginning and in most cases for a long time.



## IV

Raja Yoga is another method of approach to the Divine. To attain *samādhi* by control of the life-breath, *prāna* is the way prescribed therein. Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras at one place says, *samādhi* can be attained also 'by devotion to Ísvara.'<sup>10</sup> Then he gives some idea with regard to Ísvara. But the idea to be remembered is to be condensed or named. So he posits, 'His symbol is Om.'<sup>11</sup> Swami Vivekananda explaining this *sutra* says: 'Every idea that you have in the mind has a counter-part in a word; the word and thought are inseparable. The internal part of one and the same thing is what we call thought. No man can, by analysis, separate thought from word.' Sounds may vary according to languages but the relation between the sounds and thought is a natural one. Swamiji further states, 'Symbol is the manifestor of the thing signified, and if the thing signified has already an existence, and if, by experience, we know that the symbol has expressed that thing many times, then we are sure that there is a real relation between them. Even if the things are not present, there will be thousands who will know them by their symbols.' Millions of aspirants have verified the efficacy of this word 'Om'. In the Upanisads it is said that this Om represents the Universe, past, present, and future and even that which is beyond the three times; beyond the universe.<sup>12</sup>

Patanjali assures us that a repetition of this *mantra* along with meditation on its meaning<sup>13</sup> leads to the desired end, *samādhi*. How does this repetition of a *mantra* purify the mind? A scientific mind will naturally pose this question. We have to recall here that man is born with a load of *samskāras*, inborn tendencies. What has made these tendencies, rather how are these inclinations created? They are created by us. Whatever we think, speak or do, will and feel disturb the mind-stuff. Swamiji has compared this mind-stuff to a lake. When we throw stones in the water of a lake it is disturbed. Ripples are seen to spread all around. The stones or pebbles go and deposit at the bottom. Likewise the thoughts that we think and actions that we do have an immediate effect of disturbing the tranquillity of the mind, and has a later, more enduring effect as an impression deposited in the recesses of the mind in the form of a tendency — tending to arise again when suitable opportunity presents itself. In Swami Vivekananda's words, they leave a furrow, as it were, in the brain and after a time when the actions are repeated man is compelled to move along this line. Any attempt to deviate from this beaten path is vigorously resisted by the mind. These are called *samskāras*. How then are we to overcome these *samskāras*? Sri Ramakrishna used to say a thorn that has pricked you must be extracted by the aid of another thorn. The evil *samskāras* are to be got rid of by good acts, and good thoughts. By repetition of a *mantra* and meditating on its meaning the mind is secured from sliding back into its old ruts. Fresh *samskāras* are formed by such constant meditation which overwhelm the evil ones, if the practice has been long and intense. The

mind being rid of dross inclines naturally towards tranquillity.

The path of Raja Yoga, no doubt, is through psychic control. It prescribes the control of the *prāna*,<sup>14</sup> vital force, — which Swamiji calls the energy in the universe — as a means to purify the mind-stuff. This is accomplished by the regulation of breath as a first means. The Yoga *sāstra* gives detailed instructions as to how long one has to breathe in, how long to hold it in and how long one should take to expel it. Swami Vivekananda suggests that one should, instead of simply counting numbers to measure time, repeat a holy name, which is the symbol of the Godhead, while doing so, so that one's mind may all the while remain in the thought of the Divine.

Again if this idea appears too abstract for the aspirant, Patanjali suggests alternatives. He says, 'Concentration on an Effulgent Light which is beyond sorrow; or on the heart that has given up all attachments to sense objects; or anything that appeals to one and is good,'<sup>15</sup> is also helpful.

## V

With the passage of time when man became more and more extrovert, when he could no longer abide by the duties laid down for him due to various reasons, when ritualistic sacrifices became blind observances and soulless, Hindu teachers developed this idea of symbolic representation of the Godhead so that it could be easily understood even by the common man. Images, and *sālagrams*, and temples and shrines to house them came into being. Images were not looked upon at any time even by the most ignorant Hindu as mere stone or wood. To him they were the reminders of the Conscious Divine, symbols of Divinity. It is easy to criticize and condemn the image-worship of the Hindu as idolatry, but why does not one, who condemns such worship look to his own creed. Every sect, every religion worships a symbol. But each one thinks that his own symbol is a true one, a correct representation of the Godhead and that all others are in the wrong. This is a perverted view of things and most abject form of self-love. There may have crept some abuses into such worship. But abuses of all sublime thoughts and practices are seen in every sect and every religion. That is no reason to condemn the practice itself.

One has to take the good and leave out the evil. If it has done a little harm at some time owing to the evil hands into which the practice had fallen, it has done infinite good also. Further, as long as man is man, more inclined towards flesh than soul, he requires all the other outer paraphernalia as well to hammer into his consciousness the existence of a Supreme Being which he should not forget. It is fruitless to speak against symbols. They have contributed enormously to the religious culture and spiritual upliftment of man and will continue to do so in future. Masses

require them and even the majority of the intellectual classes cannot dispense with them without trepidation as to the consequences. The only thing we should guard against is that such worship does not take a dogmatic shape to enforce one's symbol or image on others.

We shall conclude with Sri Ramakrishna's exhortation regarding image-worship: 'But why clay? It is an image of spirit. Even if the image is made of clay, there is need for that sort of worship. He who is the Lord of the Universe has arranged all these forms to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.' What is said of images is also true of symbols.

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<sup>1</sup> Rig Veda, 10.7.90.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 10.7.90.2&3.

<sup>3</sup> Chandogya Up. 7.1.3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 7.1.4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 7.23.1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 7.24.1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 8.7.4

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.11.2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 8.12.1.

<sup>10</sup> Yoga Sutras, 1.23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1.27.

<sup>12</sup> Mandukya Upanishad, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Yoga Sutras, 1.28.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1.34.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1.36 to 39.

## **SOME PRECEPTS OF THE HOLY MOTHER (\*)**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

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The Holy Mother is not an unknown personality today; her name has crossed the geographical boundaries of India and gone across the oceans. Her personality has already influenced a great many lives and still continues to do so. Her message is spreading and showering benediction on and solace to many a parched soul in the burning desert of this world. Her task of saving humanity began, we can say, even during the life-time of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna pleaded with her to aid him in his mission of saving humanity, which was forgetful of its true nature and was getting itself submerged in the quagmire of this world. After the passing away of the Master, the magnitude of her work increased, the limits of her sphere of action widened. The responsibility of the restitution of the world devolved on her. And this she silently did. Though she shunned all lime-light and preferred seclusion, she could not totally shut herself up for long. When was it possible to hide a fire under a bush? When was it possible to restrain the sweet mountain breeze from bringing its soothing effect to everyone? At first people began to come to her in trickles, but soon this stream gathered in strength and became a torrent. Even residing at her native village at Jayarambati, which was not easily accessible at that time, she could not stem the tide of the stream of devotees. People reached her there too. Later in her life, she actually longed for some respite but that was not vouchsafed to her. In disease and tribulations too, she had to fulfil the importunities of her disciples. This extensive influence of the Mother attracts one to know more about her personality. The intensive effect of her teachings sets one thinking to peep, probe and penetrate into those ambrosial words.

We shall take up a few of her precepts and try to understand their meaning, in the light of her life; for there is no other commentary more clear in its perspective and more precise in its definition on the exhortations of a great spiritual teacher than his or her own life. The precepts are corroborated, substantiated and exemplified in their lives. This is the main difference between a talker and a teacher: that the talker talks but never practises whereas the teacher practises and out of the fullness of his heart he speaks, not for the sake of speaking but out of compassion for seekers. They (the teachers) never advertise their greatness. They act as humble servants of humanity though commanding the respect of all. Their lives make them great not merely their precepts. Precepts we have in galore; books we have in abundance; instructors we have in plenty; but like the flame alone that lights another light, so it is

the life alone that influences, modulates and transforms another life.

The Holy Mother did not lecture, nor give discourses. But what has come down to us as her precepts, has been a collection from the diaries of disciples, instructions given by her to them who were genuine seekers, and will have a direct bearing on the life of the aspirants since they too may find themselves identically placed. They have an intimate connection with life as it is lived by the common people. Yet therein is embedded a profundity of thought that shall dazzle the imagination of the staunchest intellectual.

### ***How to obtain peace of mind***

Let us take first her last exhortation. She said, 'If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own!' How many times have we not read this! How many times have we not talked of it to others! But have we understood the implications of this teaching in full. In this epitome is a grand essay which can unfurl the sails of our boat of life, regulate its direction, and at last land us safe in the haven of rest. This exhortation seems to be so simple, but let us try to put it into practice, then we shall understand how difficult it is! It is a job for a life-time. Nay, it may require several lifetimes.

Now, what is it that makes us find fault? First of all it is jealousy. Most people cannot suffer the affluence of others. They cannot bear to see anyone rising head and shoulders above themselves in any sphere of life, be it learning, wealth, activity or others. They try to pull him down to their level and in order to do that they try to pick holes in the other's armour, spread even false rumours. Man stoops to any means to bring discredit to a neighbour who is rising in the eyes of the people.

Secondly it is vanity that compels us to find fault. We have so many vanities. Vanities of health, wealth, learning, purity, piety, and a host of others. One possessing any one of these is likely to look down upon another less fortunate soul. He must find fault, otherwise how could he rise in the estimation of people. But the really pure and pious never look down upon anyone. It is the vain alone that try to make capital out of others' shortcomings.

Thirdly hatred and spite play a great part in finding faults, hatred for some wrong done, or imagined to have been done and the natural desire to wreak vengeance. Lastly there is the habit of fault-finding itself which if not rooted out at the very outset will grow into a banyan tree impossible of being destroyed afterwards. Therefore when one seeks to find fault with others one must understand that one has, one or the other of these defects in oneself. Mother therefore says: 'See your own faults.' She means more than that. The moment our mind thinks of another's defect we leave our mind open to its influence. Unconsciously we harp on

that subject and the mind gets clouded with that idea. Let us illustrate it by a parable of Sri Ramakrishna: 'There was once a Sannyasin, a holy man, who sat under a tree and taught the people. He drank milk and ate only fruit, and made endless "Pranayamas," and felt himself to be very holy. In the same village lived an evil woman. Everyday the Sannyasin went and warned her that her wickedness would lead her to hell. The woman, unable to change her method of life which was her only means of livelihood, was still much moved by the terrible future depicted by the Sannyasin. She wept and prayed to the Lord, begging Him to forgive her because she could not help herself. By and by both the holy man and the evil woman died. The angels came and bore her to heaven, while the demons claimed the soul of the Sannyasin. "Why is this!" he exclaimed, "have I not lived a most holy life, and preached holiness to everybody? Why should I be taken to hell while this wicked woman is taken to heaven? " "Because," answered the demons, "while she was forced to commit unholy acts, her mind was always fixed on the Lord and she sought deliverance, which has now come to her. But you, on the contrary, while you performed only holy acts, had your mind always fixed on the wickedness of others. You saw only sin, and thought only of sin, so now you have to go to that place where only sin is."<sup>1</sup> There is a tendency today to take these tales and parables lightly as mere fanciful stories. But if we do so, without understanding the moral intended to be conveyed by them, we do it at a great risk to our spiritual well-being.

Again, the psychologists are of the opinion that most of our impressions are coloured by the taints of our own minds. In their language, they tend to be subjective. To a great extent this seems to be correct. A story is told that once Duryodhana set out to find a virtuous man; travelling through all the known lands of the time he could not find a single good man. Dharmaraja, on the other hand, sought to find a wicked person but returned sadly disappointed. One who is virtuous finds virtue everywhere and one who is wicked sees wickedness everywhere.

There is a psychological angle also, from which we can view at this teaching. Patanjali, the great Indian psychologist, says that yoga (the way to union with God) is restraining all the modifications of the mind-stuff.<sup>2</sup> In other words it means to steady the mind like the flame of a lamp in a windless place; to calm the mind like the waters of a still lake. All teachers are agreed on this point that unless the mind is stilled there can be no clear vision of the Ultimate Reality. As it is, the very fact of our embodiment implies that we have come to work out some of the effects of our actions in the past incarnations. And these being somewhat good we have been born as human beings. So all the efforts should be directed to calm the mind and reach the goal. If, on the other hand, we are every moment of our wakeful existence throwing the mind into convulsions by thinking about the defects in others when will the mind be steadied? Rather it will add to our bad tendencies and sow the seeds for further involvement into this world.

There are two sides to this teaching: the prohibitive and the injunctive. 'Seeing our own faults' leads us to correct ourselves. It should not be construed to mean that we should brood over our sins. The Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna were strongly against such a negative attitude. They used to say that one who says constantly that he is a sinner, becomes a veritable sinner. The attitude they encouraged was: 'I have perpetrated many sins, but I shall commit them no more. Lord help me to perfect myself.' This is a positive approach to life.

Further, forgiveness and forbearance have more value than all remonstrations. The great ones were ever forgiving even to the most sinful. Jesus did not hesitate in accepting the loving services of a fallen woman who was penitent. He blessed her and absolved her of her sins.<sup>3</sup> Buddha did not have any scruples to take his food in the house of a courtesan when it was offered with love, adoration, and faith. The life of the Holy Mother too bears testimony to several such incidents. Once, at Dakshineswar, while taking food to Sri Ramakrishna, a woman, of not pure character, requested the Holy Mother to grant her the privilege of carrying the food to the Master that day. Mother, though she knew about the character of the lady, handed over to her the plate of food. But later coming to the Master's room she found him sitting before the plate unable to partake anything of it. Mother understood the cause but appealed to him to somehow take the food that day. At this, Sri Ramakrishna asked the Mother to give her word that she would not send his food through anyone else in future. She replied, 'No, I cannot promise that; for if anyone wants something of me, I feel I must grant it. But anyway I shall try my best to carry your food myself.'

Another time Golap-Ma, a woman devotee, was scolding a maid-servant. When the Holy Mother asked her the reason for it, she said in a pique, 'What is the good of telling you, Mother? You cannot see the defects of others.' And what was the Mother's reply? 'Well Golap, there is no dearth of people to see faults of others. The world will not come to a stand-still if I am otherwise.' That was the Holy Mother. Every one was her own child and like a mother, she could not see the faults of her children. Nay, for a mother even the faults of her children are its ornaments. And these great ones could transmute those faults into merits. Swami Vivekananda in a hymn to Sri Ramakrishna sang, 'O Lord, Thou dispeller of illusion, Thy name, pure and auspicious, convertest sinfulness to purity.' Was it mere poetry? He observed the Master closely for more than five years and saw for himself many lives being thus converted. Later, even after the Master's passing away, he saw that merely the Master's name did this work of conversion; wondering at this phenomenon did he then spontaneously burst out into this strain.

A question may now be posed: how will then people come to know of their defects if they are not pointed out to them, since the majority of people are under the impression that what they are doing is right? This question can be answered if two conditions are fulfilled. First of all, we

must obtain the light for ourselves before bringing it to others, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say. Secondly we must ask ourselves whether we really, from the heart of our hearts, wish the well-being of the object of our criticism? Do we love him? If we get an affirmative answer for these questions then only we need take the trouble of pointing others' defects. Otherwise we will only, as already stated, increase our load of karma, add to our burden. Again it may be noted that the Holy Mother was not alone in stipulating this prohibition. Christ said: 'Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?'<sup>4</sup> Swami Vivekananda was categorical when he said, 'you cannot reform by condemnation.' Sri Ramakrishna saluted even the street-walker as the image of the Divine Mother. Many such instances can we come across if we look into the lives of other great teachers also.

How then to get rid of this disease of fault-finding? Remove the causes, says the physician, and the disease must leave. All these causes, such as jealousy, hatred, vanity should be washed off our minds. These wicked thoughts can be counteracted only by cultivating the opposite good thoughts such as love, sympathy and humility,<sup>5</sup> says Patanjali. When jealousy arises in the mind curb it down by love, that is why the Holy Mother says: 'Learn to make the whole world your own.' These ideas of jealousy, hatred and the like are there because we think ourselves as separate from one another. 'Wherever you find duality there these ideas of seeing, etc., are bound to be,'<sup>6</sup> says the Brhadaranyakopanisad. And in another place the same Upanisad says, 'As long as we see a second so long is there fear.'<sup>7</sup> Unless we try to find unity, 'learn to make the world our own', these differences will be there. There are two ways of attaining unity or getting together. First is to recognize and feel that we are one big family, of which God is the father. Second is to realize or at least firmly be convinced that we are sparks of the same divinity or better still to accept that the Divine Being alone manifests in so many forms. All our Upanisads help us to attain such a conviction, such knowledge. The Katha Upanisad describes: 'As the one fire entering into the world shines in so many forms, so also this One, the Indwelling Spirit of all beings, resides in the hearts of all and yet is outside them all.'<sup>8</sup> It is Brahman alone that has become everything. When this knowledge is put into practice we are 'learning to make the world our own.' And when we attain perfection in this knowledge, 'when one sees all beings in oneself and oneself in all beings, then one does not feel aversion for anything.'<sup>9</sup> This is the acme of spiritual realization and this alone can bring us everlasting peace. This is the goal and in this realization alone the meaning of the words of the Holy Mother 'none is a stranger my child, this world is your own,' is fulfilled.

### ***Religion and worldly afflictions***

The Holy Mother said to a disciple: 'It is not a fact that you will never face dangers. Difficulties always come but they do not last for ever.'



They pass away like water under a bridge.' This is possibly an answer to the problem that faces man. The puzzle how to get rid of dangers and difficulties: dangers such as old age, disease and death, difficulties such as poverty, bereavements and the like.

Man tries all other methods of overcoming them and then thinks God may help him. We see large concourse of people in temples, synagogues, and churches. Not all who go to these places want or seek God. Most of them want everything else but God. Some want wealth, others want their diseases to be cured and still others would want something else. Very few really and truly want God for His own sake. Sri Krishna has very aptly analysed these types of devotees in the Gita: 'Four types of people worship Me: the afflicted, the seeker, those with desires, and the wise. All these are good people. But the wise alone truly loves me. He is My own self.'<sup>10</sup> Remembering God in any way does good. But one should not think, that because one has turned religious, because one believes in God, all one's difficulties will be removed and it will be a smooth sailing afterwards, that one will lead a happy life. Not at all. For what is life? It is existence. And existence can only be felt in a body. Body is a material thing, a combination of the five elements: space, air, water, fire and earth. Being a combination the body is subject to changes like growth, decay and death. All these changes are not pleasant. Again the same sensations may be pleasant today and unbearably pain-giving tomorrow. Take some common examples: On a hot day a cold bath will be very welcome but the same cold bath on a wintry night will be most undesirable. A good dish, when the body is in a healthy condition is beneficial to its growth but when it is in a diseased state the very same dish acts as poison. So also with all our enjoyments and miseries. They have origin and disappearance, and last only for a small duration of time. We have therefore to endure them, says Sri Krishna.<sup>11</sup> That is what the Holy Mother reiterates when she says, 'they do not last for ever.' It all goes to prove that as long as the body lasts pain and pleasure must be suffered. They are like the shadow of the body. You cannot jump away from the shadow. So an eternal happy life is a contradiction in terms like cold fire or hot ice. It may be a wonderful imagery as an ending to a fairy tale but in the sordid reality it has no place. This the Holy Mother wants us to know thoroughly and unmistakably.

What then is the use of taking to religion if it is not able to take us across the ocean of grief? The answer is, it cannot give you any temporary relief. For this there are other methods, in disease there are the medicines to cure, in poverty there is the charitable man to assist. One comes to religion when one wants the complete cessation of the miseries of the world. He does not expect that taking to religion he will be freed from all bodily discomforts. To him the body remains only as the instrument to cross over to the other shores of this samsara. He comes to know of his own Self, the Atman, and like the bridge, allows miseries and enjoyments to pass under him but not to overwhelm him. Sri

Ramakrishna cites the instance of the Pandava brothers as exemplars of true spiritual aspirants remaining unmoved and undeterred, in spite of all calamities. He describes, 'They did not lose their God-consciousness even once. Where can you find men like them, endowed with so much knowledge and devotion?' The Holy Mother too is insistent to drive home the point that religion is not the gateway to physical enjoyment nor it is the opium of the intellectuals; it is hard work but the fruit is true and solid as none other is.

Nothing outwardly changes in the holy man, he appears to suffer from bodily ailments like any ordinary person, but with this difference that while the latter grieves over the body and its afflictions, the former is indifferent to them. Again the holy man is not afraid of death. For him even the direst calamity is a messenger from the beloved. Ramaprasad, a great poet devotee of Bengal, realizing God as Divine Mother sang:

*'I have surrendered my soul at the fearless  
feet of the Mother,  
Am I afraid of Death any more?'*

and in the last line of the same song he says, 'Ready am I uttering "Victory to Durga" for the life's last journey.' By realizing God one goes beyond pain and pleasure which in reality are only of the body; the body consciousness is overcome.

### ***God-realization the aim of life***

'To realize God and to remain immersed in His contemplation is the aim of human life,' said the Holy Mother when she was asked as to what the aim of life was. God for many is an unknown entity, whereas the world is very tangible, very real. The mind is drawn to this world easily and naturally. How to direct this mind from the known world to the unknown God? And why should we do it? Because knowing the world we remain in the world but knowing God, realizing Him, we get out of it. Again the known world is elusive, deceptive and destructive. Observe the world, the boy of today grows into the youth of tomorrow and with his flaming youthful imagination what exquisite ideas of life does he not form! What vistas of vision does he not see! Everything is brilliant and everything is glorious before him. He stretches both his hands to gather those enchanting things. But before he is aware, before he has enjoyed his fill, before he has fulfilled his ambitions the noonday of youth is past; the slanting rays of the waning sun of youth have already hit his life. Soon the darkness of decrepitude and old age are on him. He cries for light, but wherefrom should he get it? He had strayed away from the path of light and preferred darkness. Soon he hears the hoarse laughter of approaching death. At this man trembles like an aspen leaf. He thinks: Is this all? What have I gained? Is this the end of all my planning? Where

have gone all those which I considered as my own? There they were till now. Yes, life passes away like a wink of the eye; the life-span of man compared to the endless time is a drop in the ocean. All, man considered as his, he has to leave behind at the call of death. The world thus successfully enchants, eludes, deceives and destroys man. Naciketa, though a boy, saw through the game of this world and would not be caught into its net. Boldly, therefore, does he say to Yama, 'O lord of death, these things you offer, viz., divine damsels, chariots, long life and wealth are of dubious value. Moreover they sap away the energy of the senses. Even the longest life that you can offer is naught compared to the eternity of time. Therefore keep these things to yourself.'<sup>12</sup> Naciketa further adds, 'Tell me what happens to man after death — the subject about which there is so much controversy but to know about which is imperative. Apart from this secret knowledge, Naciketa does not desire anything.'<sup>13</sup> Here is the discrimination which the Holy Mother asked her disciples to practise so that they could realize God.

### ***Japa and concentration of mind***

Once an attendant was reading to the Holy Mother some of the letters written by the disciples. Many of them were complaints that they could not concentrate the mind. After some time she said in a rather animated voice, 'The mind will be steadied if one repeats the Name of God fifteen or twenty thousand times a day. It is truly so. I myself have experienced it. Let them practise it first; if they fail, let them complain. One should practise Japa with some devotion, but this is not done. They will not do anything, they will only complain, saying, "Why do I not succeed." Many of the religious seekers give up religion and turn agnostic when they find that a little effort does not help them to realize God. Realization is a far cry, if we but get a little real taste for the Name of God we would be blessed. But it is also true that the dawn of the day of God-vision is not far when once man has cultivated an intensive love for God. Even for getting this taste, concentration of the mind is imperative. And there is no other way to it than by intense practice. The words of the Holy Mother in this regard ring with the voice of authority as she herself spent almost the whole of her life in regular and continuous spiritual practices. The religious life therefore is not escapism as is thought of in some quarters nor is it meant for the weak. Here one is reminded of another exhortation of the Holy Mother, 'Youth is the time when intense efforts are to be made for realization of God!' The call comes to us like those of the ancient Rishis. Let us heed the voice and make our lives worthy.

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. VIII, Pages 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Yoga sutras 1.2.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. St. Luke 7. 37-50.

<sup>4</sup> St. Luke 6.41.

<sup>5</sup> Yoga sutras 2-33.

<sup>6</sup> 2.4.14.

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<sup>7</sup> 1.4.2.

<sup>8</sup> 5-9.

<sup>9</sup> Isa Up. 6.

<sup>10</sup> 7.16; 7.18.

<sup>11</sup> Gita 2.14.

<sup>12</sup> Kathopanishad 1.26.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1.29.

## **SOME REVELATIONS OF THE DIVINITY OF THE HOLY MOTHER**

**Swami Paratparananda**

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – December 1964; Vol. 51; page 407

BEING SIMPLE seems to be a natural trait in the spiritually advanced souls. Rather,— as Christ said, 'Unless ye be as children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,' — this child-likeness is an incumbent precursor to the vision of God, realization of Truth. For Truth is simple and unless one becomes simple one cannot see It. But this simplicity, this guilelessness baffles people. For they are often after the grand and dazzling things, which are complex and more complex. A simple village life is thrown off for the more complex and involved life in the cities, for the varieties of entertainments it provides, the attractions and enticements it holds forth. In a similar way the life of the world with its sweet and subtle changes, overtakes man quite unawares and slowly but surely captivates him and draws him into its fold and then smothers him there. For the sake of variety and change man runs after novelty and forgets the Simple, the Truth, and fails even to recognize the harbingers of peace and realizers of Truth. They go unnoticed.

For a long time people of Calcutta used to consider Sri Ramakrishna as a mad man, because he never recognized the value of anything except in and through God; because he, for a long time, was completely oblivious of his surroundings in His contemplation, in short, because he did not follow the norms of the mundane world. Even the so-called enlightened who used to visit him used to say that he was dull and had no faculty for organization. Today we see how misled these wiseacres have been. Their names and all they boasted of are forgotten whereas Sri Ramakrishna has come to live in the hearts of millions for ever. But such is the delusion that this complexity of the world spreads over us, that we take what is transitory as eternal.

Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna, better known among the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna as the Holy Mother, was likewise unknown as a Teacher of mankind in her own right, for a considerably long time. Even some of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna could not know about her high spiritual stature till after a few years of the Master's passing away. They in the beginning respected her as the consort of their Guru. But soon they came to know that she was no ordinary mortal.

Sri Ramakrishna paid her the highest respect by worshipping her as the embodiment of the Divine Mother one day at Dakshineswar, as a culmination of his spiritual practices. He showed great deference to her

wishes and held her in great reverence. The Master alone knew who she was. We shall narrate here some instances to show how he regarded her. Hriday, who was the Master's attendant for several years, in his last days with the Master was becoming selfish and money-minded. When his wishes were thwarted by Sri Ramakrishna's refusal to be a tool in his hands for his earthly ends, he got annoyed, became abusive and ill-treating. Seeing this growing tendency in Hriday Sri Ramakrishna warned him, 'You may be saved if the person residing here (showing his own body) is angered, but beware if she (the Holy Mother) gets annoyed. Not even, Brahma, Vishnu or Maheswara can save you then from her wrath.' On other occasions Sri Ramakrishna referred to her as the Goddess of learning, Sarada, come to impart knowledge. But in spite of repeated assertions to this effect, coming from good authorities, man often forgets to recognize divine personages. This is what Bhagavan Sri Krishna too opines in the *Gita*: 'The ignorant disregard Me, who am embodied in a human form, not knowing My higher nature as the Great Lord of beings.'<sup>1</sup> How few recognized him as the Lord! Even Arjuna his closest associate was unaware of this fact until Sri Krishna himself revealed this secret to him.

Why does this happen? The Lord when He embodies behaves like any other human being. He has hunger and thirst, His body has disease and decay. How then can any one distinguish Him unless one has penetrative and divine eyes (*divya caksus*). Yet, simple and unsophisticated people recognize Him more easily than others. For instance, in the Krishnavatara, the simple cowherds and cowherdresses of Vrindavana were blessed with that wonderful insight to probe into the mysteries of the divine. What a wonderful prayer it is with which the Gopis address the Lord — the Gopigita of the *Bhagavata*! The garland-weaver of Mathura and Kubja, the maid-servant of the palace of Kamsa, could discover Him because they were simple and had faith. In the Ramavatara Shabari, the forest-woman, could find Him out.

That is the secret of divine personalities. They come. Yet, very few can find them out unless they reveal by themselves their true nature. In Sri Ramakrishna, people according to their evolution in spiritual life, saw a good man, an unspoilt child of nature, a great saint or an Incarnation. People came in contact with him often, witnessed his ecstasies and so it was easy for them to come to any one of the above conclusions. But the Holy Mother was almost a recluse. She was so modest that she never stirred out of the Nahabat, where she stayed while at Dakshineswar, when anyone was about, so much so that it is said that when some one asked an officer of the temple whether the Mother lived there, he seems to have replied, 'Yes, we have heard that she lives here, but have never seen her'; so unknown did she live. Her prayers, her practices were all in secret. Her ecstasies and *samadhis* were unknown to others except a few

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<sup>1</sup> Gita, IX, 11.

of her close women devotees. How then could anyone know of her true nature?

The first revelation of her lofty spiritual disposition comes to us from the eye-witness Yogin-Ma, a woman disciple of the Master.

Though the Mother used to have her moods of rapt absorption, perhaps she was not aware of them herself. So one day she asked Yogin-Ma, 'Dear Yogin, please speak to the Master that through his grace I may experience samadhi. On account of the constant presence of devotees, I hardly get any opportunity to speak to him about it myself.'

Yogin-Ma reports, 'I thought it was quite right and I should carry out her request. So next morning when Sri Ramakrishna was alone in his room I went to his room and after saluting him in the usual way communicated the Mother's prayer to him. He listened and suddenly became grave.' When the Master was in that mood none dared utter a word, so after sitting for a while the devotee left the room. When she returned to the Nahabat she found the Mother seated for her daily worship. She opened the door a little and found her in a strange mood, now weeping, now silently laughing. Yogin-Ma says, 'Tears were rolling down her cheeks in an unceasing stream. Gradually she became very much absorbed into herself. I knew she was in *samadhi*. So I closed the door and came away.' This was, however, not a solitary instance; like the Master she would naturally go into an exalted mood at any incident that happened to be of some spiritual significance. After the Master's passing away these moods were more frequent in her. In Vrindavana she had the experience of the highest state of *samadhi* as well.

We have seen already that the Holy Mother had the highest spiritual realizations and was times without number absorbed in divine moods. But that does not preclude us, from inquiring if she was aware of her Divinity. Instances there are in her life which show that in spite of all her efforts to hide herself, sometimes, unknown to herself some words escaped from her lips that intimated that she was perfectly aware of her Divinity. At such moments 'she would compare herself to Lakshmi, the divine consort of Narayana, speak of herself as the Mother of all beings or admit her capacity to confer liberation on any one.' But often the very next moment, perhaps thinking that she was giving out a secret which people did not understand, she would change the topic to make the utterance appear as a casual remark of no consequence. It was left for the discerning disciple about her to take proper cognizance of the words. The disciples were given the chance to know what her real nature was. And if they had the good fortune to possess enough acumen they would know her, in spite of her later protestations to the contrary.

Here, we shall give some instances from the Mother's life in illustration of this: Once a woman disciple of the Mother went to her Calcutta residence. She was resting after lunch. The disciple sat by her and began to fan her. Suddenly she heard the Mother speaking, addressing no one in particular, 'Well, you all have come here. But where

is Sri Ramakrishna?' The disciple in her memoirs writes, 'I replied, "We could not meet him in this life. Who knows in which future birth we shall be able to see him? But this is our greatest good fortune, that we have been able to touch your feet." "That is true, indeed," was the brief remark of the Mother.' This was a rare revelation by the Mother, who liked to pass herself off as an ordinary mortal.

But whenever earnest devotees wanted to know who she was, she would ungrudgingly own to them her Divinity. "Once a devotee worshipped her feet and kept them on his head. Mother remonstrated with him and said, 'the Master himself stays in the head, God Himself sits on the thousand-petalled lotus there.' The disciple at once asked, 'Mother, if the Master is God Himself, who are you then?' Without hesitation the Mother replied. 'Who else should I be? I, too, am the Divine Mother.'"

On another occasion she installed and worshipped her own portrait along with that of the Master at the Ashrama, at Koalpara, a place not far from Jayarambati.

To another devout disciple, who had heard of her being spoken of as the Primal Energy, as the Universal Mother and so on, and was eager to know it from her own lips, she did not withhold the secret. 'Yes, it is so', was her answer.

There is an interesting episode in the Mother's life which happened after the Master's passing away. The Mother was once going to Jayarambati from Kamarpukur. Her little nephew, Shivaram, was following her with a bundle of clothes. When they were in sight of the village of Jayarambati some thought crossed this young boy's mind. He fell back. The Mother did not appear to notice it and went on. But as she missed his footfalls she looked back and saw him standing motionless at a distance. With surprise in her tone she asked, 'What's the matter Shivu? Come along?' Shivu didn't budge; instead he called out, 'If you would tell me who you are, I shall come.' Mother wanted to put him off, so she said, 'Who should I be? I am your aunt.' Unsatisfied, he replied, 'Then go, there you are near your house. I won't proceed further.' It was evening, Mother was worried as to what to do with the boy. There was no time for the boy to reach Kamarpukur before nightfall, neither will he go to her house. In this predicament she could not leave him alone. Still, she said, 'Look at that. Who, indeed, can I be, my dear? I am a woman, your aunt.' Shivaram, however, was insistent, 'Well, you can go then,' said he. At last the Mother had to yield. She said, 'People say I am Kali'. 'Is it true', asked Shivaram. 'Yes,' replied the Mother. Delighted at that Shivaram said, 'Now let us go.' Then only did he follow her into the village.

Another time a devotee was taking leave of the Mother at her house at Jayarambati. As she was bidding him good-bye she remarked, 'Call on me,' but the next moment she said, 'Call on the Master. He is all.' Lakshmi Devi, the Master's niece, who was present on the occasion said to her, 'Mother, why should you confuse them thus?' Mother replied, 'Why? What have I done?' Lakshmi Devi said, 'Well, Mother, did you not



say, "Call on Me" and then bewilder him by saying, "Call on the Master "? 'Why?' argued the Mother, 'Calling on the Master is calling on all.' Lakshmi Devi, however, was not distracted. She impressed on the devotee 'that what he had heard from the Mother was very valuable; that it was a declaration, as well as a direction by the Mother herself, that he should call on her.'

An incident which happened at Rameswar when the Mother visited the temple of Shiva at that place may be recalled here. When the Mother saw the uncovered emblem of Shiva at the temple she said to herself, 'Ah, It is just as I had left It.' Devotees, who were around her, inquired, 'What did you say, Mother?' Mother at once, as it were, drew into her shell, 'Oh, a meaningless something escaped out of my lips.' A revelation was made to the devotees and they believe that one who came as Sita, the faithful consort of Sri Ramachandra, and worshipped the emblem of Shiva on the coast of Rameswara, had again descended as the Holy Mother.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, a house-holder disciple of the Master and a first-rate genius, had a unique mystic experience about the Mother. He was one of those of the Master's disciples who did not at first think highly of the Mother's spiritual greatness; so it will all the more compel our attention.

Some years after the Master's passing away Girish, along with some of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, went to Jayarambati. That was the first time that Girish was taken to Holy Mother's presence. Girish prostrated before her, stood up and looked at her once and immediately left the room. He sat in the outhouse musing and serious. Others who were with him were astounded at his behaviour. Then one of them, Swami Niranjanananda, asked him the reason for such a change. He requested the Swami to inquire of the Mother if she was not the person who had appeared to him in a dream in his nineteenth year. Mother sent him word that she was. Then Girish narrated his experience: how he was seriously ill in his nineteenth year; how he was given up for lost by the attending physicians; how one night in that condition he dreamt that the whole firmament was lit with a divine light; how it proceeded towards him and took the form of a Goddess; and how the Goddess put something in his mouth, resembling the consecrated food of the Lord of Puri, uttering soothing words and vanished. He remembered the Goddess again as soon as he had seen the Holy Mother, he said.

It is necessary to point out here that the Mother was most unassuming all throughout her life though she came to know who she really was. There was not a trace of egoism in her, nor was there in her any tendency to carve out a position in society. Therefore, she had no patience with people who were not convinced of her divinity, but out of mere plagiarism would call her the Divine Mother. She would silence such of them effectively and pointing to the picture of the Master say, 'He is everything. He kindly gave me shelter at his feet.' Only the deserved got

an opportunity to have a peep into her personality. To others she behaved like an ordinary mortal ever busy with the household chores — dressing vegetables, scouring vessels, cooking and the like. Sri Ramakrishna referring to this modest trait in her used to say, 'She is like a cat covered with ashes, hiding its true colour.'

Until the centenary of her birth, in 1953, very few people outside the pale of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna knew about the Holy Mother. She became known to the world during the celebrations. Today people from distant parts of the world go on pilgrimage to the place of her birth, Jayarambati, and thinking about her feel blessed. A nunnery to provide shelter for women who are in earnest to pursue the life of renunciation has been started in her name on the centennial day of her birth not far from Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. Shrines dedicated to her are being built now. Slowly, the Mother is revealing herself more and more.

## SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND INNER TRANSFORMATION OF MAN

**Swami Paratparananda**

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MAN'S EXISTENCE is a fight with nature. Nature tries to limit him, to imprison him in its net. Science in the outer world and religion in the inner fight for freedom from the freaks of nature. Man manifests his vitality when he fights against a morbid set of dogmas or creeds, whether scientific or religious. He expresses intelligence when he puts forth honest doubts against set beliefs. But if he stops with this mere negative approach he misses the very fundamentals of life. He becomes a mere negative man, which is not a healthy sign of a thoughtful mind. Man's mind must have some support, some positive proposition to work upon. Whether in science or religion man takes a proposition that has already preceded him and experiments with it, before discarding it. Whereas this reasonable method is faithfully adhered to in the empirical sciences, it is sadly neglected in the religious field. The reason is, however, obvious. A man of science has to work on things external whereas a man of religion is to work on himself, on his own mind. A man of science need not necessarily be pure in character but for the man of religion nobility and purity of character are the very foundations. Those are his instruments by which he will have to work. He must be above the temptations of the world. It necessarily, therefore, follows that few are really qualified to attain that plane where they could cross the barrier of the mundane to have a peep into the transcendent. But such is man's presumption, that he thinks by mere ratiocination, empirical facts and a few experiments conducted on the body of human beings, as on guinea pigs, he would know the whole of the transcendental Truth. Rather, he believes that religious experiences are no more than some nervous diseases, produced by excessive emotionalism and are of no value at all.

There has been this allegation repeated Almost parrot-like *ad nauseum*, against religion that it 'is the opiate of the people', without even trying to plumb the depths of the religious life. Again, this statement is often supported by Freud's maxim, 'I never doubted that religious phenomena are to be understood only on the model of the neurotic symptoms of the individual'. Not satisfied with the term 'neurotic

symptoms' Freud's present disciples would have it as "psychotic symptoms". It is not known whether they understand that there is something apart from the body. It is doubtful whether they believe in a mind exclusive of the body. If we follow the trend of their arguments it comes to this: where can there be any mind if there is not a body — and a gross body at that? It is a great hurdle, however, for them that they cannot deny the dream experiences, as a result of which they have to concede a sub-conscious state for the mind. Perhaps they ignore the state of deep sleep as worth no notice as nothing phenomenal is experienced in that state.

Some modern psychiatrists have begun to experiment on human beings, to find out the effect of certain drugs, in order to prove their proposition that religious experiences are no more than some chemical changes that take place in the brain, which can be induced by drugs as well. They put forward certain statements and statistics describing the findings of their experiments. They quote from some of the sayings of some aspirants of India as well as of Christianity who seemed to have had spiritual experiences under the effect of hemp, opium, wine and the like. Undoubtedly there is some effect of these on man. He may have some experiences while under their effect but to point them out as the same as religious experience is something absurd. If these statements were from genuine seekers we have to presume that they have been distorted to suit the needs of the interpreters, if not we have to take it that the aspirants themselves were misguided. While no one denies the deadening effect of morphia on the pains of the body for the time being, the return of the pain as soon as the effect of morphia passes away is also an undeniable fact. As the drunkard experiences a certain type of enjoyment forgetting all his sorrows so too an opiate or an addict to such type of drugs may have some experiences, may find some joy. But an opiate is an opiate and to equate those experiences to those of a man of God is to say that the joy that the pig experiences in wallowing in mire is the same as that of the man who is bewitched by the beauty of a panoramic view or enthralled by a fine piece of music. What we imply by this is, that spiritual-like experiences are not the criteria of religion, but spiritual experiences are. The former are spurious, are like soap bubbles without any substance in them, hollow as the experienter himself so far as spirituality is concerned.

It is significant at this stage to note that appearances are often deceptive. Take the crow for example; how it resembles, in its build and features, the sweet song bird cuckoo! But what a difference in the cries of the two birds! The cry of one is harsh and irritating while the sound of the other is sweet and soothing. Similarly the experiences induced by drugs and the like lead man down into the realms of morbidity and later to addiction to the drug itself, which will be very difficult to get over afterwards. Often also it leads to moral turpitude and hence the ruin of the body and mind; while real spiritual experience transforms man. It is

not, however, a physical transformation. To use the language of Sri Ramakrishna, 'he does not grow two horns', but his character gets ennobled.

## II

How then to distinguish between the spurious and the genuine, between a charlatan and a saint? As already stated above the real spiritual person develops in character. He sheds all enmity; discards all desires; is content with whatever comes in his way unasked. He does not manifest any pomp or glamour; does not hanker for name and fame. He is always ready to help people in their troubles. He is ever immersed in the thought of the Most High. He loves all and hates none. Even the bite of a deadly snake is a message from the Lord for him. In short he has no unripe ego in him; whatever he does goes to add to the benefit of society, nay for the benefit of mankind as a whole.

It is this unripe ego that divides man from man, society from society and nation from nation. It asserts itself in several ways. Love of power is one of them. Almost everyone wants to rule over somebody. Even in a family, a society, or a nation that is what happens — the tendency to control and to rule. But who does actually rule the hearts - of people? Swami Vivekananda once said it is the child that rules supreme in the home. And is it not a fact? So, unless we be like children, simple and straightforward, pure and unsophisticated it is impossible to gain the hearts of people. And this is possible when man has gone beyond the idea of I and mine, — a condition which is possible only when one has realized the Supreme, realized God.

On the other hand, what do we come across in the history of the nations all over the world — not only in the present times but from the beginning of history? It is strife and stress, war and bloodshed. Strife between sections of society, between the haves and the have-nots; war among nations for supremacy, for possession of land not rightfully belonging to them and the like. That is what earthly power begets --- tyranny. It is the ego — the I and mine, we and ours — that perpetrates these crimes. The ego is present in every human being in one form or other — the ego of possessions, the ego of caste, the ego of heredity, the ego of learning, the ego of race, the ego of beauty of one's person and so on. Now the purpose of religion is to turn this self-centred ego into a God-centred one, turn the unripe ego into the ripe one. That is what religious experience does. Can the experiences induced by drugs do this?

Let those who assert that religious experiences are only some chemical reactions taking place in the brain, which can also be induced by drugs, give us an example of a person who has attained to selflessness, pure and simple, who has gone beyond all desires by these drugs and then put forward his claim. If they say that they have just begun to

experiment and it will take time to develop, to arrive at a perfected man through these means, is it not better to ask them not to confuse the minds of the simple folk by their unfounded arguments in the name of science, till such time that they are in a position to prove it by results? We think it will be good to do so. Also it would be good for mankind not to heed this prattle until such time but to follow the well-founded path, on which myriads of saints and sages have already travelled and who in their turn are there as beacon lights to illumine the way for humanity. Let us remember the proverb, 'Rome was not built in a day'. The Rome of character which forms the very basis of religious life cannot be formed by a few drugs. If it could be, why is there so much tension in the life of the affluent West — we mean here those who entirely depend upon matter and science for their support? Do they like to live under tension? Do they like being neurotics? Why have the tranquillizers failed to effect a lasting cure on the nervously overwrought? Until these questions are satisfactorily solved let us not be carried away by these empirical tests which prove nothing conclusively.

If the experiments are just to decry religious experience, as their purpose seems to be, such people will have to meet the challenge put forward above if they have any claim as scientists. Again there are experiences and experiences. We cannot put them all in one category. Let us remember that this thought of drugs being able to produce peculiar experiences was not unknown in India. Witness for example what Patanjali says in the Yoga Sutras: 'Occult powers are attained by birth, drugs, *mantras*, austerities and *samadhi*.'<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this takes these "psycho-scientists" by surprise: that drugs can induce certain powers also, not to speak of mere vague experiences. The yogis, however, never encouraged running after these occult powers. Rather, they were cited as impediments to one's spiritual progress, as pitfalls to be avoided from one's path.

That experience which steadies man's wisdom, dispels all doubts about the existence of God, breaks all ties that bind man to this world, that alone is genuine religious experience. What is steadiness in wisdom? Sri Krishna describes it at great length in the second chapter of the *Gita*. A few characteristics of such a person can be cited here to illustrate the heights to which a spiritually advanced person rises. Sri Krishna says, 'He who is unperturbed in difficulties, and unattached to happy circumstances, from whom attachment, fear and anger have taken leave is called a man of steady wisdom.'<sup>2</sup> Probably each one of us might have experienced this type of wisdom for a little time; a time when we did not desire anything, did not feel any attraction for anything, did not fear anything, and felt an all-pervading love towards every being. But the next moment one or all of these emotions may have been set in motion. The *Gita* does not allude here to such passing phases but to a continuity of

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<sup>1</sup> Yoga Sutra, 4.1.

<sup>2</sup> Bhagavad Gita, Ch. II.56.

such a state when once attained. How do we know that it is a continuous state that is referred to? First of all, it is common knowledge that scriptures speak of things that are not discernible by the senses, The scriptures are to expound and explain what is beyond the ken of the ordinary human mind, beyond the experience of the generality of mankind. So it would not be to any one's purpose to repeat a well-known every day experience. Secondly, scriptures direct the way to get rid of misery and attain bliss eternal, for which man, howsoever ignorantly, strives in his own way. Thirdly, in this context Sri Krishna makes this point clear at the end of the discourse. He says: 'Attaining this state of Brahman, O Arjuna, one does not get deluded.'<sup>3</sup> Sri Ramakrishna compares such a person to a bee that will not light on anything but a flower; that will not drink anything but honey.

### III

The infatuation with which the world is besieged produces misery and it is to get out of this misery that man strives hard by various means. From the efforts of the cave man to that of the civilized person of today with the devices and appliances of science, are all to attenuate misery. Our Indian sages were aware that however much one strives in the outer world one could not reach the stage of satiety by enjoyment. The sense of misery would return redoubled once the enjoyment came to an end. In this way by sledge hammer blows, as it were, the truth, that there is no happiness in the outer world, is brought home repeatedly. 'That where one does not see another, hear another, know another is the Great. And this in which there is seeing another, hearing another and knowing another is little, is insignificant. This Great is immortal, and the little is perishable.'<sup>4</sup> There is no happiness in this little; the Great alone is bliss. That alone is to be known,<sup>5</sup> says the *Chāndogyopanisad*. So, the ancient sages explored the realm of the spirit and were unusually and amply rewarded. They reached a state from whence they could look with an eye of equanimity on pain and pleasure, from where everything on earth and heavens seemed to pulsate with the breath of the One Conscious Principle; nay they saw it as one solid mass of Consciousness, undivided and impenetrable. They saw that they too were not separate from it. They became calm, and fearless, for they perceived not a second thing. It is from a second thing alone that fear creeps into a being,<sup>6</sup> explains the Upanisad. That is the transformation that man undergoes. Outwardly he will resemble any ordinary human being. But in him the knowledge of the Supreme will be like a blazing fire.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., II.72.

<sup>4</sup> Chandogyopanisad, 7.24.1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 7.23.1.

<sup>6</sup> Brihadaranyaka Up. 1.4.2.

Let us now conclude with what Sri Ramakrishna, the most modern and most liberal of the Spiritual Doctors, says about religious experiences: "Sivanath once said that one loses one's head' by thinking too much of God. 'What?' said I. 'Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity, Purity, and Consciousness. Through His Consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His Intelligence the whole world appears intelligent.' Shivanath said that some Europeans had gone insane, that they had 'lost their heads' by thinking too much about God. In their case it may be true; for they think of worldly things. There is a line in a song: 'Divine fervour fills my body and robs me of consciousness.' The consciousness referred to here is the consciousness of the outer world." Now, just as you call in a physician for consultation when you are ill and not a carpenter, or a blacksmith, or a renowned dramatist, or a scholar, so too to cure us from the disease of worldliness the advice of the spiritual doctors, i.e. the saints and sages, is alone to be resorted to and not that of any and everyone. The assurance of Sri Ramakrishna, quoted above, should set at rest all doubts as regards the validity and veracity of religious experiences and the immense good that could come out of them.



## **SRI KRISHNA – THE GITACHARYA (\*)**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – September 1962; Vol. 49; page 202

The masses of India have been stirred to the very core of their being by two personalities, viz., Sri Ramachandra and Sri Krishna. Indians have been disparagingly termed hero-worshippers and idolators. It is to the credit of the Indians that they have found their ideal and do not hesitate to worship it. Perhaps, it is so for the reason that India has produced more heroes than any other part of the world, heroes whose visions were never blurred as to the verities of life, whose conquests were over the flesh into the empyrean heights of the Everest of spirituality. The citadel they stormed was their own nature and they never relented until the souls door was thrown open to them; until the secret of life was made known to them. And they by their examples and precepts made it known to us as how to bypass this world of unrealities. Why should we not then admire them? Why should we not worship such heroes? And then as regards the so-called idolatry less of it is said the better. For, man if he does not worship an image as a symbol of Divinity, he will worship something else like Mammon or someone else, not with the idea of God but what they stand for. Which is better; to worship the Divine in a symbol or to worship the decayable?

Definitely the former. For, in the perishable there is no fixed ideal, and the conquest of ones own nature is more covetable than the conquest of the external nature. Again is nature a tiny thing that you can know all about it within the span of a few years given to you? Indians, therefore, rightly worship such personages as their ideal as have conquered their own self, own nature. Maybe sometimes the adoration is misplaced, but that quickly dies. Scores of kings have ruled over India in the last few millenniums. But who remembers them all? Who adores them? Even the worthiest of them are not — if at all — remembered more than a few times in the lifetime of a man. Not so Sri Ramachandra or Sri Krishna. They have that eternal charm about them. They eternally attract.

Sri Krishna attracts three types of persons: the believer, the sceptic, and the scholar. To the believers he is their Lord God, capable of protecting them from all calamities or to bestow courage to face boldly all misery. To the sceptic, he is a heroic and symbolic mythical personality, yet with something to impart, something to teach. To the scholar, he is a great philosopher, a great teacher.

His greatest teachings are contained in the Bhagavad Gita, which has been aptly described as the essence of the Upanisads. We need not

here enter into the controversy whether the Gita was actually delivered on the battle-field, when both the armies were poised for fight, or not. We shall confine ourselves as to what message we have from the personality which shines forth through its teachings.

We come across in the Vedas and the Upanisads apparently contradictory statements. With these statements as basis several systems of philosophy have been propounded, each holding its own view, to be perfectly in accordance with the trend of the scriptures. When all these schools of thought claim veracity, at the same time and on the ground of the same scripture, the generality of mankind gets bewildered. It knows not which path is correct and what path it should follow.

Arjuna in the battle-field experiences a similar difficulty though slightly of a different nature. His problem was to decide what his duty was. On the one hand was the pledge, as a warrior, to rid the country of all irreligious and tyrannical elements and establish righteousness, on the other he was faced with the poignant question of killing hosts of his near and dear ones, arrayed and aligned in the enemy camp. What should he do? Confused, and frightened at taking a wrong step, he breaks down completely and refuses to fight. However, he was wise enough to offer himself to be taught and guided by the nobler counsels of his friend and philosopher, Sri Krishna. He says, 'With my natural faculties overcome by (a sense of) helplessness and weakness, and my mind perplexed regarding my duty, I ask you — tell me that which is definitely good for me. I am your disciple; teach me who have taken refuge in you.'<sup>1</sup> Arjuna's despondency thus forms the genesis of the Gita.

Swami Vivekananda in a hymn to Sri Ramakrishna describes succinctly and beautifully the personality of Sri Krishna and the magnificence of his teachings thus: 'He who quelled the uproar, like that of the worlds day of dissolution, of the great battle (of Kurukshetra), who dispelled the natural *tamasic* dark night of deep ignorance (of Arjuna), and roared the sweet and soothing Gita, that person (Krishna) has now been born as Sri Ramakrishna.' Here none of the attributes of Sri Krishna are left out and none repeated. The grandeur, the beauty, the mighty power, and the mellow sweetness, all have found their place and what is not expressed can easily be comprehended. Picture the battle-field of Kurukshetra with the armies arrayed, taut and restive for battle, with the trumpets blowing fiercely and cohorts marching. Picture again the undaunting yet smiling, ready for action yet not anxious, calm and serene yet not yielding nor inactive figure of Sri Krishna as he is seated on the chariot of Arjuna, resplendent in his own glory yet in the humble role of a charioteer. That is the picture, a perfect combination of contradictions.

He was not only himself immune to all the outside tumult but was in a position to quell the storms raging in the inner mind of Arjuna, to make him see the depth of his ignorance in his misdirected pity and to convince him of the righteousness of the battle. His patience and forbearance at the folly of Arjuna in the nick of time, is something that inspires admira-

tion. He was patient enough to recount the entire Hindu philosophy to teach the disciple, who had approached in the proper way, righteousness and religion. Swami Vivekananda from his personal experience declared: 'Words, even thoughts, contribute only one-third of the influence in making an impression, the man, two-thirds.' That it is so we too may experience in our life, if we but care to note it. We might have listened to grand oratorical performances, couched in the most beautiful language, presented in a cogent manner, and delivered with a logical coherence, only to be forgotten after a while, whereas the words of some lone personality uttered in a rustic tongue and perhaps in an ungrammatical way would have left a lasting impression on us. Swami Vivekananda saw before his very eyes the transformation of scores of people who approached Sri Ramakrishna. Pandits of the old type as well as the scholars of the modern times sat at his feet forgetting all about their scholarship to learn from him, an almost unlettered priest. Likewise it was the personality of Sri Krishna that imparted weight to his words.

What is this personality? It is the life lived to perfection that unfolds the personality. Such a life is a tremendous power. Such a person is a blessing not only to himself but to thousands who come in contact with him while living in the body and millions when he is no more in the physical frame. Some millenniums have rolled on after Sri Krishna preached the Gita, still the influence Sri Krishna wields over the minds of the earnest seekers has not abated in the least. Maybe, only one Arjuna was benefited at that time but that saved the cause of righteousness. Innumerable persons have been saved later, when placed under similar situations, by the precepts of the Gita. 'Sri Krishna can never be understood until you have studied the Gita, for he was the embodiment of his own teaching,' opines Swami Vivekananda. And how true it is! Take for instance the message of unattachment to the fruits of actions. Coming from his lips it has a meaning vast and pro-found, for he was himself an illustration of what he taught. He put down many a tyrant but never cared to rule over any kingdom. What need had he to take on the role of a charioteer of Arjuna and groom the horses at the end of the days fighting? Sri Krishna himself declares: 'O Partha, I have no duty to perform; nor is there anything in the three worlds unattained that I have to attain, still I am engaged in action.'<sup>2</sup>

Arjuna's delusion was very deep. He was ready even to live by begging as a mendicant instead of doing his duty. The task of retrieving him was formidable. Sri Krishna, an expert teacher that he was, points out at the very outset, to Arjuna his folly. First he tackles him on the metaphysical plane. What did he grieve for? For the death of the bodies? They were but changes like childhood, youth and old age. One discarded them like worn out garments, to enter into new ones. The real man was the soul which was eternally present: in the past, present and the future. The soul is immutable and hence there is no cause for grief on its account.

Again, whatever is born must die. And what reason is there to grieve on account of that which is inevitable. These creatures were not manifest in the past and again they will be unmanifest in the future. They have this manifest existence only for a short duration, so why should they be grieved over? Krishna then takes up the cause of dharma, in the name of which Arjuna thought he was making a great sacrifice in renouncing his duty. It is the duty of a warrior to fight a righteous war. There is no other duty for a warrior so sacred than to fight such a war. If he falls in the battle he goes to heaven, and if he succeeds he enjoys the fruits here, in this world. So, one should try to see pleasure and pain, and loss and gain with an equal eye and fight on.

Next Sri Krishna delivers his great message of selfless work, the way of action (Karma Yoga), for getting rid of the bondage of work. He says, 'In this, there is no waste of undertaking nor chance of incurring sin; even a little of this religion saves one from great danger.'<sup>3</sup> And in this Yoga, 'You have the right only to do action and not to claim its results.' For, once a man hankers after the results, the chains of karma are clamped down on him. He becomes miserable, when he does not reap the expected harvest. By following the path of Karma Yoga one is able to attain Self-realization too and thus free himself from birth and death. This, and not going to heaven, is the final aim of all human endeavour.

Arjuna then asks, 'If in your opinion knowledge is superior to action why do you goad me to do work, which is fraught with danger.' 'A two-fold faith has been declared by Me for this human race; the way of knowledge for the Jnanis and the way of action for the Karma yogins,' says Sri Krishna. But all are not fit to adopt the way of knowledge. By mere giving up of action one does not attain to liberation. The human mind and body are such that not a single moment passes without their doing work. Man is forced to work by his inborn propensities. Even for maintenance of one's own body work is necessary, therefore, Krishna asks Arjuna to perform the prescribed duties. The creation depends on sacrifice not in the sense of pouring libations into the fire alone, but sacrifice of self-interest too. What does even a sacrifice signify except offering of the best things into the sacrificial fire, an act of sacrifice of self-interest? Therefore one should incessantly perform prescribed actions, unattached. By that one will attain the highest.

Thus did Krishna gradually and slowly lead Arjuna out of the maze of delusion, answering all his queries and anticipating the pupil's doubts until Arjuna finally surrenders: 'Dispelled is my infatuation. I have gained back my steady wisdom by your grace, and freed from all doubts as I am, I shall do your bidding.' That, a true teacher never lets down his disciple, whom he has accepted, has been proved by Sri Krishna. Sri Ramakrishna likens such a teacher to a first rate physician who, if necessary, will force the medicine down the throat of the patient.

What is the speciality of Sri Krishna's teaching? It appears that by the time of Krishna's preaching the Gita, there were two antagonistic

sections in the Hindu society, who vied with one another to establish their own view of religion as final — one party claiming that religion meant only performance of sacrifices as enjoined the Vedas, relegating to a secondary position all the other portions. Sri Krishna paints a picture of these in the following words: 'People of feeble intellect, with minds full of desire, regarding heaven as their ultimate goal, enamoured of the panegyric statements of the Vedas and asserting that there is nothing else (higher than this), speak flowery words about numerous kinds of rites giving rise to birth, actions, and their results, as the means to enjoyment and power.'<sup>4</sup> The other party were those who followed the path of knowledge condemning all karma as of no use in the way to liberation. Sri Krishna however, saw the impracticability of the views of both the sections. What was one, who was satiated with the pleasures of the worlds, to do if the heaven was accepted as an ultimate goal? This proposition, therefore, precipitately falls to the ground. Such a man has a right for a higher life of liberation. Are we then to force others into one camp or the other? The answer is no. Those who want to enjoy will follow the first and those who are satiated with pleasures will renounce. But there will still be a great many who will like to be liberated but have not that strong renunciation. What were they to do? Sri Krishna showed them the path of Karma Yoga.

They were not to give up their sacrifices and their duties, but only had to sublimate them by being unattached to the fruits of their actions or to perform them as an offering to God. In this way, they will gradually rise higher and higher until all desires drop away. The process may be gradual but sure. And this is the greatest message of the Gita.

One other contribution of Sri Krishna was, to harmonize all the Yogas, to reconcile all the paths, imparting equal importance to each one of the pathways. All paths, he said, lead to the same goal. The different paths existed only to suit the aptitudes of the aspirants. Arjuna raises the question: 'Among those devotees who worship you, being ever devoted to you and those who worship the Imperishable, the Unmanifest, who are better versed in Yoga.'<sup>5</sup> Sri Krishna says, 'They who worship Me alone endowed with supreme faith, they are of course the best yogins,'<sup>6</sup> but he immediately hastens to add, 'those who worship the Imperishable, Changeless, Unmanifest also attain Me alone.'<sup>7</sup> So there is no question of one path being superior to another. Sri Ramakrishna in his inimitable way expressed the same thought: 'The cake tastes sweet whether you eat it straight or side ways.' The main thing is to attain the Goal. There is a significant saying of Sri Krishna wherein he affirms that all sects, knowingly or unknowingly, worship Him alone. 'All truths are strung in Him as pearls upon a string.'

The exquisite passages depicting a man of established wisdom, one who has transcended the three gunas, a knower of Brahman, a real bhakta, are some of the highlights of the Gita, wherein all other considerations of what path the aspirant follows, are completely left

behind. The one crucial test applied in all cases being whether the aspirant satisfies these descriptions. There is no essential difference in the descriptions of the various perfected souls. Everywhere stress is on the conquest of desires, control of the senses, the annihilation of the ego, mental equipoise in pain and pleasure, and same-sightedness towards all creatures. 'Such people,' says Sri Krishna, 'whose minds are in equipoise, have conquered rebirth here and now. For, they have attained that pure state of Brahman.' Reaching this state man does not come under the spell of delusion or nescience. So it is a wonder that leaving aside the essentials, man fights over the non-essentials such as dogma, form, and creed, and gets hopelessly lost and leads others too astray.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhagavadgita, II.7.

<sup>2</sup> Bhagavadgita, III.22.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., II.40.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., II. 42-43.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., XII.1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., XII.2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., XII.3 and XII.4.

## **SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – February 1963; Vol. 49; page 403

This is an age of science when people doubt the very veracity of the existence of God. Though advanced scientists are not so dogmatic in their views now, most people think that matter is quite sufficient for the existence of the universe. Science provides them with their requirements of trade, transport, luxury and other things. By researches in the hygienic field science has been able to extend the lease of man's life. A long and happy life is what most people desire, and for that they have the science and its methods. Where then is there the necessity for a God, whom none can see even by travelling in the space capsules? He is not visible to our eyes, nor perceived by our senses; how then can a sense-bound man believe in Him? So he denies Him outright.

Some others do not go so far, they think, 'Let Him be if He exists; He can neither do good nor evil to us, so we have no necessity of Him. We need not bother about Him.' Still others oscillate between belief and unbelief. They sometimes are very hopeful and certain that He is; and that is when everything goes on in their favour, to their liking, but at other times when they are thwarted in their desires, their belief snaps like a worn out string. Most of the believers are of this latter type. It is not bad either. For, it is better than rank materialism. But one should not stop with this belief. Religion should not end in mere lip service, rituals, or seeking utility. Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'It is good to be born in a church but not to die in it'. Man is not man unless he evolves into spiritual manhood. Others are mere babies who are satisfied with the tinsels of this world. They are happy with these 'red toys'. Unless they are tired of these little plays they will not listen. In the language of Sri Ramakrishna they have scored three, four or five points and are still in the game. In short the ordinary run of men, even if they be scholars, are only matter-conscious.

Very rare are the souls who desire to be God-conscious; who hunger for God. Sri Krishna voices the same opinion in the Gita, 'One among thousands tries for perfection and some one among those who try, know Me truly, in the proper perspective.'<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramakrishna used to remark often with great pathos, 'Who wants God? People shed jugful of tears for wife, children, property and wealth; but who weeps for God?'

Nature in the physical world has a way of adjusting itself. A depression at a certain place in the atmosphere, due to extreme heat, immediately sets in a gale, a storm. It is the nature's way of infilling the want. A similar phenomenon we notice in the life of man. He is terribly afraid of the upset of balance of power, and struggles hard to maintain it; for upon it depends his physical existence. All the conflicts that we see in

the world today are due to this fear of upset of balance. Now what happens in the physical world, may also be attributed to be repeating in the spiritual world. So when agnosticism reached its peak, hit the ceiling, as it were, and the balance was disturbed in the spiritual atmosphere, some one was necessary who could restore the balance; who could demonstrate that matter alone without the spirit behind it, was powerless like the body without life; who could show that God was the essential unit of all existence, that God was a verifiable truth and not the mere fancy of fevered brains.

Sri Ramakrishna came to us to point out that. He was the embodiment of God-consciousness. When we review the events of his life we find that one thread of Super-Consciousness running all through them without a break. His birth itself seems to indicate this characteristic in him. Let us recall the event. The baby was born. The woman attending on the mother after sometime turned round to look for the baby. But it was not where she left it. It had slid into the hollow fire-place nearby and was seen besmeared with ashes. Yet it uttered no cry. Was it a prelude to the child's future life of silent but intense renunciation? Observing the later events one is compelled to surmise that it is so. How does it indicate renunciation? The ashes for the Hindu have a two-fold significance. They are sacred to him as they are Lord Shiva's ornament. Adorned with it He is visualized as sitting absorbed in meditation on the Mount Kailas. Secondly it points to the ultimate end of man. What is left of man when he dies and is cremated, but a handful of ashes? All his ambitions, huge aspirations, ever recurring desires —none of these can hold him back from the mouth of death, nay they thrust him again and again into its mouth. That is what the Upanisad says, 'The other world (the Highest) does not shine for the child-minds (the indiscriminating), who are engrossed in worldly attachments, and are deluded by wealth; who deny the existence of a higher world, and believe that this is all that exists. Such people come under My (Death's) sway again and again.'<sup>2</sup> So one is asked to make an oblation of one's desires by lighting the fire of knowledge to be free from death, which means to be free from birth also. 'As a blazing fire reduces to ashes all wood that is put into it, the fire of knowledge burns away all activities,'<sup>3</sup> says the Gita. Here the child (Sri Ramakrishna) is, as if, immersed in his own Self unaware of the surroundings, displaying his unattachment to things worldly and his perfection from very birth.

Later, as a boy, his sport and pastime were in enacting the life incidents of Sri Krishna. The solitary mango grove of Manick Raja was the venue of these sports; with a few friends of his own age he retired to this place and re-enacted what he heard from the wandering minstrels and saw at the dramatic performances about these godly lives. Moulding the images of Gods and Goddesses and playing at their worship was his another play.

Another thing, which was conducive to his nature, was doing odd



jobs for the wandering monks, who stayed at the village rest-house and listening to their talks on God. As days passed he took to wandering alone in the village cremation grounds and was seen to spend hours in solitude. This latter trait developed in him by degrees after his father's passing away. What visions he had and what revelations came to him none can say. His mind must have been in deep communion with nature and its Creator. For, he is seen after this to emerge with definite convictions regarding the way he would conduct himself in the world. One is reminded of the Upanisadic story of Satyakama Jabala, who lived in rapport with nature for several years and at the end of the period came to have the Highest knowledge, being taught by a bull, the fire, and the two birds. Sri Ramakrishna's exhortation even to his lay-disciples to go into solitude, at least occasionally, is of particular significance. He lived for years and years such a life and knew the value of it.

As early as the age of seven he had his soul's first flight into the Unknown. And how was it occasioned? One day when he was out in the fields with a handful of puffed rice, in a basket, his eyes fell on a flight of snow-white cranes across some sombre clouds; the contrast and picturesqueness of it so enveloped the boy that he lost all outward consciousness. He was carried in that condition to the house. Though the parents became anxious it was observed that the ecstasy had no adverse effect on the boy. The boy himself related later to his friends and parents, that he enjoyed a unique bliss within him at that time. Perhaps, for his pure mind, the beauty of the scene gave an inkling into the realms of the Beautiful; lifted the veil from the face of the Reality, the Lord, who is described in the scriptures as Truth, Auspiciousness and Beauty. Even at this age his absorption in the contemplation of the Divine appears to be so complete that a little impetus would send him into deep ecstasy. Once the boy, Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna's early name), was accompanying some ladies of the village to Visalakshi temple at Anur, a village two miles to the north of Kamarpukur, singing the glories of the Goddess, when he suddenly became still. Tears began to flow from his eyes and all efforts of the ladies to bring him back to the normal state were of no avail, until at last a pious lady in the group suggested that they take the name of the Goddess. This had the desired effect. Another time it was when he played the part of Siva, in a dramatic performance on a Sivaratri night in his village, that he merged in the identity of Siva. With the matted-locks, the tiger skin, and the trident he looked so charming that the assemblage cheered him. But he was rapt up in the thought of God. Who would hear and who would act? He did not regain the normal state again that night, in spite of their best efforts.

The storm of God-consciousness that had seized Sri Ramakrishna and was blowing unabated in his boyhood increased in its strength and became a tornado when he entered the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar as Her priest. There She, the Divine Mother, was and he Her child was out to verify the truth of Her existence. He prayed to Her, entreated Her, wept,

fasted and passed nights in calling upon Her to show Herself to him. What agony, what anguish he passed through we can never know. A little glimpse of it we can obtain from the description that he himself gave. He said, 'I felt as if someone was wringing my heart and mind, just as they do to squeeze out water from a wet towel.' Unable, at last, to bear the agony he wished to end his life. It was then that the Divine Mother gave him the first vision. What a vision it was! He felt as if he was being enveloped in the surging waves of an ocean of infinite light, and fell down unconscious.

Even after this vision Sri Ramakrishna's desire to be in Her immediate presence did not subside, rather it only increased. Like a child he wailed, calling upon the Divine Mother to bestow on him the boon of Her constant vision. He writhed and rolled on the ground in pain at being separated from Her. Hearing his wailing people would gather round him. But to him they were no more real than shadows or were at the most mere pictures drawn on canvas. In his extreme agony he would lose his external consciousness and in that state would be more than compensated by the blissful presence of the Divine Mother in his inner Self. At that time She consoled him and taught him in endless ways.

At one time, for six years at a stretch, he had no sleep. He could not wink his eyes. They had lost the power to do so, because of his extraordinary longing for the unbroken vision of the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna himself was petrified at this phenomenon. To quote his own words: 'I could not close the eyes in spite of my efforts. I had no idea of the passage of time and was not at all conscious of the body. When the eyes turned from Mother to the body, even a little, I felt apprehensive, I asked myself, "Am I not on the verge of insanity?" I stood before the mirror and put my finger into my eyes to see whether the eyelids closed. I found they were incapable of winking even then; I became alarmed and wept and said to the Mother, "Mother, is this the result of calling on Thee? Is this the result of my absolute reliance on Thee that Thou hast given this terrible disease to this body". And the next moment I said, "Let anything happen to this. Let the body go if it is to do so; but see, Mother, You don't forsake me. Do reveal Thyself to me and bestow Thy grace on me."'

Perhaps the only near parallel to this kind of love for God we may find in the love of Gopis of Vrindavan for Sri Krishna. The Bhagavata says about them: 'Their hearts given to Him, they talked of Him alone; they imitated His sportful activities; they identified themselves with Him; they sang of His excellent attributes; they did not think of their homes.'<sup>4</sup> Sri Krishna says of them to Uddhava: 'Through deep longing for Me the thoughts of the Gopis were firmly fixed on Me and hence they were not conscious of their body, or what was far or near, just as sages absorbed in contemplation, or like the rivers that have entered the sea losing their distinguishing name and form.'<sup>5</sup>

We can learn a little more of Sri Ramakrishna's inordinate love for

God if we take one or two more incidents in his life. Once Sri Ramakrishna had been to Banaras, the holy city of the Hindus, with Mathur Babu, proprietor of the Kali Temple and a son-in-law of Rani Rasmani. Mathur was a man of the world and many types of people came to him and there would be talks on all sorts of subjects. To Sri Ramakrishna the atmosphere of the house became unbearable. He said to the Divine Mother in a complaining tone, 'Mother, where have You brought me? I was much better off at Dakshineswar. Here I am in a place where I must hear about "woman and gold". But at Dakshineswar I could avoid it.'

Again when devotees began to come to him in large numbers, he noticed that most of them were like one measure of milk mixed with three or four measures of water, so dilute, so luke-warm in their love towards God. He cried out in despair, 'Mother, bring some pure-souled devotees. I shall die of the company of worldly people.' Such was his condition. Even a little talk of anything else than God would pain him deeply. Narada in his Bhakti Sutras speaks of this attitude as ananyata or unification with God, which comes from the abandonment of all other support.<sup>6</sup> He speaks of such Bhakti as, 'the consecration of all activities, by complete surrender to Him and extreme anguish if He were forgotten'<sup>7</sup> The Upanisads too speak in a similar strain. The Mundaka Upanisad says: 'Know That one alone, the Atman; give up all other talk. This is the bridge to Immortality.'<sup>8</sup> What can we understand about all this? Try even for a single day to practise this injunction of the Upanisad and you will find how difficult it is; it appears almost impossible. But in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's life, which stands as the unrefuted proof of the Upanisadic teachings, all these truths of the scriptures acquire a new meaning; they get a new lease of life as it were. That is why Swami Vivekananda said, 'The life of Sri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of Hindu religion. He was the object-lesson of all the theoretical knowledge given in the Sastras. He showed by his life what the Rishis and Avatars really wanted to teach . . . Without studying Sri Ramakrishna first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedanta, of the Bhagavata and other Puranas.'

Regarding surrender which, is spoken of in the Bhakti Sastras, Sri Ramakrishna had an over abundance of it. His visions, the treasures of his unstinted practices and unsullied life, were doubted by Swami Vivekananda at the beginning. Sri Ramakrishna like a child approached the Divine Mother and asked in a pathetic way, 'Mother, should you, finding me ignorant, befool me?' But when the Mother assured him that his visions were all true and that Narendra would soon accept them, he was delighted. When Hazra, a devotee who lived at Dakshineswar temple garden and was of a perverse disposition, admonished Sri Ramakrishna for his attachment to the youngsters, he was really perturbed. He prayed to the Divine Mother for guidance. Referring to this Sri Ramakrishna says: 'I said to the Divine Mother: "Mother, Hazra admonishes me for worrying

about Narendra and the other young boys. He asks me why I forget God and think about these youngsters." No sooner did this thought arise in my mind, than the Divine Mother revealed to me in a flash that it is She Herself who has become man. But She manifested Herself most clearly through a pure soul.'

Without a mention of the various ways in which he enjoyed the realization of the Most High, we will not be able to have an idea of his all-consuming love of God. He practised the Tantrik, the Vaishnava, and the Vedanta modes of approach to the Godhead. And when he had finished the whole gamut of the Hindu way of spiritual practices, and realized the goal of all these several paths, he wanted to know how the Mohammedans prayed to God. No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than a Muslim Fakir came to the temple garden, and Sri Ramakrishna learnt from him the Islamic way of approach to Reality and realized the Highest through that path as well. He then contemplated on Jesus and had His vision too. At last he came to the definite conclusion that the so many views were as many paths to the one Reality, upholding as it were the statement, of the most ancient Rishis of India, 'Truth is one, sages call It variously'.<sup>9</sup> He used to say, 'Why should I be like a one-stringed instrument. I enjoy the presence of God through many ways. When I was initiated into the Vedantic disciplines I prayed to the Mother "Mother, do not make me a dry Vedantin".'

We have given some of the incidents in Sri Ramakrishna's life to show how all through he was conscious of the Highest. This would not, however, have helped the world, had he not practised spiritual disciplines himself and emphasized their necessity; if he had not showed how to attain God-consciousness. People talk lightly of the guru: that the system of guru and sisya is a relic of the past superstition; that spiritual life is possible without any outside aid. Sri Ramakrishna, on the other hand, took the aid of many teachers even after scaling the heights of spiritual peaks to affirm the importance of the guru. His directions regarding the necessity of a guru in spiritual life are unambiguous. Let us listen to what he says: 'One must get instruction from his guru. If a man is initiated by a human guru, he will not achieve anything if he regards his guru as a mere man. The guru should be regarded as the direct manifestation of God. Only then can the disciple have faith in the Mantra given by the guru.'

'A sadhaka has to sever the eightfold fetters that bind man down to this earth if he has to win the grace of the Mother,' said Sri Ramakrishna to his nephew and attendant, Hriday, in the early period of his sadhana at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was at that time spending his nights in the woods of the temple garden, meditating on the Divine. He used to put off his sacred thread, the symbol of Brahminism and sit for meditation. Hriday, who had followed him one night to see what he was doing there at dead of night, felt scandalized at this behaviour of his uncle. He went near Sri Ramakrishna and upbraided him for his sacrilegious act. It was

then that the Master had told him that shame in taking the name of God, pride of birth, contempt for others, fear and the like were the impediments in the way of approach to God. Here Sri Ramakrishna gives us a practical lesson on the way to God-consciousness. Like all great preceptors, Sri Ramakrishna too laid stress on keeping the company of the holy. In his sayings and talks even the smallest amongst us can find some practical hints for our spiritual uplift and that is the beauty of Sri Ramakrishna's utterances: the abstruse truths are brought home to us in the simplest language and the homeliest parables.

In a world full of the darkness of material-consciousness Sri Ramakrishna came with his select band of disciples to re-infuse the light of God-consciousness; to be as a beacon light and to reinvigorate humanity spiritually.

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<sup>1</sup> Gita, 7.3.

<sup>2</sup> Katha U. 2.6.

<sup>3</sup> Gita, 4.37.

<sup>4</sup> Bhagavata, X.30.44.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., XI.12.12.

<sup>6</sup> N.B.Sutras 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>8</sup> Mundaka 2.2.5.

<sup>9</sup> Rig Veda.

## **SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE PRACTICAL MYSTIC**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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The nineteenth century was a period full of upheavals all over the world. It was so in Europe, in which the Industrial Revolution set things apace and changed man's mode of living as well as ways of thinking. It was in the last century again that Charles Darwin by his theory of biological evolution threw a challenge to religion. It was also in the nineteenth century that there was a civil war in the new continent, that of America, that made the United States a fact of history. It was during that period again that a scramble for overseas empires began and India came to be more and more dominated by the British. The British, however, not confining themselves to political domination ventured to penetrate into the cultural field of Indian life, with their very subtle methods. The British posed as benefactors of the Indian people and wanted to civilize a backward race—as they presented the Indian people to the world. Indians were told, that their religion was crude, that their scriptures were mere superstitions and that deliverance lay in giving them up and following Western modes of thought and life.

But yet another upheaval more powerful, more lasting, greater in extension and richer in content, in answer to many of these little tumults, also came about in the last century, viz. the spiritual upheaval. It was ushered in by Sri Ramakrishna, born in a village, acting as a temple priest at Dakshineswar, not far from Calcutta, with very little of the so-called education but deeply rooted in the culture of the soul. His life was a fitting reply, a challenge to the clamours of the iconoclasts, to the agnostic and the atheist, to the doubter of the efficacy of Hindu religion to stand its ground against other religions and last but not least to the onslaught of the then scientific man on religion itself. Forces of religion were rallied round, as it were, to encounter the rising tide of agnosticism in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna's was a wonderful life. He began with a simple faith in God that was nurtured in the innocence of a village life, guarded in a home of pious parents, and enthralled in the legacy native to his being. As he pursued his spiritual practices he no doubt passed through dismal nights of doubt, but only to be firmly and indissolubly bound to the Divine Mother, by the blessing of Her vision—an experience that made him cling to Her, like a child to its mother, all his life. Her first vision brought on him a raging fever, as it were, to have her complete and uninterrupted

presence. He pined and writhed in pain at separation from Her. In his anguish he rubbed his face on the rugged ground till it bled; so acute was his sorrow, so intense was his despair. He strained every nerve for that and completely gave his mind to Her. In this respect Sri Ramakrishna may be called a spiritual scientist. He, like the Rishis of old, was never content with theories but wanted to test them in the laboratory of practice and would not rest until he had gained his end. When he began the worship of the Divine Mother in the temple of Dakshineswar, he asked himself this question: 'Is the Divine Mother only a stone image?' He thought he must verify it. He held a piece of cotton to the nostrils of the Image and strange to say he felt the breath of the Mother on it. He felt it more tangibly than he felt his own breath. That was the method of his experimentation. If the Divine Mother was a conscious entity She should be seen, should be realized—that was his firm determination. This determination was backed by a strong renunciation and a penetrative discrimination.

Even as a boy he had discovered by observation the futility of mere book-learning—a learning which could be only a means of earning livelihood and of no further use. It did not solve the problem of life, did not unfold its meaning. On the other hand his first mystic experience at the age of seven, at Kamarpukur, at the sight of white cranes flying across sombre clouds had bathed his soul in great bliss. Compared with it, he found all other joy only a semblance of it. His father's devotion to God, rich with dreams and visions, had helped the boy to concentrate his mind on Him. And his father's death, early though it was in his life to leave its full impress, still had left some void in the boy's heart. That the boy felt his mother's sorrow and ceased to tease her with his importunities after the death of his father gives evidence of this. His association with the wandering monks who visited the village of Kamarpukur kindled the fire of renunciation. Lastly, the religious performances of the wandering minstrels lit up his love of God. His power of concentration, specially on subjects connected with the God-head increased enormously, so much so that on occasions he was absorbed, completely oblivious of his surroundings, in the thoughts of the particular Deities, which the circumstances would arouse. His second ecstasy occurred on the way to the Temple of Visalakshi, the Divine Mother, of Anur, and his absorption in the thought of Siva on the Sivaratri, when he was called upon to act the part of Siva in the village drama, was his third mystic experience that lasted for a long time. Thus grounded in discrimination and renunciation and mind given to God, Sri Ramakrishna entered the state of adolescence well-equipped to start on his journey of mystical pursuit.

Before we proceed with our subject let us state what we understand by mystic experience in this context. It is not something that is mysterious or unravellable. It is not a thing of the past. It does not exhaust the human being. It is an experience of the supernatural. It is living beyond the senses. It can be experienced even now by those who

live a pure and unsullied life and pursue the path of spirituality. It is the going to the source of all bliss. It is seeing God; being touched by Him. It is bliss of God or Atman bathing the soul. It is a state where all senses are left behind. Even speech cannot reach it. That is why it is not possible to describe it through the vehicle of language. Language is but a poor porter there. It is left far outside. It has no access to those chambers. This is what Sri Ramakrishna told his disciples. This is what we can see, if we care to, in his life. This is also what the Upanisads declare: 'From whence speech unable to penetrate returns with the mind, reaching that bliss of Brahman a seer never fears anything.' Reaching it man goes beyond all fear. He finds nothing else but himself or his God present everywhere. Normally, man in this world is afraid of several things and the worst fear of all is the fear of death—and these fears continue as long as he sees a second being other than himself. Even death of the physical body holds no fear to a person who has realized that he is deathless. Is this then not a significant benefit? Is it not a covetable experience? Mystic experience in brief, is something that can be felt by a human being, if there be the requisite qualities of purity and other disciplines to his credit. Sri Ramakrishna experienced this mystic touch even in his first ecstasy in Kamarpukur. When all the household was perturbed at the sudden event and were trying to find remedy for the malady, the boy, Gadadhar, for so was Sri Ramakrishna named in his younger days, assured his parents that he did not feel anything bad, that, rather he felt a flow of bliss during the period of his unconsciousness. This was subsequently corroborated when nothing untoward happened to the boy.

Sri Ramakrishna's mystic experiences are innumerable to be enumerated here. But as far as is necessary to our subject we shall refer to some of them now and then. A spiritual person in India if anything is intensely practical, if not he is nothing. Speaking about practicality Swamiji once said to an audience in the West: 'Just as your people are practical in many things, so it seems our people are practical in this line (spirituality). Five persons in this country (America) will join their heads together and say, "We will have a joint stock company," and in five hours it is done; in India they could not do it in fifty years; they are so unpractical in matters like this. But, mark you, if a man starts a system of philosophy however wild its theory may be, it will have followers. For instance, a sect is started to teach that if a man stands on one leg for twelve years, day and night, he will get salvation—there will be hundreds ready to stand on one leg. All the suffering will be quietly borne. . . So you see the word practical is also relative.' So spirituality, religion and philosophy have a practical basis in India. And practice alone can bring one to fulfilment of one's ideal. This was obviously known to Sri Ramakrishna. So he plunged headlong into spiritual practices. Night and day he was absorbed in the thought of the Mother, at Dakshineswar. His only idea was to know and see Her. In the beginning he had none to guide him. But his own intense yearning brought on Her vision. He had



heard that God never came to a person who was conscious of his ego, who looked upon himself as a man of noble birth, as a person of wealth and so on. Therefore, at dead of night, after every one had retired to bed, he would steal into the nearby Panchavati and casting off the sacred thread, the symbol of Brahmanhood, and even the wearing cloth, sit for meditation, deeply absorbed in the thought of God. His nephew and attendant Hriday noticed his absence from his room for several days.

One night wanting to know where Sri Ramakrishna went and what he did, Hriday followed him. But he felt scandalized when Sri Ramakrishna put off the sacred thread and the wearing cloth as well, as he sat in the woods for meditating. Hriday took him to task for his sacrilegious act. For a Brahmin to cast off the sacred thread! He could not think of it. But Sri Ramakrishna was unperturbed. He calmly replied, 'If a person wants to approach God, he should cast aside his sense of aristocracy of birth, wealth and the like and humble himself before God. For what are they before the omnipotent and omniscient Being? So I am trying to do that.' Another time Hriday tried to frighten his uncle out of the wood by throwing sand in the direction where he sat. But Sri Ramakrishna was lost to the outside world the moment he had entered the woods. So deep was his concentration. The fury of his hunger for God increased as days went by. He rolled on the ground calling, 'Mother,' 'Mother'. People around thought of him in various ways. Some thought him mad. Some others thought that he was crying out of colic pain. But to him, as he himself expressed later on to his disciples, the persons around were like pictures painted on a wall or at best were mere shadows.

Again, Sri Ramakrishna was not satisfied with a chance acquaintance with the Divine Mother. Perhaps, in spite of the bliss that he felt on his first vision, he had questioned himself, as Narendranath did later, whether it was not some fancy of his mind that made him think that he had a vision of the Mother. Actually, however, the bliss itself had made him mad, as it were, for Her perpetual presence, as a lover longs for the presence of the beloved, as a child longs for the mother, and as a man of the world yearns for more and more wealth. And till he obtained the continuous vision of the Divine Mother and forced it, as it were, from Her, he was not contented. That was why he used to say: 'Who is my Mother! Is She a step-mother, no, She is my own Mother.' Yet other times he advised: 'Force your demand on God; claim your birthright as a son claims his patrimony.' To him God-vision is the birthright of every human being. We are the children of the Divine Mother. Why should She then withhold Her vision from us? We have every right to claim it. That was his firm conviction. Nay, it is his assurance to us from his life's own experience.

To him came the teachers of different faiths when he had known the Divine Mother, when he had conclusively established the relation of a child with Her; when he could see Her, and talk to Her whenever he desired to do so. In his case, to quote his own simile, the fruit came first

and then the flower. His later sādhanas were for the verification of what he had already known by his earnest faith and boundless yearning. His earlier realizations were corroborated when he followed the path laid down in the scriptures. After his first realization he came in contact with the God-head following other paths in a very short time. It did not take him more than three days to arrive at the culmination of any one path. Here also he was most practical. He put his whole mind, body and soul into it. For instance, when he was undergoing the disciplines of Islamic faith, he abstained from visiting the temples, everything about the Divine Mother was forgotten. In habits as well as costumes he followed the Mohammedans in every detail. And that is why he could arrive at the result in so short a time.

In the case of Advaitic sādhana he had a little difficulty. While trying to concentrate his mind on the formless Brahman, the benign form of Divine Mother appeared before him everytime. He expressed his difficulty to Sri Totapuri, his teacher in the Advaitic sādhana. The latter was not to be put away. He pressed a piece of broken glass between his eyebrows and asked him to concentrate his mind on that spot. No sooner did Sri Ramakrishna direct his mind towards his eye-brows than the Mother's form appeared before his mind's eye but this time he cleaved it, as it were, by the sword of knowledge. The thin veil that separated him from Brahman fell and he passed into the realm of the Unknowable. It was now the turn of Totapuri, who had taken forty years to reach the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, to be surprised at the ease and rapidity with which Sri Ramakrishna had scaled the pinnacle of spiritual realization. For three days, Totapuri kept watch over Sri Ramakrishna. On the fourth day Totapuri, assured that the latter had been established in the discipline, brought him to normal consciousness.

It will be an incomplete survey of the practicality of Sri Ramakrishna as a mystic if we do not mention here how he expanded the vision of those who came in contact with him, even those who came to teach. For, as Swamiji said, Sri Ramakrishna's life itself was a Parliament of Religions. It was therefore natural that those who came to him should have their views extended. We shall cite only the example of Totapuri again. Totapuri, who never stayed for more than three days at any place, charmed with the surroundings of Dakshineswar and enthralled by Sri Ramakrishna spent there nearly eleven months. But he could not understand Sri Ramakrishna's worship of the Divine Mother even after attaining the *Nirvikalpa samadhi*. To him all these forms were only illusions. Sri Ramakrishna, however, chided him for his disparaging remarks about the worship and prayer to God with form. But deeply imbued with the idea of Advaita Vedanta as he was, Totapuri could not easily give in. Strange, however, are the ways of God. Though he tried to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna several times, something held him back from broaching the subject. At last he fell a victim to dysentery. Gripping pain laid him down. He could not sit for meditation. One day in utter

disgust he wanted to cast off the body by drowning himself in the Ganga. For what use was it if the mind could not be immersed in the Self. Resolved to do so, one might he walked into the Ganga but wonder of wonders was that though he waded through the river, the water never reached above his knees. In amazement he cried out, 'What strange *māyā* is this?' Turning back towards the temple of Bhavatarini he saw the benign form of the Divine Mother. He returned to the Panchavati and lay himself down, soothed in body being relieved of pain. Next day Sri Ramakrishna saw him cheerful. Totapuri narrated the incident to Sri Ramakrishna and having been thus enlightened he shed his dogmatic outlook and took leave of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna came to the world to teach mankind that every path was true. Would then the Mother allow his teacher to remain a fanatic? That was not to be. Sri Ramakrishna's contact thus corrected the views of even his teachers.

Another matter Sri Ramakrishna paid great attention to was the company his young disciples kept. In spite of the loving and compassionate heart that he possessed, he could not allow his disciples to mix with any and every sort of man who came even in the guise of a monk. Once a wandering minstrel, a haul came to Dakshineswar and wanted to sit for food along with Narendranath and others who were having a picnic in the Panchavati. The Master did not allow it. He said: 'What merit has he earned that he will sit with you? One should be very careful in associating with people during the early period of one's spiritual life. It harms one's spiritual growth if one indiscriminately mixes with people.'

It is said that religion and religious experiences are other-worldly. First thing here to remember is, that all religions can be followed here and now though we may reap the results of our actions in the other worlds also. Secondly religious experience has an effect on man in this world too. The natural and other forces leave no mark on him. Entering him they are lost like the rivers in the ocean. He alone becomes like a limpid pool, calm, serene and peaceful and not he who is running after the sense objects, says the Gita. Thirdly religion is the basis of morality. By religion no dogma or creed is meant. Religion, as Swamiji often stressed, is realization: realization of God; realization of the unity of all beings. When that realization comes then alone can man talk of universal brotherhood. Today humanity suffers from all types of handicaps, racial, so-called religious, social and others. In such a world the only way to come together is by spiritual realization. In this respect Sri Ramakrishna's contribution is invaluable, immeasurable, overwhelming. By his life he showed that dissensions due to these badges of religion are not necessary. They only bring unrest. Nay, they are harmful. But sad to say, humanity has yet to learn this lesson. Will it ever awake? It can do so if it studies Sri Ramakrishna.

Lastly we shall say a few words as to how practical Sri Ramakrishna was in his normal life. He trained the Holy Mother how to live in the

household. He taught her every detail of housekeeping, beginning from the way to trim the lamp upto dealing with persons whom she would have to contact. He chastised his disciples when they took anything for granted. One day he gave a young disciple (Swami Yogananda) some money to purchase a frying pan. The disciple believed the shopkeeper and brought the pan the trader gave without examining it. It was however found that the shopkeeper had deceived the boy and given him a broken pan. At this Sri Ramakrishna commented: 'That you have become a *sadhu* is no reason that you should be a fool as well. The trader is not there to earn merit but make money. So before you purchase anything examine it, enquire at other shops and in the case of purchases where an extra allowance is made collect that too.' Such was the advice on things secular by a person who could not take proper care of his wearing apparel! What then to speak of lesser beings! Sri Ramakrishna as we see him portrayed to us in his biographies and talks was intensely practical not only in spiritual but also in secular matters. That is why he has an appeal even to the most modern man. We are sure the erroneous impression that a mystic is a mysterious being will clear away if Sri Ramakrishna's life is properly and critically studied.

## STRENGTH: THE BASIS OF LIFE

Swami Paratparananda

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If we happen to traverse through the pages of history, all the world over, we shall invariably find that prosperity and glory opened up before the strong, and the weak and the cowards went to the wall. Empires have risen with the strength of the particular people and dwindled and died with their weakness. Darwin's theory, 'survival of the fittest' which has been so well proved in the sub-human species illustrates this fact to a large extent. Probably, physical strength alone could not prove even Darwin's theory. Because, if we take into consideration the recent stipulations of science, that there existed in a remote past such gigantic animals like the dinosaur which have become extinct now, we cannot but admit that their very gigantic forms which restricted their movements made them vulnerable to attack and destruction by smaller and more agile beings. So it is not physical strength alone that gains supremacy. Indian history of the past few centuries will show how some small hordes were able to run over the whole land. What was it due to but our own disunity which was the most vulnerable spot that the conqueror chose to exploit!

The current events in the world too show that might still rules though in a different mask. A nation, therefore, has to be strong if it is to remain independent and ward off the grasping hands of the neighbours from its territories. Strength is also a necessity for even the internal development of a nation. The weak may be pitied but the strong alone will be respected. And anything that is received without a requisite repayment in some form or other will bear down heavily on the recipient. It is a debt and an obligation.

This preamble has been to show that what law holds good in the world outside, is applicable to the regions of the mind and soul too, but with the difference that in the latter case one has also to possess moral and spiritual excellences. The Upanisads declare: This Atman cannot be attained by the weak.<sup>1</sup> Strength of the muscles alone will have nothing to do with the inner world, nor intellectual power keep the mind from wandering. It is the life righteously lived, which generates a moral force

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<sup>1</sup> Mundaka Up., III.ii.4.

and which runs as a precursor to the dawn of a higher mode of life — the life of the spirit — that is spoken of in this statement of the Upanisads as strength. In it all these types of strength are included and none is excluded. Physical strength is as important to withstand the strain of spiritual disciplines one has to undergo, as intellectual acumen is incumbent to understand the subtle truths of religion. In secular and political pursuits intellectual power may be put to the meanest possible use, and yet one may succeed in one's endeavour in those fields. But the way of the spirit is quite different. An inch you swerve from the right path and a thousand feet away will you be flung from it — narrow is the way of righteousness, like the sharp edge of a razor, as the Upanisads describe it. Or as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Man does not know what it is that causes his downfall'. He then illustrates this by an example: 'Once, while going to the Fort,<sup>2</sup> I could not see at all that I was driving down a sloping road; but when the carriage went inside the Fort I realized how far down I had come'. That is the way one slides from the right path little by little, imperceptibly, unknowingly, so much so that when one comes to know of it, one has travelled a long way down the wrong path. The allurements of the world are many and strong and therefore one has not only to be physically fit, but mentally alert and morally toned up to resist them.

An appreciation of Naciketa by Yama, the king of death, when the former refused to be drawn and entangled by the rewards of the earth and heaven that were offered to him, will bear evidence as to the importance that is laid on the strength of the mind to deny oneself the luxuries, comforts and enjoyments that can be had here or hereafter. Yama is profuse in the praise of Naciketa. Again, and again, amidst his teaching he stops and puts in a word of encomium about Naciketa's self-denial. Here are his words: 'You have discarded, after well discerning, all that was offered to you in the shape of pleasing and pleasurable things. You have not deigned to accept this wealth, which is another name for transmigration, in which the majority of mankind choose to sink.'<sup>3</sup> 'I wish there was some one among us, my disciples, who could be an inquirer like you.'<sup>4</sup> Again, 'I deem that the portals of Liberation are open to Naciketa'.<sup>5</sup> All this points out how lofty is that power and how mighty and covetable is that strength which in the end endows us with a blissful life for ever.

Here the sophisticated may think: 'If it is such a botheration, such a hard task, if it is so impossible a thing to realize an unknown God, why not try to make the world more and more perfect?' Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task of realization, man seeks perfection in an imperfect world; happiness in a vale of misery. For the world is an existence of

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<sup>2</sup> The reference is to the Fort in Calcutta.

<sup>3</sup> Katha Up., 2.3.

<sup>4</sup> IBID., 2.9.

<sup>5</sup> IBID., 2.16.

contraries. It is an imbalance in the *gunas* (substantive forces), *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, of Prakrti that has caused the projection of the universe. When that balance will be regained there will not be this manifested universe. It will be resolved into its cause, the Prakrti. But still man thinks that he can progressively improve the world phenomena. Swami Vivekananda, speaking of progress remarks, 'To live in the world where it is all good and no evil, is what Sanskrit logicians call a "dream in the air".' Continuing he says, 'Another theory, in modern times, has been presented by many schools, that man's destiny is to go on always improving, always struggling onwards but never reaching the goal.' Commenting on this theory he concludes, 'This statement, though apparently very nice, is also absurd, because there is no such thing as a motion in a straight line. Every motion is in a circle. A straight line infinitely projected must end in a circle. Therefore, this idea that the destiny of man is progressing ever forward and forward and never stopping is absurd'. So to seek perfection in the created world is a wild goose chase. Is then all work to improve the world-condition to be given up? The answer is no; the efforts to help the world in every possible way are to be continued. At the same time it should be remembered that we do not actually help the world but help ourselves to become more liberal in our outlook on life. Again, we cannot cease from work, cannot even live without work. When it is so, is it not better for man to do something good instead of becoming more and more selfish and self-seeking?

## II

Having seen that there is no happiness in the created world, the sages sought it in the Uncreated, by cultivating dispassion towards the things of the creation. 'Having examined the worlds attainable by actions a Brahmana (a man of wisdom) should inculcate dispassion. For the Uncreated cannot be had by sacrifices, by acts,'<sup>6</sup> says the *Mundakopanisad*. Now, as it is a long journey from the created to the Uncreated, the equipment required also should be commensurate with the hazards and situations one may meet on the way. For in the world also we note that the equipment of a mountain expeditioner is not the same as a North Pole explorer nor like that of a space walker. The expedition into the Unknown, has its own peculiar requirements. We have already said that all types of strength were essential for spiritual growth. We can understand what is meant by physical strength and intellectual acumen. But what is moral strength? What is spiritual force?

We need not discuss here the term 'moral' from the point of view of society. For there can be no one standard for all countries and all societies and for all time. We are here concerned with that which leads to

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<sup>6</sup> Mundaka Up., I.ii.12.

a religious life. There are some fundamentals on which even a society is dependent, or to be more explicit, on which its growth, its usefulness to the world as a whole and its glory rest. And these are common to the spiritual life also. For when we say society we are going into an abstract construction, but what is society but a collection of individuals? So, it is the individuals, who constitute society, that are expected to maintain certain norms. And one among these norms is truth. Here again, there may be an endless controversy as how far one should be truthful and so on. Giving a go-by to this controversy we shall pin-point our attention to the necessity of observing truth. Allowing every margin to the prevalence of falsehood, in the life of man, we find that there is an element of truth behind the universe, and it is this truth which upholds it. Sri Sankara in his Brahma Sutra Bhasya aptly observes: 'All transactions in the world are through the combination of *satya* (truth) and *anrta* (untruth)'.<sup>7</sup> Sankara might have stated this truth from a higher plane of consciousness, but even from the lower standpoint it is found to be true.

Swami Vivekananda, speaking about the potency of truth, remarks: 'Truth is like a corrosive substance. It can penetrate everything, soft things quickly and even hard granite rocks slowly but surely. No one can resist it'. We all know that ultimately 'truth alone triumphs and not untruth'.<sup>8</sup> But such is the lure of wealth and the like that though repeatedly reminded of this fact we forget it at the moment. Perhaps the readers will be wondering what connection has this truth to do with our subject matter. However, if we remember that truth forms the moral base on which the structure of society is built it will not be difficult to relate the two. In the religious field too moral goodness must precede the spiritual hankering. Besides, truth is an element of the spiritual life. It makes one courageous, whereas falsehood transforms us into cowards. With truth one can face tribulations bravely and that is what made the martyrs live and die for their cause cheerfully.

The second equipment that is necessary for our journey is dispassion towards the transient things. There should not even be lingering back-glances on what has been once discarded. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the passions leave man immediately he resolves to lead a spiritual life. The meaning is that the passions should not be entertained, even when they arise; courting them would be dangerous.

The third requirement is chastity. There is a beautiful story in the Upanisads to illustrate the value of Brahmacharya as well as the necessity to cultivate other virtues. Once the gods, men and demons, all his progeny, went to Prajāpati and lived with him the life of continence. After their term of *brahmacharya* the gods asked him, 'Tell us how we can

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<sup>7</sup> Adhyasa Bhasya.

<sup>8</sup> Mundaka Up., III.i.6.



conduct ourselves in life'. Prajāpati uttered the letter '*da*' and asked them whether they had understood the meaning of his teaching. They replied that they had, that he meant that they should control themselves. He said, 'Yes, it is so; you have understood well'. The gods are denizens of the heaven and given to great deal of enjoyment. After living the life of *brahmacharya* with the teacher their eyes of knowledge had opened, they had come to know of their own defects and hence had no difficulty in comprehending what Prajāpati expected of them.

Then the men said to him, 'Please instruct us'. To them too he repeated the syllable '*da*' and asked them whether they understood the meaning of what he had said. They said they had understood him; that he meant that they should *give*. 'Yes, it is so; you have understood, said he. Men usually are of the hoarding nature. Man puts by things thinking it is only for a rainy day, but it is not always so. More often than not his avarice makes him self-centred and callous towards others' sufferings. After having lived the life of continence with the Lord of creatures the men came to know wherein was their fault and could understand the cryptic message so easily.

Lastly the demons said 'Please instruct us'. To them he said '*da*', and asked whether they had understood him. They replied, 'We have; you ask us to be compassionate'. 'Yes, so it is; you have understood well', said he. The demons are cruel and always indulging in killing, so to them the message of Prajāpati was to be compassionate towards beings. The Upanisad says that this divine message is even now being transmitted to us by means of the thunder, in its roar '*da*', '*da*', '*da*', 'Control yourselves', 'Give' and 'Have compassion'.<sup>9</sup> In Sanskrit all the three words representing the above three meanings begin with the letter '*da*' viz., *dāmyata*, *datta*, and *dayadhvam* respectively.

What is obviously evident from the story is that *brahmacharya*, a life of continence and restraint, is essential for the religious. Men cannot find out their own drawbacks until they have lived a life of continence. And once they know their defects it is easy for them to get over them when they are commanded to do so by the teacher. The second conclusion is that we have to inculcate all the three virtues mentioned herein in order to be morally uplifted. For it is these virtues that form into a moral force in man — a force that opens further and new vistas of a higher life. What a mere intellectual man, a mere scholar, can comprehend but not experience, that Self-knowledge becomes easily accessible to a man of virtues by a little practice. For morality is the ground of all spiritual evolution. 'He who has not desisted from wicked actions, has not controlled himself, nor has a collected mind, nor whose

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<sup>9</sup> Brihadaranyaka Up. V. ii.

mind is restless can ever attain Brahman by knowledge,'<sup>10</sup> says the *Katha Upanisad*. Sri Ramakrishna as it were echoes these very statements of the Vedas when he says: 'The first sign of knowledge is a peaceful nature and second is the absence of egotism'. About mere scholars, without discrimination and dispassion, he had a very poor opinion. He used to say, 'Kites and vultures soar very high but they keep their gaze fixed on the charnel pit. What I mean is that these pundits — who merely talk words of wisdom and do not live up to them — are attached to the world, to lust and greed. If I hear that pundits are practising discrimination and dispassion, then I fear them. Otherwise I look upon them as mere straw'. Intellectualism and erudition to explain the scriptures without yearning for God does not make for liberation, though they may bring one all the worldly goods, name and fame.

### III

Now, one should not stop with being morally good. It is only a foundation. And a foundation however strong is not able to give us shelter from sun, wind and rain, if there is no superstructure on it, just as a ship though large and built with all modern devices to weather gales and storms cannot be a good means to cross the ocean, if its engines fail or it puts in an harbour which is not its destination. The superstructure is spiritual life and when it is built on a strong moral base there is no danger of its collapse.

A life of devotion to God with firm faith and all the attendant virtues is the life of the spirit for a devotee; to a follower of the *jnana marga* it is to look upon every being as the manifestation of the One Divine Principle, Brahman and the continuous attempt on his part to be in communion with that One. The strength born out of leading such a life is not only beneficial to the person who practises but also to those who come in contact with him as well. Swami Vivekananda, speaking of such a strength, says, 'Strength is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto God'. In the *Kena Upanisad* is a story introduced to illustrate this fact. Once Brahman obtained victory for the gods over the demons and the former thought that they themselves had won the victory and that it was their own glory. But in order to remove this wrong notion of the *devas*, Brahman appeared before them in the form of a Yaksa, an effulgent being. The *devas*, afraid and at the same time anxious to know who that being was, deputed Agni and Vāyu successively to ascertain about It. In its presence they were struck dumb and when the Yaksa asked who they were and what was their special prowess, Agni said that he could burn whatever there was in the world and Vāyu said that he could blow away everything. The Yaksa placed a straw before them and asked Agni to burn

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<sup>10</sup> *Katha Up.*, 2.24.

it, which with all his might he could not do. He asked Vāyu to blow away the straw but Vāyu could not move it. They returned thus discomfited to the gods and Indra then approached It, but Brahman did not even deign to give an interview to him but vanished from his sight. Indra, however, did not go away from the place but stayed on and meditated as to who that being could be. Finding him eager to know about the Yaksa, the Brahma-Vidyā itself in the form of a beautiful woman appeared there. Indra asked of her who that Yaksa was who had appeared and then vanished. She teaches him that it was Brahman, because of whom they had won the victory and had falsely been elated considering the victory as their own.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is seen that all source of strength is Brahman. Because of His presence in the universe, in all that is living and moving and in all that is immovable also, the world phenomena goes on. He is therefore, the foundation, the basis of life.

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<sup>11</sup> Refer Kenopanishad, III. 1-12 & IV-1.

## **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA- AN EXEMPLAR OF HIS TEACHINGS (\*)**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

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Lives of great spiritual leaders are the best commentaries, the greatest illustrations of their own teachings. In them we find thought, speech and action working in consonance. As a popular Sanskrit verse elegantly puts it, 'the holy ones are one in mind, speech and action.' How simple this definition looks! But what a vast meaning is encompassed in it. As if in a sweep, it includes all the highest virtues man can conceive of. It means the inherence and manifestation of truthfulness, purity, sincerity, unselfishness, unbiased love and a score more of other virtues. It is a staggering list, no doubt, but that is the very reason that there are very rare souls that reach such dizzy heights of spiritual realization, such eminence. Sri Ramakrishna emphasized the need for 'making thought and word perfectly at one' as a discipline even for those who sought God in earnest. Swamiji writes to a disciple in Madras, 'Be holy and pure and the fire will come'. This was the keynote of all his teachings. Coming from Vivekananda these words had tremendous effect. They carried his vigour and enthused puissance into the reader. They were not mere words of encouragement but the products of the faith and conviction born of his own experience. He was never tired of repeating this formula, whether it was in conversations, dialogues or letters, to impress upon his audience the primacy of cultivating these virtues. In one of his letters he remarks, 'Be pure, staunch and sincere to the very backbone, and everything will be all right. If you have marked anything in the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna it is this — they are sincere to the backbone'.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Place of Truth***

And on what a high pedestal Swamiji did place truth! It was to him, as with his Master, the very foundation of spiritual life. 'Be not discouraged, one word of truth can never be lost; for ages it may be hidden under rubbish but it will show itself sooner or later. Truth is indestructible, virtue is indestructible, purity is indestructible,'<sup>2</sup> writes Swamiji in a letter to a disciple, with a certitude that can pierce through granite and cleave through all doubts. How was he able to do it? Because he was himself full of truth and nothing but that. Truth was with him a natural possession from his very childhood, and all through his life we see him struggling and fighting for it. One such urge brought him to Sri

Ramakrishna and what marvellous effect it has produced in the world of thought and action, both in the East and the West! Yet this is but the beginning.

To get a little extended view of Swamiji's life we shall follow him through his peregrinations, through his travels in the foreign lands and just take an instance or two to learn how passionately attached to truth he was. sometimes at the risk of even estrangement from his best friends. We refer the reader to a letter written to Miss Mary Hale on 1st February, 1895, wherein he mentions about an excited argument he had with a Presbyterian gentleman. 'Who,' he writes 'as usual got very hot, angry and abusive'. He continues, 'I was afterwards severely reprimanded by Mrs. Bull for this, as such things hinder my work. So it seems, is your opinion'. Both of these ladies were his staunchest supporters and well-meaning friends, but where truth was concerned he was no respecter of persons. Let us quote his own words, 'I know full well how good it is for one's worldly prospects to be sweet. I do everything to be *sweet*, but when it comes to a horrible compromise with the truth within, I then stop. ... I believe in Samadarsitvam — same state of mind with regard to all. The duty of the ordinary man is to obey the commands of his "God", society, but the children of light never do so. This is an eternal law.... The worshippers of "Vox populi" go to annihilation in a moment—the children of truth *live for ever*.'

It is no doubt true that the path of truth is not strewn with flowers, but a spiritual leader comes not to cater to the whims and fancies of a society and allow it to run to its ruin. He has a mission to fulfil — that of drawing society up towards him. The spiritual leaders know the hollowness of wealth, beauty, name and fame. So they resent and fight falsehood and expose it. They *know* that truth alone triumphs—not believe but *know*. Swamiji compares 'truth to a corrosive substance of infinite power. It burns its way in wherever it falls—in soft substance at once, hard granite slowly, but it must.' Continuing his letter he writes: 'I am so sorry, Sister, that I cannot make myself sweet and accommodating to every black falsehood. But I cannot. I have suffered for it all my life, but I cannot. I have essayed and essayed. But I cannot. At last I have given it up. The Lord is great. . . God of Truth; be Thou alone my guide! . . .What reason is there for me to conform to the vagaries of the world around me and not obey the voice of Truth within?'<sup>3</sup> That is what Swami Vivekananda symbolizes — Truth. Let us not think that after this correspondence either Miss Mary Hale or after the 'fight', as Swamiji calls it, Mrs. Bull, lost any regard, respect or admiration for Swamiji. On the other hand they stood by him till the end. Many were such instances in the life of Swamiji. But he never gave in. His mind instinctively recoiled from untruth.

## ***Unselfishness***

Now what did Swamiji mean by 'fire' in the sentence quoted above? It is the fire, the vigour, enthusiasm and energy to plunge undaunted into action, a determination to face all odds or die, for a noble cause. It is the fire of holiness and unselfishness which can achieve wonders. Swamiji declared on another occasion: 'But mind you, this is life's experience: if you really want the good of others, the whole universe may stand against you and cannot hurt you. It must crumble before your power of the Lord Himself in you, if you are sincere and really unselfish.'<sup>4</sup> He urged his followers to be totally unselfish. He used to quote often a Sanskrit verse which runs in the following strain: 'The wise one should give up wealth and even life for the sake of others. When death is certain, it is better to die for a good cause'. For, he said, that is the true way to make best use of our human life. Once when Ingersol said to Swamiji, 'I believe in making the most of the world, in squeezing the orange dry, because this world is all we are sure of.' Swamiji replied: 'I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do and I get more out of it. . . . I know there is no fear, so I enjoy the squeezing. I have no duty, no bondage of wife and children and property. I can love all men and women. Every one is God to me. Think of the joy of loving man as God! Squeeze your orange this way, and get ten thousand fold more out of it. Get every single drop.'<sup>5</sup>

Mark the words 'believe' used by Ingersol and 'know' used by Swamiji. Whereas the former speaks from the plane of the five senses and is not sure of the outcome, Swamiji is emphatic and certain, having been vouchsafed the vision of the Divine in everything long long before, at the feet of his Master. So the words that came out of his lips were from the innermost core of his being and had the stamp of authority.

Another time Swamiji declared: 'To be unselfish, perfectly selfless, is salvation itself for the man within dies, and God alone remains.' Here are the words of a sage, a seer, very clear and unambiguous and at the same time apparently showing an easy path to salvation. But it is to be worked out. Man must be intensely and motivelessly working for others, with not a thought of what will happen to himself. He himself did it. One of his American friends remarks: 'He did not seem to be conscious of himself at all. It was the other man who interested him.' Out of the fullness of the heart Swamiji spoke: 'You little know how nothing would be impossible for you in life if you labour day and night for others with your heart's blood! 'Again, he prophesies: 'Our best work is done, our greatest influence is exerted, when we are without thought of self.'

## ***Love of humanity***

But to be 'unselfish, perfectly selfless' we require a better basis than the mere exercise of the intellect. We should have the heart, the feeling,

the love of humanity. Swamiji had it in ample measure and that was what sent him to America, to seek means to ameliorate the condition of the suffering masses of India. He had failed to get any response from the rich of his own country in this direction, and was struggling, as it were, in the jaws of death. He panted for direction from on High and when the anguish reached the climax, the command came. For him religiousness was not making long faces, nor was it looking down on others. 'Love and charity for the whole human race, that is the test of true religiousness,' he stated. Let us not jump to the conclusion that we have this in abundance. Swamiji was aware of this fault of man and warned us against this self-complacency. He observes: 'I do not mean the sentimental statement that all men are brothers, but that one must feel the oneness of human life.' Many are ready to accommodate their brother as long as everything goes their way, as long as the brother does not cross their path. But as soon as their least interest is affected, woe unto the brother! This is not loving humanity. It is pure selfishness masquerading in the form of charity. Swamiji reiterates that no society in any country has come to that excellence 'where the effectiveness of individual self-sacrifice for the good of the many and oneness of purpose and endeavour actuating every member of the society for the common good of the whole, has been realized.' Let there be no misgivings about it. It can be done by a few, and the persons on whom God's choice falls must consider themselves blessed. There is no room for pride about it. Swamiji decisively points out: 'All are helped on by nature, and will be so helped even though millions of us were not here. The course of nature will not stop for such as you and me; it is only a blessed privilege to you and to me that we are allowed, in the way of helping others, to educate ourselves. . . . So drive out of your mind the idea that you have to do something for the world; the world does not require any help from you. It is sheer nonsense on the part of any man to think that he is born to help the world; it is simply pride, it is selfishness insinuating itself in the form of virtue.'<sup>6</sup> He was himself humble to the end.

An incident in the life of the Swami that occurred at the Belur Math in the year 1901 shows his love for the poor, in a touching way. Some Santal labourers were working at the Math premises then. Swamiji used to visit them and hear their tales of woe. Sometimes tears would come to the Swami's eyes when he heard them and then the narrator would stop his tale, entreat Swamiji to go away. One day while Swamiji was talking with them some people of wealth and position came to see him. When he was told about the visitors, he said, 'I shan't be able to go now. I am quite happy with these people.' Another day he arranged to feed them with sweets and delicacies and when they had eaten to their satisfaction, Swamiji turned to a disciple and said, 'I actually saw the Lord Himself in them. How simple-hearted and guileless they are! 'And a little later addressing the Sannyasins and Brahmacharis of the Math he observed: 'See how simple-hearted these poor illiterate people are! Can you

mitigate their misery a little? If not of what use is your wearing the gerua? . . . Alas! Nobody in our country thinks of the low, the poor and the miserable!' With the knowledge of history of the countries of the East and the West as background he prophetically remarked, 'Unless they (the masses) are raised, this motherland of ours will never awake.' 'You will be free in a moment, if you starve yourself to death by giving to another. If you will be perfect, you will become God,' said he on another occasion.

### ***Purity of motive and sincerity of conviction***

The motive power to work for humanity comes with renunciation, not merely outer, but inner also. There must not be any ulterior end in view at any time, prior, during or at the end of the work. That is purity of motive. This will not come unless sincere conviction, that the path chosen is sure to lead us to the goal, arises. Incidentally, we may point out, that sincerity of conviction and purity of motive form the groundwork of any other pathway, to spirituality, as well. Swamiji warns: 'Keep away from all insincere claimants to supernatural illumination.' Aye, that is the great hurdle that comes in spiritual life. We like to attain results quickly and without effort. Is it possible? No. But man is man. He knows it is impossible yet runs after the miraculous and the like. But those who are sincere, have the assurance of all the Great Ones, to which Swamiji too joins his voice: 'Truth, purity and unselfishness — wherever these are present, there is no power below or above the sun to crush the possessor thereof.' Is it not a reflection of his own life ?

### ***Chastity***

'Chastity in thought, word, and deed, always, and in all conditions,' said Swamiji, 'is what is called Brahmacharya.' Than Swamiji there can be no better authority to speak on the value of chastity. He was pure as purity can be. Sri Ramakrishna said of him that he was like a blazing fire. The Master said, 'Maya stood ten steps away from Naren. She could not catch him in her net.' Let us, therefore, hear Swamiji's opinion about this virtue: 'It is only the chaste man or woman who can make the Ojas rise and store it in the brain, that is why chastity has always been considered the highest virtue.' 'Without chastity there can be no spiritual strength. Continence gives wonderful control over mankind. The spiritual leaders of men have been very continent, and this is what gave them power.' Referring to his plan of education he said, 'It is *gurugrihavasa*, living with the teacher that I would prescribe,' for that meant a life of celibacy. 'Everybody should be trained to practise absolute Brahmacharya and then only faith and shraddha will come. . . . Simply by the observance of strict Brahmacharya (continence) all learning can be mastered in a very short time. One has an unflinching memory of what one hears or knows but once.



It is owing to this want of continence that everything is on the brink of ruin in our country,' remarked Swamiji on various occasions. Will the nation heed? It would be the best way of honouring Swamiji if it did. For it is the working out of his ideas, and not his name, that he liked to see.

### ***Swamiji's personality***

Commissioned by Divine Providence to preach the gospel of Vedanta, of tolerance, of spirituality he, it is hardly necessary to state, was well-equipped with all these and more. We have seen here, in a few of his teachings that we have discussed, that he never taught anything that he himself had not practised. As in the case of these teachings so too was he an exemplar in the love of God, and other virtues that he asked us to cultivate. This can be observed by anyone who cares to go through his life. We shall now conclude by a reference to the remarks of those, specially from the critical West, who had the opportunity to come in close contact with him.

Swamiji's personality was imposing and impressive. He had a regal bearing and a casual observer would take him to be a Rajah (a Prince). Here is a news item from the *Framingham Tribune*, which has recently been brought to light; it reads:

Friday, August 25, 1893.

Holliston: Miss Kate Sanborn, who has recently returned from the West, last week entertained the Indian Rajah, Swami Vivekananda. Behind a pair of horses furnished by liveryman F. W. Phipps, Miss Sanborn and the Rajah drove through town on Friday en route for Hunnewell's.<sup>7</sup>

This news item, appearing in a journal of a remote town, has its own importance and significance; and more so when it happens that Swamiji had not yet attained the fame and celebrity, which, after the Parliament of Religions, was his. This proves that his was a personality that could not be hidden.

It is also interesting to note that he left deep, abiding and loving memories with whomsoever he came in contact. Witness Mrs. Wright's letter to her mother which has recently come to light:

Annisquam, Mass.  
August 29, 1893.

"Dear Mother,

We have been having a queer time. Kate Sanborn had a Hindoo monk in tow as I believe I mentioned in my last letter. John went down to meet him in Boston and missing him, invited him up here. He came Friday! In a long saffron robe that caused universal amazement. He was a

most gorgeous vision. He had a superb carriage of the head, was very handsome in an oriental way, about thirty years old in time, ages in civilization. He stayed until Monday and was one of the most interesting people I have yet come across. We talked all day all night and began again with interest next morning. The town was in a fume to see him; the boarders at Miss Lane's in wild excitement. They were in and out of the Lodge constantly and little Mrs. Merrill's eyes were blazing and her cheeks red with excitement. Chiefly we talked religion. It was a kind of revival, I have not felt so wrought up for a long time myself! Then on Sunday John had him invited to speak in the Church and they took up a collection for a Heathen College to be carried on on strictly heathen principles — whereupon I retired to my corner and laughed until I cried.'<sup>8</sup>

Here are given the circumstances that brought Prof. J. H. Wright and Swamiji together. How this meeting helped Swamiji, to get entry into the Parliament of Religions as a delegate, is a matter of history too well-known to need repetition. But mark the impression left by Swamiji during that short visit.

We shall now quote from a letter of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, journalist and poet, to Mrs. Kate Tannatt Woods who had sometime played hostess to Swamiji. Of course this letter is of a later date (May, 1895) but it shows how the correspondent, who was one among the audience of Swamiji, felt about his personality. She writes:

'I was listening to Vivekananda this morning an hour. How honoured by fate you must feel to have been allowed to be of service to this Great Soul. I believe him to be the reincarnation of some great Spirit — perhaps Buddha — perhaps Christ! He is so simple — so sincere, so pure, so unselfish. To have listened to him all winter is the greatest privilege life has ever offered me. It would be surprising to me that people could misunderstand or malign such a soul if I did not know how Buddha and Christ were persecuted and lied about by small inferiors. His discourse this morning was most uplifting — his mere presence is that. His absolute sinking of self is what I like.'<sup>9</sup>

How enormously he should have touched the deep chords of their hearts to make them spontaneously pour out their adorations and encomiums on him! What a divine joy should have been brimming in their hearts to make them desire to share it with others! Yet speech is but a poor messenger of the heart. If even that sends a thrill through one's being, how greater should have been the feelings aroused in those hearts! One can feel it only when one comes across such a holy one. As words and descriptions can carry little meaning of what an ocean is, so too these letters convey but a faint echo of the resurrection of those hearts. Perhaps one can imagine it a little. But imageries will fall far far short of the real feeling. The magnitude of the spiritual benefit one can receive by

a sight, a touch or communion with such spiritual luminaries is unfathomable. These letters, which form but a fraction of the few that have come to light, are living evidences of the soothing influence, like that of a cool mountain breeze, his sublime life breathed wherever he happened to be; nay even more, wherever his message spread. His life, like those of others of his eminence are verifications of the scriptural statements. These lives reiterate the scriptures and reimburse them with energy and vigour.

Finally let us reproduce from what Miss Sarah Farmer, the founder of the summer School for the Comparative Study of Religions, at Green Acre, wrote to the Vedanta Society of New York about the year 1902, after the passing away of Swamiji:

'To know Swami Vivekananda was a renewed consecration; to have him under one's roof was to feel empowered to go forth to the children of men and to help them all to a realization of their birthright as Sons of God. What Green Acre owes to him cannot be put into words. A little band of people had started to provide the providing care of God for those who only rely upon Him in utter faith and love. This great soul came into our midst and did more than any other to give to the work its true tone, for he lived every day the truth which his lips proclaimed and was to us the living evidence of the power manifested nineteen hundred years ago, in that he went about his Father's business in perfect joyousness and childlike trust, without "purse or script" and found all promises fulfilled, all needs met. Forever after, as he grew in knowledge and power, his influence increased among us and helped to strengthen our faith, and today his power for good is even greater and will continue to be, if we are true to Him who worketh in us "to will and to do His good pleasure".'<sup>10</sup>

Such then was Swami Vivekananda, an embodiment of the highest virtues he preached.

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<sup>1</sup> Works, Vol.V,p.44 Epistles.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,p. 56,57.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Vol.VIII, p.83, 'My Life and Mission.'

<sup>5</sup> Works, Vol. VII, p.75, Inspired Talks.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 87-88.

<sup>7</sup> Swami Vivekananda in America, New Discoveries by Marie Louise Burke, pub. Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, page 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., page 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., page 29.

<sup>10</sup> The Brahmavadin, January, 1903, pages 56-57.

## **SWAMI BRAHMANANDA - THE SPIRITUAL SON OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA**

**Swami Paratparananda**

*Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – January 1964; Vol. 50; page 494*

### **I**

Every enterprise requires two distinctive forces to keep it in a palpable, healthy and dynamic condition — one to help it expand and the other to aid it in consolidation. Both these forces are imperative. For without depth expansion tends towards infirmity, and without expansion depth becomes meaningless. This is more poignantly felt in the case of an enterprise which seeks to serve the spiritual needs of mankind as a whole. That is what happened to Hinduism, the Eternal Religion, when it made foreign travel a taboo. The exchange of ideas ceased; the firmament of religion shrank, as it were, to such small dimensions that it was thought to be contained in the mere observance of certain external practices.

In the movement ushered in by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda played the dynamic part of spreading the message of the Master broadcast. He trotted the earth almost from end to end in order to do this. But the life given to him was very short, a bare 39 years, out of which his actual work can be said to begin only after 1886. If we remember the days of the Baranagore monastery we find Swami Vivekananda not as the dynamic interlocutor but as the consolidator. For after the passing away of the Master the young disciples had gone back to their homes and it was left to Swami Vivekananda to gather them back, instil the Master's fiery renunciation into them and pick up the thread from where the Master had left to ensconce the brotherhood on a firm footing. And once it was done, the Master called him, as it were, to function as the other arm, that of taking the message of the Eternal Religion to different parts of the world. For a time it appears, on the surface, that Swami Vivekananda had ceased to consolidate but even this appearance is for a brief span of time. Even from America he was urging his *gurubhais* and disciples to get a plot of land and to build a monastery, from where future preachers of Vedanta could spring up.

But his life, as we have said, was too brief and he had so much to do in making the world know about the Master's message. He, therefore, stuck to it and submitted to the commands from on High. Nevertheless he saw his approaching end. To whom should he entrust the Master's treasure — the sacred task of guiding the movement? The Master himself had solved this problem for Narendranath in the Dakshineswar days. Once Sri Ramakrishna had remarked, `Rakhal has in him the capacity to rule a

kingdom.' Narendranath who was present on the occasion took the hint. He told the younger group of the Master's disciples about the Master's appreciation and said, 'From today we shall call Rakhali, Raja', and that epithet stuck on. Sri Ramakrishna who heard about it later, was greatly pleased. Remembering the Master's words Swamiji from the very beginning left him in charge of the Math and formally made over to Rakhali, Swami Brahmananda, the Presidentship of the organization in 1901. For full twenty-one years he guided the faltering foot-steps of the young organization un-ostentatiously, yet commanding the respect, awe and love of one and all with whomsoever he came in contact.

After the going forth of the message of Sri Ramakrishna into the world, it was required that preachers fit to take up the mantle were to be recruited and trained, not for a few years but for generations to come. It was a work which required infinite patience. It was the task of consolidation of what was already gained. And this task devolved on the shoulders of Swami Brahmananda, and before two years had elapsed he lost his companion, Swami Vivekananda.

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It is difficult to assess the personality of the spiritually great ones. It is more so when the person happens to be of a silent disposition. So, to get a peep into the personality of Swami Brahmananda we have to take recourse to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master has left to us, through his talks, his insight into the exalted characteristics of his disciples, their inherent natures and their unapproachable heights of renunciation. 'Once, before Rakhali came,' says Sri Ramakrishna, 'I saw in a vision that the Divine Mother suddenly brought a boy, and placing him on my lap said, "He is your son". I was startled to hear it. I said, "What is that? How can I have a son?" -She smiled and explained, "He is not a son in the ordinary worldly sense of the term, but your all-renouncing spiritual son." Thus assured, I was consoled. Rakhali came sometime after I had that vision and I recognized him at once as the boy.' Another time Sri Ramakrishna stated how Rakhali's nature was revealed to him: 'One day just before Rakhali came here I saw in a trance Krishna, as the shepherd boy of Vrindavana, standing on a full-blown lotus in the midst of a lake and by his side stood a boy looking at Him playfully. When Rakhali came, I knew him as that boy, as Krishna's companion.' Rakhali was therefore not only the companion of the Master in this Incarnation but in the past as well. The Incarnations come with such pure souls to help them in their divine mission.

Again, Sri Ramakrishna used to class him as an *Īswarakoti* — one possessed of divine qualities, perfect from his very birth—and also as one of the inner circle (*antaranga*). 'Youngsters like him belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are born with God-consciousness. No sooner do they grow a little older than they realize the danger of coming in contact

with the world.... Their one thought is how to realize God,' said the Master many a time. These words of the Master are very significant. For Sri Ramakrishna did not heap any undue praise on anyone for whatsoever a reason. He was simple as a child and whatever was revealed to his insight he spoke without reservation. Moreover, he depended on the Divine Mother for everything, even to bring to him versatile spiritual geniuses, which the Mother had said would come to him. He prayed to Her and cried in anguish at the delay in their coming but there he rested. All his appeals were to the Divine Mother and he was sure that She would not fail him. She did not let him down at any time. That is the reason why his estimation is infallible, his every word in-estimable.

Now, the relation between Sri Ramakrishna and Rakhal was sweet, intimate and very touching. His attitude towards this disciple was like that of a mother to her child. Rakhal too in his presence was just like a child of five or six, wholly dependent on him and basking as it were, under his protecting wings.

Such had been the personality of Swami Brahmananda even at the beginning of his spiritual career. It deepened and expanded with the passage of time. For the first few years after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna he spent his time exclusively in tapasya at Puri, Banaras, Vrindavan, and on the banks of the Narmada. Knowing his in-drawn nature and complete reticence to pay heed to the wants of the body Swamiji enjoined one of his brother disciples to accompany him and look after his needs. Swami Subodhananda, another direct disciple of the Master, who lived with him at Vrindavan used to bring him food and set it down in an appointed place, but many days it would remain untouched, for Maharaj, as Rakhal was lovingly called, would be lost to the outer world, in the contemplation of the divine.

At Banaras when he was offered help in the way of arrangement for his food as long as he stayed there, he politely but firmly declined the offer and preferred to live on the food begged from the alms-houses. For it entailed no obligation on him. Besides, it left him free from disturbance by way of people crowding in. This was the time when he desired to be left alone. From Banaras he proceeded to the banks of the Narmada. It is said that here, once, for six days at a stretch he had no consciousness of the outer world at all. So deep was his samadhi. But what divine experiences and visions he had during these times were never known. They remained a sealed book for ever as he never talked about them. Once, however, he remarked, 'The religious life begins after Nirvikalpa samadhi'. But how few can understand it! Till one attains that state one sees everything in a different way, one's evaluation of things gets coloured by one's own nature. The ideal is very high and hence appears impossible. But persons like him who have attained the goal have affirmed it. Swamiji too said, 'Religion is realization'. Until then we are all groping in the dark.



Swami Brahmananda's contribution to the world is enormous but the brightest part of it is his life — austere undertaken, unostentatiously but immaculately lived and above all purely dependent upon God. It is an absorbing study to follow his footsteps as a pilgrim from Banaras to Narmada, from thence to Panchavati, Dwaraka, and other places. His absolute dependence on God and stern abidance by the rule of non-acceptance of money is a thing that fills one with awe and more so in a world where everything seems to go topsy turvy in the absence of that one thing — money. His dependence on God was pure and simple, almost child-like. At Bombay a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna pressed him to accept his hospitality but he refused on the ground that it would interfere with his solitude and flag away his dependence on God. He put up in a quiet place near Mumbadevi's temple and lived on alms. Even for travel he would not accept money. Many places he covered on foot despite the untold difficulties.

During this time, in Vrindavan, he came across Vijay Krishna Goswami whom he knew at Dakshineswar. Both were glad at the meeting. The Goswami, who had come to know of the austere life being led by Swami Brahmananda, asked him: 'Sir, why are you engaged in such austere practices when Sri Ramakrishna had already bestowed on you all types of experiences and visions?' In a sweet voice, the Swami replied, 'What I have experienced by his grace I am trying to make my own.' The Goswami was wonderstruck. He felt the surge of the God-hunger that was passing through the Swami and thought it futile to try to dissuade him from his pursuit. From Vrindavan he went to Hardwar to continue his life of contemplation. Thus it was a saga of intense sadhana for a long period until, perhaps, he received some command from Sri Ramakrishna to return to the field of work. For just when he was passing his days blissfully at Vrindavan he suddenly left for Calcutta. After a few days of his arrival there he said to some of his brother disciples: 'I was blissful at Vrindavan. But I came here so that I may be of service to the brothers at the Math to help them express in their lives that love and devotion which we found in Sri Ramakrishna, so that people who would come in contact with them may be reminded of him.' Further he added, 'People will come to you, will come to the Math seeking solace. They will take shelter at Sri Ramakrishna's feet and attain peace from the miseries of this world.'

It must be remembered, however, that we cannot expect always something spectacular to happen in the life of a man of the spirit. The contribution of these spiritual ones go, more often than not, unnoticed. For their influence like the morning dew that brings into blossom myriads of flowers is silently but unobtrusively exerted. It cannot be measured in terms of worldly things. A single moment's contact with them, a single word of theirs changes some men, gives others supreme consolation. It is

unwise, therefore, to judge these great ones from mere outward accomplishments. People competent to know about them are those who have attained similar spiritual heights. In this connection it would be profitable to know what Swamiji once said of him: 'Raja is the greatest treasure house of spirituality.' On another occasion when a European devotee came to Swamiji with his spiritual problems Swamiji sent him to Swami Brahmananda with the words: 'There is a dynamo working and we are all under him.' The devotee after conversing with Swami Brahmananda felt his doubts cleared and expressed gratitude for the help. Such was his personality.

The tree is known by its fruits. But seldom is it known how the seed grew from its tiny, inconspicuous beginning into the tree. The Ramakrishna Order has today expanded into a fairly big institution and has immense possibilities of further growth in it. But it was Maharaj who sowed the seed, watered and manured it with all motherly care in order that it may shoot up into a mighty banyan tree, so that the message of Sri Ramakrishna could reach and minister to the spiritual as also the secular needs of humanity for ever. Maharaj, it is needless to say, firmly believed like Swamiji that humanity needed the message of Sri Ramakrishna particularly at the present moment of its evolution. So in order to put the organization on a firm footing, Maharaj, who was far-sighted in administration, picked and chose the right type of human instruments, monks and lay devotees, for particular fields of work both in India and abroad. That is why the success the disciples, lay or monastic, achieved everywhere was almost phenomenal.

#### IV

From the time Swami Brahmananda, who came to be known to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna as 'Maharaj', arrived at Calcutta, after his long pilgrimage, a different phase opened in his life — that of ministering to the spiritual needs of the people. Sri Ramakrishna's name had by then spread far and wide and many earnest seekers, young and old, now thirsted to drink of the ambrosia of his message. But Sri Ramakrishna was not living in his physical tenement any longer. People had also heard a great deal about Maharaj; how he was the beloved of the Master and so on; so they, from all walks of life, young and old, students and the employed came to him whenever he stayed in Calcutta. The ease with which he moved with them made them shed the awe, that otherwise naturally awakened in them on seeing him, and find in him a person almost of their own age. They felt free to unburden their innermost thoughts and problems to him as if he was their life long confidant. And he with his command over the spiritual kingdom ministered to their needs.

But it was not always that he talked about spiritual matters. With many he discussed things in which they were interested. We can only



presume, now at this distance of time, that probably that was the way by which he drew them toward himself and through that process got them interested in the life spiritual. For who can hold long their own once they come in touch with the divine? His close and long association with and training under his Master had revealed to him the intricacies of human nature, and this knowledge he utilized in imparting instructions suited to each individual. Many young men soon began to come and it was left to him to train them and cast them in the mould of Sri Ramakrishna. This spiritual ministry thus begun continued throughout the rest of his life.

## V

After the passing away of Swami Vivekananda the full responsibility of guiding the mission fell upon him. We have said that he used to remain indrawn most of the time, but it was also true that he was aware of what went on throughout the organization. Though in the beginning there were a few centres, gradually the work of the Order expanded. More centres sprang up but his vigilant eye was on every activity of the mission, without any one being aware of it. He never interfered with the normal working of any centre but everyone looked to him for his blessings on any new venture. He even knew the progress each one of the members of the order made and we have this on the authority of his own words: 'Do you think,' said he to a disciple, 'I don't know what you boys have been doing and how you have been faring in the path of God. I may live in one place and seem to be unconcerned, but I know what is happening to each of you.'

Many a time his mere presence would solve the knottiest of problems that arose in a centre and that without his having the necessity to enquire into them. For in his presence the minds of the aspirants were lifted far above the mundane plane and the petty squabbles that they might have indulged in appeared to them as childish and unbecoming of them. Thus before him all problems melted like snow before the sun.

'Once when he was asked,' writes a disciple, 'to make some new rules for the guidance of the young monks he replied: "Swamiji has already made our rules for us. We do not need to add any new ones. Add more love, attain more devotion and help others to move toward the ideal of God."' That was his prescription. For had he not seen how Sri Ramakrishna without formally inaugurating any organization knitted them, young boys, indissolubly together? That bond was more firm than all the rules could induce to hold together. He saw that love destroyed hatred and jealousies. Devotion lifted man from the animal-level to the godly state, and naturally in that state men could do with few rules. If one could really be devoted to God how could he hate His creatures?

And how to add this love? Unless one loved God intensely one cannot truly love His creatures. All other love is either a trading as Swamiji put it —you do me something and in return I cherish you some

affection — or a make-believe. And loving God is not an easy matter. Unless one sees God one cannot love Him truly and wholly. So Maharaj laid great stress on practice of the spiritual disciplines to attain God-realization, to see God.

‘Onward, forward’ was his watchword to one and all. Practice of spiritual disciplines was his remedy for all types of drawbacks, moral as well as spiritual. For he said that this would clear one's perspective, purify one's mind and make one see light where one saw darkness before. Spiritual disciplines properly practised made one humble.

Someone once asked, ‘Maharaj, I am not getting concentration of mind. I do not feel that I am making any progress spiritually.’ He replied: ‘Practise spiritual disciplines regularly for eight or nine years and then you will reap the fruits of your efforts. Even in a year you will make some progress.’ Thus with assurances and encouragements he guided the disciples on the path of the Spirit. But when in spite of his efforts if a disciple failed to make progress, Maharaj helped him to clear the hurdles. Yet he laid great stress on individual effort.

One thing he warned against was about indulging in idle talk. He said, ‘Idle talk wastes much energy.’ A spiritual aspirant is to be up and doing. His thoughts should be constantly dwelling on God. The Upanisads say, ‘Know Him alone, give up all vain talk.’<sup>1</sup> For, once the mind is allowed to run where it pleases it will be difficult to gather it again. In the Kathopanishad there is a beautiful allegory where the Self is likened to the owner, body to the chariot, the discriminating intellect to the charioteer, the mind to the reins, the senses to the horses and the sense objects to the roads.<sup>2</sup> Then it goes on to say, ‘One whose intellect is dull and indiscriminating and one who is always of uncontrolled mind, his senses are uncontrolled like the wicked horses of a charioteer.’<sup>3</sup> They bring the chariot and the owner to grief. Maharaj says, Give your mind to the world and it will destroy not only your mind and soul but the body too. On the other hand give it to God and it will contribute not only to the well-being of the mind but of the body also.’ Sri Ramakrishna too warns us: ‘The mind is like a packet of mustard seeds — once spilled it is very difficult to collect them again.’ Hence we must always be circumspect of what we think, of what we talk and what we do.

Swami Brahmananda was a tower of strength to the organization. Under his fostering care it was nurtured during its early days almost from its inception. So when we shall be celebrating his hundred and second birthday—he was only a few days younger to Swamiji—this month it is but meet we look back and think over this divine personality who came into the world to transmit the message of the Incarnation of the age, Sri Ramakrishna, and imbibe some inspiration to carry us onward on the path of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Mundaka Up. 2.2.5.

<sup>2</sup> Kathopanishad III. 3 and 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 5.

## SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA (\*)

By Swami Paratparananda

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – July 1962; Vol. 49; page 122

This world is a conglomeration of good and evil, the magnanimous and the diabolic. In each one of us these elements are present in a lesser or more degree. Man's effort is to eliminate the diabolic, the degrading and weakening elements by cultivating the opposite virtues: magnanimity, tolerance, sympathy, love, strength and the like. He has to manifest these divine qualities in full and then only does he reach his pristine perfection. And to reach this perfection, is the goal of all life. 'Everything that exists is moving towards the manifestation of that perfection whether it is conscious of that or not,' says Swami Vivekananda. It is one thing to move unknowingly or drift along the current and quite another to consciously seek to reach perfection. The former may take aeons before the goal is reached whereas the latter may find it in this very life. All Scriptures are but directions to reach this perfection, this freedom. But Scriptures alone by themselves do not help man attain this perfection unless aided and supported by individual effort. The Hindu Scriptures are bold and unequivocally explicit on this point. They declare: 'This Atman is not to be attained by ratiocinations, not by intellect, nay not even by the knowledge of an infinite number of Srutis (Scriptures).'<sup>1</sup> They do not mince matters.

Scriptures lay down only principles and precepts which we have to follow to attain that perfection. Man understands these principles when he has examples before him. Majority of us are not so constituted as to understand the abstract principles without the help of illustrations. 'Would to God that all of us were so developed that we would not require any example, would not require any persons. But that we are not,' says Swami Vivekananda. So we need examples to explain the abstract principles enunciated in the Shastras. The lives of sages and saints supply this want. Hence arises the necessity to study these lives, that we can learn the ways and means to shed our encrustations and *upadhis*-beginning from the ego to the body — that bind us down to the world.

We have heard it said that he who has obtained the grace of a preceptor alone can know Brahman. He alone can realize God. We have also heard it said that one should approach such a Guru with humility, and learn of him by obeisance, by questioning and by service.<sup>2</sup> But in an age when valuation of things higher seems to have undergone a great change and when scepticism stalks the earth, these things are rarely believed, unless there are dazzling examples which can pierce through the veils and reach the heart of man.

Our land has been fortunate to bear on its bosom personages of such spiritual magnitude, as the occasions demanded, as could scatter the gathering clouds of agnosticism and unbelief by blasts of their wonderful

realizations. So we find Sri Ramakrishna come to re-establish the eternal spiritual values at a time when religion was considered as mere superstition. He gathered round him the very lads who were most sceptic, but sincere, from the city of Calcutta to propagate his message, transformed them and commanded them to be like lamps unto the weary travellers on this parched earth. Some he commanded with vehemence to go forth and bring the erring humanity to its senses and gather into the fold the sheep that have strayed away.

Among these University students was Sashi Bhusan Chakravarti, young, strong, energetic, with a brilliant intellect. In spite of all these qualities or because of them there was an undercurrent of unrest in him, which goaded him on to seek spiritual solace first in the Brahmo Samaj and later at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. That he was a sceptic at the time he met Sri Ramakrishna is amply borne out by his reply to the Master's question, whether he believed in God with form or in a formless God. He had replied, 'When I am not certain of the very existence of God how can I say one way or the other.' This feeling however did not last long. His first contact with the Master revealed to him, as it were, quite different regions, where everything was soothing to the senses and bestowing serenity on the mind. He hungered for it more and more. His visits to the Master became frequent. Many a day he would come to Sri Ramakrishna full of doubts but the Master solved them all without it being necessary for him to ask about them. Then developed an intimacy, a relationship which bound Sashi forever with the Master. Sashi began to regard Sri Ramakrishna's words as divine injunctions and faithfully followed them to the letter. It is said that once coming to know of the excellence of Sufi Poetry he started studying Persian. He took to its study so seriously that even when he went to Dakshineswar he used to carry those books with him. One day he was so absorbed in their study that he did not hear Sri Ramakrishna call until the Master had called him thrice. When, however, the Master observed, 'If you forget your duties for the sake of secular studies, you will lose your devotion,' he made a bundle of those books and threw them into the Ganges. Books lost all importance for him from then onwards.

After Sashi's two years of communion in the bliss that flowed incessantly at Dakshineswar, came the unforeseen blow in the form of the Master's fatal illness. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that this illness of his was the Divine Mother's device for separating the inner circle of devotees from the rest. Among those who served the Master at this time with untiring zeal, Sashi stood first. For Sashi, the Master was his all in all. He could not brook the idea that the Master would leave his mortal coil so soon. But all indications were against this presumption. Yet night and day he remained like a shadow at the Master's bedside and nursed him. Personal service to the Guru formed his main spiritual practice at this time and this remained the dominant note of his life throughout the rest of his days. To serve the Master whole-heartedly became a passion with

him. The chroniclers of Sri Ramakrishna referring to Sashi's service, write: 'He practised no other spiritual discipline. He knew no other asceticism. Regardless of personal comfort, of food or rest, he was indefatigably at work. His one idea was to alleviate the sufferings of the Master. He would have given up his life if he had thought that would cure him. He had attained perfection through service; so of what use were other forms of disciplines for him? Everyone marvelled at his indefatigable energy, his sustained power of endurance and his boundless love for the Master.'

For eight months or more Sashi knew no rest or comfort in serving the Master. But setting at naught all hopes and wishes of the devotees, the best medical advice, treatment, and nursing, the day of final departure of the Master arrived. Sri Ramakrishna was more cheerful that day than ever and the devotees believed that he was really getting better, so that, when the end actually came Sashi could not believe it. He remonstrated with the Doctor for declaring that life was extinct. He thought it was just another samadhi of the Master and requested the assembled devotees to chant the Lord's name. They chanted Lord Hari's name for a long time. But when at last, life did not return and the body grew cold they carried it to the burning ghat. The anguish Sashi felt at the departure of his beloved Master can only be imagined than described. He fell at the feet of the Master unconscious. However, after reviving he sang the name of the Master in triumphant praise. When the cremation was over he gathered the relics that remained and carried them on his head to the Cossipore garden.

Sashi's service to the Master did not stop with the disappearance of the Master's corporeal frame. We find him engaged in the Master's service again at the Baranagore Math, whither they had moved after the expiry of the lease of the Cossipore Garden. Here Sashi Maharaj set apart a separate room for the preservation of the Master's relics. Placing a portrait of the Master on a pedestal in that room he commenced worshipping the Master in the orthodox way. His devotion and worship thoroughly moved and left a deep impression on the visitors.

Towards the end of December 1886 the young disciples who had renounced the world, formally took the vow of sannyasa and assumed new names. Narendra, into whose care the Master had left the disciples, wanted to have the name 'Swami Ramakrishnananda' for himself. But having seen the unbounded love Sashi bore towards the Master and the inimitable way in which he served him, Narendra relinquished the covetable name in favour of the brother disciple. And true to his name Sashi Maharaj found bliss in the service of the Master and the dissemination of his message till the end of his life to the exclusion of all his personal needs.

The early days in the monastery were of extreme privation. The contributions which some of the lay disciples of the Master made were inadequate for the expenses of the brotherhood. Sometimes they would

go by turns and beg, but the food thus secured was not even sufficient for the day. Swami Ramakrishnananda at that time worked as a teacher for three months in a nearby High School to maintain the monastery and the service of the Master. When others lost themselves in meditation it was Swami Ramakrishnananda who after offering the food to Sri Ramakrishna would wait with their meals or even drag them out of their meditation. Thus he kept watch on the relics of the Master and looked after the children of the Master like a mother.

He believed that the Master was present in the shrine and therefore never felt the necessity to go on pilgrimages. The sanctity of all the places of pilgrimage was experienced by him in the shrine. When all the other brother disciples in response to the call of the itinerant life left the monastery one by one Swami Ramakrishnananda stuck to his post of watching over the sacred relics of the Master. He never even went to Calcutta to see Suresh Mitra, a devotee of the Master, who was on his death-bed. But at the earnest insistence of the latter he went in a carriage hired for the return journey, spent an hour with the devotee and returned to the monastery.

To Swami Ramakrishnananda the likeness of the Master ceased to be a likeness. He treated the portrait as if it was the Master himself in flesh and blood. On a sultry night at the Alambazar monastery — to which place the monastery was shifted from Baranagore — when he was fanning himself he suddenly got up and as he felt that the Master should also be feeling the burning heat, entered the shrine and standing near the cot of the Master fanned him till dawn. Such incidents were not infrequent in his life.

After 11 years of constant watch over the Master's relics, he was called upon, by Swami Vivekananda, to go to Madras and found a monastery there in the name of the Master and spread his message. Swami Ramakrishnananda readily agreed to the leader's call recognising behind it the guiding hand of the Master; for did not Sri Ramakrishna entrust the responsibility of all of them to Swami Vivekananda? Did not the Master make him their leader? He took the next steamer to Madras and arrived there at the end of March 1897 with a framed photo of Sri Ramakrishna.

As at Baranagore and Alambazar here too in Madras he established a shrine and performed daily worship of the Master. All the activities of the Math centred round Sri Ramakrishna. But here too it was a continuation of those days of travail. The stir and enthusiasm that was created by Swami Vivekananda's triumphant tour in the West had died down with the receptions given to him in Madras and other places. When therefore Swami Ramakrishnananda started a monastery first on the Ice House Road and later at the Ice House and subsequently at Mylapore he had to be sometimes the poojari, cook, servant and all, on account of paucity of funds. He had to take classes in different parts of the City. At times when he returned in the evening he would be too tired to cook. On

such occasions he would satisfy his hunger by a piece of bread. Yet except a few of his students, who knew about his difficulties and volunteered to remove them, none cared to know. He was very reticent to receive the help proffered by those young men lest it should cause them inconvenience. For their own condition was far from affluent.

These privations, however, stood not in his way of maintaining the worship of the Master in all its detail. Such were the difficult days that he passed through, that sometimes there would be nothing to offer to the Master and the Swami in great distress would go to the shrine and pour out his anguish. One day when the Swami was in the Shrine some visitors arrived and they heard the Swami call out in loud and angry tones, 'You have brought me here, Old Man, and left me helpless! Are you testing my powers of patience and endurance? I will not go and beg hereafter for my sake or even for yours. If anything comes unasked I will offer it to you and share the *prasadam*. If not, I will bring the sea-sand for offering to you and I shall live upon that.'

As in the Alambazar Monastery in Madras too he would on sultry days fan the Master's portrait for hours on end both in the afternoons and nights. As days passed his conviction that the Master was himself present in his likeness grew stronger and stronger. His worship therefore attained the classic character of service to a beloved person. Whenever he himself felt the oppressive heat he would immediately remember about the Master, open the shrine and would start fanning him. Besides, as Sister Devamata has stated 'He was dead to himself and alive only in the Master.' Writing about the Swami she further adds: 'His coming and going, his eating and sleeping, his labour and teaching, his entire living took their rise in the will of the Master, never in his own desire and convenience.

Those who saw him carry his Master's picture close to his heart, his body bent over it in protection as he walked in rain from the carriage to the entrance to the new Math hall at Mylapore (Madras), when he moved the shrine there from the Ice House, could appreciate the tenderness of love, the power of devotion for his Guru which transfused his being. He could say of his Master as truly as St. Paul said of his: "The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God."

An incident that happened at the Mylapore Math is reminiscent of this faith of the Swami. The first building of the Math at Mylapore had developed cracks in several places and during rains water would come down through these fissures. Swami Ramakrishnananda at such times would enter the shrine to see whether water leaked through the roof. One night he found that water dripped just over the likeness of the Master. He stood there holding an umbrella over the Master till the night wore out and the rains stopped. He did not move the portrait of the Master to a safer side as that would mean disturbing the Master's sleep at an unusual hour.

Swami Ramakrishnananda's life was one of great austerity and self-

surrender. His complete dependence on the Master was observed on more than one occasion. On the death of Mr. Biligiri Iyengar the original owner, the Ice House, in which the Math was housed, came up for auction. The devotees apprehensive of the outcome if the house passed into a stranger's hands were sorely perturbed and one of them reported the progress of the auction to the Swami every now and then. But the Swami, who was seated at some distance from the crowd that had gathered, remained calm and serene and after a time remarked to the devotee: 'My wants are few, what do we care who buys or sells? I need only a small room for Sri Guru Maharaj. I can stay anywhere and spend my time in speaking about him.'

Another time Swami Ramakrishnananda had been to Puri to escort Swami Brahmananda to Madras. Through some misunderstanding no berth was reserved for him in the train. After much difficulty an upper berth was made available. For a person of the Swami's build to occupy a weakly built upper berth meant no small danger to the occupants below. This, therefore, brought forth some caustic comments from the passengers. One of the friends who had come to see the Swami off expressed his embarrassment at the situation. The Swami's smiling and calm reply to him was, 'Do not mind. The Divine Mother will take care of me.' And strange to say the train had to be abandoned as the engine had derailed; a separate train left for Madras from another track and in it the Swami was provided with a single first class compartment by the station master. As the Swami boarded the train he said to Devamata with the same confident smile, 'I told you, sister, that the Divine Mother would look after me.'

On another occasion wide publicity was given that on the next day, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, there would be a grand feeding of the poor but there was not a single bag of rice in the Math. When some devotee asked the Swami how he was going to feed the poor, his quiet rebuke in a compassionate tone was: 'You are a fool. Have you no faith in Annapurna Devi? She will take care of Her children. Throw the whole burden on Her and be free from all anxieties.' As they were talking thus, carts laden with rice and provisions in sufficient supply rolled into the Math compound. The statement of Sri Krishna in the Gita, 'I take upon Myself the welfare of those who have completely surrendered themselves to Me,' was thus seen here verified in toto.

His was a life of tremendous activity. He sometimes took as many as eleven classes a week in Madras. He went on invitation to lecture to many places in South India, Bombay and even far off Burma. Though he was in the midst of such intense activity he remained unattached, and alone though surrounded by men. Like the deep waters of the ocean his inner being remained unmoved by the ripples of activities and disturbances on the surface. Once he was heard to remark, 'I am full of God. What need have I of any one else?' He analysed, 'Aloneness means singleness, purity. In reality fearlessness exists where there is only one.'



Since we cannot be happy as long as we fear, we shall not find peace until we can say I am alone, I need nothing.'

The Bhagavad Gita and *Vishnusahasranama* were very dear to his heart. Every morning before he would begin his work he would chant them without fail. His observations on the efficacy of the chanting of the Gita demand special attention in this age when the sceptic moderns and cynics deprecate and doubt the value of such chanting — when done without understanding its meaning. He said, 'Let urgent business remain or not, I have learnt that the reading of the Gita is the most meritorious and glorious of all actions. How can he who has enjoyed and understood for a time at least the cardinal truths of the Gita be attracted by the paltry things of the world? Really to enjoy the sweetness of the Gita one should possess the force of Bhakti and the unstinted devotion of a pure heart. Nevertheless even the mere repetition of the Holy words that fell from the lips of Bhagavan Sri Krishna cannot be without efficacy. It will surely arouse in the reader an unflinching sense of purity and devotion.' Will the worldly-wise take this advice and give it a fair trial before condemning such practices?

Living with a God-man Swami Ramakrishnananda had learnt to respect the prophets of all religions and sects. He considered it blasphemy to speak ill of them. He could not even tolerate any one speaking disparagingly of them within his hearing. His reprimands on such occasions were severe irrespective of the person to whom they were meant. Once he left a place where he was invited to discuss religious topics, because someone spoke irreverently of Sri Sankara, saying that he had no place where the Acharya was not respected. A rich devotee another day spoke slightly of Sankara in his presence. The Swami came down upon him with a homethrust which silenced the speaker. The assembled devotees later expressed their fear that the gentleman might stop his contribution to the Math. But the Swami did not care about it. The gentleman on the other hand understood his fault and corrected himself. Another time it was a youth who happened to pass uncharitable remarks about the *Chaitanya Charitarmrita*, that fell into his wrath. Thus by precept and example he has taught that every religious teacher is great and deserves all our homage and reverence.

His was a life of self-abandonment. To him selfishness meant debasing, demoralising, and degrading oneself. To him assertion of the ego meant atrociousness. He said: 'When God asserts himself in man he becomes good, pure and virtuous. Try to feel God inside yourself and you will overcome all selfishness. All your anxieties and worries come from selfishness. Let go your little self and they will disappear.' Further he added, 'So long as we are selfish, our work is bound to be fruitless. We may deliver fine lectures, we may gain name and fame but the actual results will be nil.' He asked, 'How can we be unfeeling? If we cannot love others, if we cannot serve others, what are we here for? 'And out of this expansive heart arose the conception of the Students' Home when he met

some boys orphaned by the epidemic of plague at Coimbatore. The Swami took them under his care and thus was formed the nucleus of the Students' Home of Madras which today is providing succour to hundreds of poor boys yearly.

He was the pioneer of the Ramakrishna Movement first in Calcutta and later in the South. It was he who held the fort, as it were, when all others went away for tapasya or on pilgrimage. It was he who managed the affairs of the monastery for the first eleven years during its most crucial days. Beset though he was with the problems usually encountered by a pioneer of a new movement he faced them all bravely and solved them. And for all this his only asset was his devotion to the Master and calm resignation to his will. To quote Swami Premananda, one of the direct disciples of the Master: 'In fact, Swami Ramakrishnananda, and none of us, is the founder of the Math and its shrine. He stuck to the shrine in spite of the protests of his brother disciples.' And this worship has now been helping myriads of people to strengthen their faith in external worship and grow in spirituality both in this country as well as outside it.

He travelled widely lecturing and spreading the message of Vedanta as lived by the Master all over the South, and this message was well received, particularly in Bangalore, Mysore and Travancore. A monastery was established in Bangalore on a firm basis before long by his untiring efforts. But it is not meet to judge the achievements of the great ones by the immediate results, for the seeds they sow never prove barren but abide their time and when suitable atmosphere and environment are created they germinate and yield plentiful results. The country today is reaping a rich harvest the seeds of which were sown by him in the first decade of this century.

He was a great writer both in Bengali and English. His book on the life of Ramanuja in Bengali is considered a classic and gave to the North the details of the life of the Acharya till then little known. He contributed many articles to the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali journal of the Order. The book, *Universe and Man*, a collection of his discourses became the first publication of the Madras Math and received great appreciation from the then Yuvaraja of Mysore. Later some more of his discourses came in book form. We thus find him a scholar, a writer and a lecturer of no small repute. More than all this his life was an illustration of his teaching.

It was an education to be with Swami Ramakrishnananda. He was a strict disciplinarian having himself lived a life of austerity. But all his chastisements were for moulding the lives of the novitiates and not merely authoritarian. He loved these young men and liked to see them grow in spirituality. With their welfare at heart how could he keep aloof when they went wrong? The young monks though at first were cut to the quick soon came to know of the Swami's love for them and took the rebukes in the proper spirit. A young monk whom the Swami loved dearly, once went to see his parents and came back laden with presents

of clothes and a silk wrapper. Swami Ramakrishnananda noticed this, called him and asked as to whom the silk wrapper was meant. The young Swami in fear replied that it was for Swami Ramakrishnananda. The Swami took the wrapper and asked the junior monk to throw away all the clothes. When he had done so he said, 'For the safety of monastic life all memories of home are to be wiped off. Unless this is done how can a monk look upon every home as his own and the whole humanity as his family?'

He would not allow the rigid rules of his monastic life to be violated by any one. Once when he was away from the city Sister Devamata, who had earned a soft corner in his heart by her devoted disposition, finding his room untidy, swept it, put his bedding in the sun and neatly arranged the things. The Swami noticed it after his return, resented her action and did not fail to say that she was wrong in touching the bed of a monk and warned her against repeating such acts.

We have stated above of his love for the brother disciples during the Baranagore and Alambazar days. The flow of this love continued throughout his life. Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna was not only loved but respected as the representative of the Master by him. When the former visited Madras he said to the devotees: 'You have not seen the Master but it is as good as seeing him if you see the son.' That this was his firm faith was seen when a devotee who brought some fruits for Sri Ramakrishna was asked to offer them to Swami Brahmananda.

His respect and reverence for the Holy Mother was equal to that which he had towards the Master. One of his great ambitions in life was to bring the Holy Mother to South India. When therefore she came he accompanied her in her tour, looked meticulously after all her conveniences and when after her sojourn she left for the North, Swami Ramakrishnananda said, 'My life's ambition is fulfilled.' He did not live long after this. Soon the excessive work which had been telling upon his health and the enervating climate of the South and the privations he had to undergo threw him a prey to the fell disease, phthisis. Doctors advised immediate change, the devotees entreated him to go to the North, but until he received orders from Swami Brahmananda he did not move from his place of duty. The disease however proved fatal and he passed away on August 21, 1911.

Such was the life of Swami Ramakrishnananda: a blazing fire of renunciation, an example of Guru bhakti and Guru seva, a teacher of great magnitude, an illustration of obedience and awareness of duty, and above all a heart soft like butter which melted at others' sufferings. Though it is more than half a century now after he has passed away, still his life sheds that lustre which clouds cannot hinder, nor darkness obstruct but guides all those who travel on the path of salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Katha Up. 1-2-23.

<sup>2</sup> Gita IV-34.

## **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND VEDANTA (\*)**

**By Swami Paratparananda**

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India has been the perennial source of religious revival for millenniums now. This source has been augmented, replenished and reinforced from time to time by a succession of sages and seers through the ages. This life-giving stream of religion has never been allowed to dry up during its meandering course through the dreary desert of this world. Its course might have been obstructed, checked or seriously hampered but was never lost; on such occasions it gathered momentum to flow with greater vigour and to reach far-off lands. Each sage was, as it were, a tributary emptying itself into the main stream, with this difference that each originated at and was nourished by the same spring, the Eternal Religion (*Sanâtana Dharma*). Each one left one more edifice, one more haven for the scorched humanity to rest its limbs on its onward march to God.

Beginning from the Vedic period down to the present century we see waves of spirituality passing over the country; each one guiding humanity and rescuing it from foundering on the rock of dogmatism and sophistry, from unbelief and unrighteousness, at the same time catering to the particular need of the age. When such a nadir was reached in the last century a powerful wave arose and on the crest of it was Sri Ramakrishna. His was a very short span of life but intensely spiritual. After a long period of extensive sadhana and realizations he collected round him a few young and energetic youths, picked and chosen to be his torch-bearers and banded them together into a brotherhood before he left his mortal coil. He named Narendranath, who later become the world-renowned Swami Vivekananda, to be the leader of the brotherhood and commanded him to minister to the spiritual needs of humanity, much against Narendranath's own inclination for a quiet and meditative life. Sri Ramakrishna specially trained him for this purpose.

### ***Sri Ramakrishna's training of Narendranath in Vedanta***

Sri Ramakrishna's power to see through the past, present and future of an aspirant who came to him, and also his visions regarding Narendranath, had revealed to him who Naren was and what was his mission on the earth. He verified these visions and conclusions on Naren's third visit to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna on that occasion took him to the adjacent garden of Jadu Mallik and in the course of conversation entered into a trance. In this state the Master touched Narendra.

Narendra, in spite of his best efforts to remain unaffected by the touch, instantly lost all out-ward consciousness, as on the previous occasion. Sri Ramakrishna put him several questions when he was in that condition and learnt many things which confirmed his visions and findings about Naren's antecedents. Then onwards Sri Ramakrishna started training him in the path of Advaitic knowledge. But Narendra was not to submit easily. His inquiring and analytical intellect could not accept anything as true unless he experienced it himself or it stood the test of reason. So when the Master requested him — with a view to familiarise him — to read aloud some passages from such Advaitic treatises as the *Ashtavakra Samhita*, he revolted saying, 'It is blasphemous, for there is no difference between such philosophy and atheism. There is no greater sin in the world than to think myself identical with the Creator. . . The sages who wrote such things must have been insane.' Sri Ramakrishna was amused at this outspoken comment of his disciple. He argued with him that no one could place a limitation on God, that he should be such and such and not anything else, but to no purpose. Narendra continued to criticize such ideas for some time more. One day Sri Ramakrishna, having failed to convince his disciple by argument about the truth of Advaitic realizations, touched him in an ecstatic mood. There was an immediate change in the disciple's vision. He saw with his eyes open that there was nothing else in the universe but God. He kept his vision to himself to see how long it would last. When he went home and sat for food he saw that the plate, the food, the server, all was God; on the streets the cab, the horse and himself, he found were made of the same stuff. This experience continued for some days and with it came to him the conviction about the truths of Advaita philosophy, which no amount of argument could have been able to bring. That was the mode of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching.

Sri Ramakrishna was, however, careful to enlarge the disciple's vision regarding other faiths and paths. Even the path considered most indecent and vulgar, Sri Ramakrishna said, was a path if there was a real and intense longing for God. One day while Narendra was condemning certain practices of some sects Sri Ramakrishna gently told him, 'My boy, a mansion has many entrances. Some of them no doubt are dirty like the scavenger's entrance to a house. It is really desirable to enter the house by the front door.' Naren thereafter was never seen to condemn any sect. By these gentle methods Sri Ramakrishna helped to wipe out bigotry and puritanism from the disciple's mind.

It was never the procedure with Sri Ramakrishna to force his own views on the disciples. He allowed them to grow naturally, helping them in their own path. Naren once felt it difficult to go beyond the body idea and approached the Master for the remedy. How the Master helped Naren to overcome this impediment we shall learn from Narendranath himself: 'On another occasion I felt great difficulty in totally forgetting my body during meditation and concentrating the mind wholly on the ideal. I went to him for counsel, and he gave me the very instruction which he himself

had received from Totapuri while practising Samadhi at the time of his Vedantic Sadhana. He sharply pressed between my two eyebrows with his finger nail and said, "Now concentrate your mind on this painful sensation!" As a result I found I could concentrate easily on that sensation as long as I liked, and during that period I completely forgot the consciousness of the other parts of my body, not to speak of their causing any distraction in the way of my meditation.'

Narendra with his keen intellect, weighed the Master's words in a balance, as it were, criticized and tested them before accepting them. At the same time he could go deep into their meaning. We shall narrate a solitary instance which has a pertinent bearing on our theme. One day Sri Ramakrishna was discussing the tenets of the Vaishnavas. He recounted them to his devotees: relish for the name of God, compassion for all living creatures and service to the devotees of God. He related at some length what the meaning of the first tenet was, but coming to speak about compassion he was thrown into Samadhi. Returning to a semi-conscious state he said to himself, 'Compassion to creatures! Compassion to creatures! Thou fool. An insignificant worm crawling on earth, thou to show compassion to others! Who art thou to show compassion! No it cannot be. It is not compassion for others but rather service to man, recognising him to be the veritable manifestation of God.'

Coming out of the room, Naren said to his young friends, 'I have discovered a strange light in those wonderful words of the Master. How beautifully has he reconciled the ideal of Bhakti with the knowledge of the Vedanta, generally interpreted as hard, austere and inimical to human sentiments and emotions! What a grand, natural and sweet synthesis!' For a long time did he explain the meaning of those words and in the end said, 'If it is the will of God, the day will soon come when I shall proclaim this grand truth before the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all'. Thus did the Master prepare his disciple for the propagation of Vedanta.

### ***Contact with the masses of India***

For a time after the Master's passing away, outwardly it appeared as if all was over; but the seed of renunciation sown by the Master and the hankering for God-realization, that he had generated in the young hearts, were too enduring to be easily lost in the maze of the world. A monastery soon came into being, though in a dilapidated house, at Baranagore with the kind munificence of Surendranath Mitra, an ardent devotee of the Master. The young men gathered there plunged themselves in spiritual practices and scriptural studies. Days and months passed in this way. The fire of vairagya kindled by the Master kept on burning steadily and unabated, and Narendranath played a great part in

this process. He engaged them in talks of the days they had spent with the Master, revivifying their memories with the ecstatic joy of those days and urging them on in their spiritual practices, even though he himself was passing through a tornado of difficulties at his own home. When he had settled the affairs of the family at home and put the monastery in a shape, the urge to wander alone, depending solely on God, came upon him.

During his peregrinations he came in contact with the real India; India of the villages, the pure, simple, innocent folk, industrious yet grovelling in poverty, living in dirt and squalor, bearing their hard lot with a patience that was beyond imagination. This naked picture of penury and illiteracy pained him deeply, and stirred the very depths of his being. A stern resolve to do something to alleviate their misery goaded him from place to place. Having failed to rouse the sympathy of the rich of the country in their cause, he thought of seeking it elsewhere. Just at this time he heard of the Parliament of Religions that was being convened at Chicago and thought it the best medium through which he could approach and rouse the interest of the people of America in the masses of India. With the aid of a few friends he crossed over to America.

### ***The Parliament of Religions and after***

What transpired at the Parliament of Religions is an event well-known to all and needs no repetition here. Suffice it to say that, whatever may have been the motive of the convenors of the Parliament, it was undoubtedly established that Hinduism was in no respect inferior to any other religion; rather it was found to be the only religion which had from the earliest times showed toleration and acceptance of other religions. And that not in a patronising attitude, but as a true recognition of the different pathways to God. Who then was more competent to represent Hinduism than Swami Vivekananda, the disciple of a person who was, as it were, a Parliament of Religions in session, viz. Sri Ramakrishna? Nay, Sri Ramakrishna was a harmonious blend of them all. Was not Swami Vivekananda trained by the Master to look on all faiths as pathways to God? In Sri Ramakrishna he had seen no note of discord. Every type of aspirant came, discussed his religion, his difficulties, was enlightened and went with his vision broadened. The chosen disciple of the Master, Swami Vivekananda, was, therefore, pre-eminently fitted to appear and speak at that august assembly in the name of the 'mother of all religions'. And he did receive the acclamation and admiration of that cultured gathering when he addressed it. Over-night he became famous. Swami Vivekananda became, to quote one of their papers, a celebrity.

After the Parliament of Religions he toured the States of America from one end to the other, spreading the message of Vedanta, enlightening the people on the customs, manners and religion of the

Hindus, a race maligned without cause. A race whose only faults, if any, were that it was not aggressive and intolerant; that it never went to conquer or prosetelyse with the sword. Swami Vivekananda had to fight against the ignominious propaganda of his adversaries. A heart less pure and brave than that of Swamiji would have compromised or would have broken down in the face of such attacks. Swami Vivekananda stood like a rock while the calumniators beat themselves against it and were crushed. 'Truth will triumph,' was his calm and collected reply to those who wanted him to defend himself. And before long truth did triumph. This is how Swami Vivekananda suffered for the sake of India, Hinduism and the masses.

### ***Application of Vedanta in practice***

Now let us see why Swami Vivekananda, a monk that he was, took upon himself the so-called work of social regeneration, a work purely for the society to deal with. There were two reasons. First of all, the society was comatose and moribund. The English-educated of the society were turning to the West for enlightenment and aping them in their customs and costumes. They had lost faith in all that was native to the soil. What was left of such a society were some village superstitions and rigid caste rules. Could any good be expected out of such a society? Were then the poor and the downtrodden to be left to the mercy of such an unsympathetic society? Did not the Master enjoin them to serve man as a veritable manifestation of God? And when so many gods were trampled under the heels of autocracy and ground in the wheel of poverty, was he to keep quiet? How then would he be true to Sri Ramakrishna's teaching? What does even Vedanta teach? Do not the Upanisads declare, 'Verily all this is Brahman'<sup>1</sup>, 'That Thou art'<sup>2</sup>? Were these highest truths of Vedanta then to remain only in books or as subjects for intellectual discussions? Swamiji never believed in such sophisticated statements as: this is philosophy and that is practice. To him religion was a practical science. It was his firm faith that the truths of Vedanta could be lived and should be lived. For, he had seen one, Sri Ramakrishna, who was the living embodiment of Vedanta philosophy. Enlightened, therefore, by the Master's interpretation of Vedanta and urged by his own noble heart, Swami Vivekananda strived to mitigate the misery of the poor. To the still doubting minds we like to recall Sri Ramakrishna's remonstrance of young Naren's cherishing the idea to work for individual salvation alone. Did not the Master express what he expected of him, in clear and unambiguous terms, when he said, 'I expect you to be like the banyan tree under which the weary travellers could rest'? What further testimony than this is necessary to show that it was Sri Ramakrishna's own will which was working through the Swami?

Again, uplifting of the masses may be social work in the eyes of those whose vistas of vision are cramped by mere body idea, who see



man only as a higher species of animal, a bundle of flesh. But for him they were divinities on earth. Let us see what Swami Vivekananda says of service to the poor and the stricken: 'The poor and the miserable are for our salvation so that we may serve the Lord coming in the shape of the diseased, coming in the shape of the lunatic, the leper and the sinner.' Besides there was the command by the Master to preach religion. To whom was he to preach it? To the hungry millions? There could be no mockery baser than that and he knew it well. So he said, 'Let the hungry get a morsel of food.' Who could fathom the anguish of that heart that bled for the poor of the country? He wanted to make Vedanta most practical. 'If you believed in a thing and did not try to practise it,' he said, 'why, that is hypocrisy, it is worse than atheism. At least the atheist is honest.' Swami Vivekananda was, therefore, moved to take up the regeneration of the masses not on humanitarian grounds, as some like to interpret it, but as a worship of the divine, the indwelling spirit, the essence of all beings.

### ***Vedanta disabused***

It is commonly believed that for the practice of Vedanta one has to divest oneself of all the tender feelings and sentiments of the heart. We do not know what led to this peculiar idea, but it is perfectly contrary to what has been recorded in history. Take for instance the life of Sri Sankara, the paragon of Vedanta philosophy in the past. If this was the ideal, why did he not confine himself to his own salvation? What made him wander on foot from one end of the country to the other? What axe of his own had he to grind? One has to admit that there was no other cause for him to do so except for the establishment of religion, a way of life that could give ultimate liberation. What higher compassion can there be than to feel for the liberation of the ignorant? The impression, that one had to be unfeeling, seems therefore to be based on insufficient grounds. Whatever might have been its origin and whatever might have been its necessity in the past, if there was any — about which we have grave doubts — in the present age this opinion has forfeited its right to exist. Swami Vivekananda was the first, in recent times, to disabuse Vedanta of this ill-fame.

Let us see for ourselves if this contention — Vedanta teaches one to be sympathetic — is at variance with the scriptures: What is the ultimate goal of Vedanta? Realizing one's own Self which is Brahman,<sup>3</sup> Brahman which is the only Truth. 'This Universe is only Brahman,'<sup>4</sup> and It is 'One without a second,'<sup>5</sup> declare our Upanisads. Vedanta then teaches the Oneness of Reality. It also says, 'Perceive it through the mind that there are not many things at all, one who sees many goes from death to death.'<sup>6</sup> Again take the famous passage of Svetasvatara Upanisad, 'Thou art the woman, Thou art the man, Thou art the boy, Thou art the girl. Thou art the old man tottering on the stick, Thou art that which manifests

in so many shapes.' <sup>7</sup> What religion expresses the divinity of all beings in such clear terms? Vedanta, therefore, does not teach us to turn into stock and stone.

This Oneness, that it teaches, alone makes for love; unless one recognises, at least intellectually in the beginning, the Oneness of all creatures, Vedanta is impossible of practice. And to attain this love, our feelings, our heart only can help us. Speaking on practical Vedanta, Swamiji stresses: 'It is through the heart that the Lord is seen and not through the intellect. The intellect is only the street cleaner, cleansing the path for us, a secondary worker, a policeman; but the policeman is not a positive necessity for the working of society. He is only to stop disturbances, to check wrong doing and that is all the work required of the intellect. . . . It is feeling that works, that moves with speed infinitely superior to that of Electricity or anything else. Do you feel? If you do, you will see the Lord. . . . It is the feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God.' Again he says, 'Intellect is like limbs without power of locomotion. It is only when feeling enters and gives them motion that they move and work on others.' Swamiji, therefore, here restates the Vedantic standpoint, only more effectively as he had direct access to such realizations.

### ***Vedanta, basis of all Ethics***

Another charge levelled against Hinduism in general by some Western writers is 'that it is quite impossible to find any real or vital principle of ethics,' in Vedic literature. This is not a fact, because the Vedic literature, from which we cannot exclude the Upanisads, is replete with texts which enunciate the ethical principles, based on which alone Manu and other sages have given out their law codes. This, the writers have conveniently overlooked and put out statements which are biased and presumptuous. If, on the other hand, this statement had any truth in it, how does one account for the emergence of so many saints and sages in the country? Can truth come out of falsehood? Can sin beget holiness? If at all any *sure* basis exists for ethics, it is only in Vedanta which teaches the Oneness of all life, all existence. Let us see what Swami Vivekananda says on the subject: 'The rational West is earnestly bent upon seeking out the rationality, the *raison d'etre* of all its philosophy and ethics; and you all know well that ethics cannot be derived from the mere sanction of any personage, however great and divine he may have been. Such an explanation of the authority of ethics appeals no more to the highest of the world's thinkers; they want something more than human sanction for ethical and moral codes to be binding, they want some eternal principle of truth as the sanction of ethics. And where is that eternal sanction to be found except in the only Infinite Reality, that exists in you and in me and in all, in the Self, in the Soul? The infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction of all morality, that you and I are not

only brothers, but that you and I are really one. This is the dictate of Indian philosophy. This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and all spirituality.' Repeatedly did he bring this fact to the notice of his audience. On one occasion he said, 'Why is it that every one says, "Do good to others"? Where is the explanation? Why is it that all great men have preached the brotherhood of mankind, and greater men the brotherhood of all lives? Because whether they were conscious of it or not, behind all that, through all their irrational and personal superstitions, was peering forth the eternal light of the Self denying all manifoldness, and asserting that the whole universe is but One.' Therefore the cause of Hinduism and Vedanta in this respect stands vindicated as anyone can see.

All these truths, however, were garbled and presented to the West by parties who wanted to advance their own cause in India. Hence it was required that a true picture of Indian Religion be presented not in mere word-pictures but in life. Swami Vivekananda by his immaculate life, wonderful realizations and great insight fulfilled the purpose. It was from that day that the queer ideas the West cherished about India began to disappear and Vedanta reached a wider circle. India, and for the matter of that the whole world, remains eternally grateful to the Swami.

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<sup>1</sup> Chandogya Up., III.14.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., VI.8.7.

<sup>3</sup> Brihadaranyaka Up., II.5.19.

<sup>4</sup> Mundaka Up., 2.2.12.

<sup>5</sup> Chandogya Up., VI.2.1.

<sup>6</sup> Katha Up., 4.11.

<sup>7</sup> 4.3.

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON THE REGENERATION OF INDIA

**Swami Paratparananda**

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – February 1967; Vol. 53; page 419

### I

GREAT sages have an unlimited view of what is to come and how best it can be achieved. Nay, they give a new turn to events that are to happen, strike a new path, smoothening the rugged terra and avoiding the abysmal hollows that might have been carved on the beaten track by vested interests. The natural human tendency is to go easy, take everything easy and reap as maximum a benefit as the circumstances allow. That is why in every age sages and Incarnations have to appear and give redress to and reform mankind. Sri Krishna says about Karma Yoga, 'This Yoga, handed down through generations, was known to the Rajarshis, but due to the long passage of time has been lost here (in this world).'<sup>1</sup> This happens in regard to every ideal. The zeal for the ideal lessens due to several reasons: (1) when the ideal is taken-over by ill-equipped aspirants, (2) when it becomes only a cover for exploitation, (3) when the aspirants break off from the enthusiasm and spirit with which they start, and when there creeps in laxity of purpose. The first two need not be discussed here. But the last one, the laxity in purpose, we have to admit is the outcome of a lack of conviction regarding the ideal. Sri Ramakrishna convincingly proves this by an illustration. 'Suppose there is a store of gold in a room and only a thin partition separates it from a thief. Will the thief remain idle? Will he not feel restless to get it?' We relax because we are more after our comforts than intent on our purpose. We become privilege minded. And that in turn makes us stoop to means fair or foul to secure those privileges. Thus runs the down-grade path until we know not how far we have gone. So in this hunt for privileges people carve out hollows in the declared path and mislead others into them. Then comes the necessity for an Incarnation or a great sage to retrieve humanity.

Swami Vivekananda came, gave his message and left his mortal coil as well. It is some decades now. But his message was not for the hour, nor only for India but to the humanity as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhagavad Gita, IV.2.

What was his message to India, for her regeneration? There were many reform societies in his time, each with a limited view trying to cater to some decadent branch of the tree of the Indian social fabric. But Swami Vivekananda was not in a hurry to do anything spectacular for the time being. He studied the situation; he studied the disease; he investigated the symptoms. He travelled far and wide. He allowed his mind to absorb all that he saw, as also to crystallize ideas by themselves. From his observation and study of the history of nations he came to one conclusion, that 'each nation has its own part to play, and naturally, each nation has its own peculiarity and individuality, with which it is born. Each represents, as it were, one peculiar note in this harmony of nations, and this is its very life, its vitality. In it is the backbone, the foundation, and the bed-rock of the national life.... Here in this blessed land, the foundation, the backbone, the life-centre is religion and religion alone. In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life'. Such was his diagnosis and naturally appropriate was his treatment. He said, 'So, in India, social reform has to be preached by showing how much more spiritual a life the new system will bring; and politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants — its spirituality.'

It is not a dogma of a religious fanatic that Swamiji puts forth here. Because we are experiencing the effects of the neglect of this sane advice everyday. Our social reform done with a vengeance, as it were, is only sowing seeds of hatred, of narrowness in outlook, of embitterments, and the consequences follow with unimpeded force, bewildering thinking men and women as to where all this will end. You may ask: What about those people in other nations who have not accepted spirituality as their basis? We are only trying to imitate them. If they can survive why can we not? Well, it requires a prophet to make a right choice of life. And as Swami Vivekananda says, 'We made our choice ages ago and we must abide by it. And, after all, it is not such a bad choice.' Spirituality has penetrated into the very nerves and sinews of our being. It has become our very nature. If you try to change the nature of a material by any means it would not remain the same material again. It will be something else. And the new matter that is produced will not serve the purpose for which the old material was meant. Similarly you cannot change your nature and survive as a nation.

Swamiji emphatically declares, 'For good or for evil, our vitality is concentrated in our religion. You cannot change it. You cannot destroy it and put in its place another.... You can only work under the law of least resistance, and this religious line is the line of least resistance in India. This is the line of life, this is the line of growth, and this is the line of well-being in India—to follow the track of religion.'

Other nations are made out quite differently. The material, the equipment and the tradition that made them also are different and even they, as days pass we see, are searching to find out on what better

principles, on what better basis the solidarity of their race could be built up. Materialism has lost its charm and people are groping for something substantial, something ever-lasting; the appeal of humanitarianism alone is also not satisfying, for it breaks down when it comes in conflict with selfish interest. Should we then throw away our heritage and take up the things that are being discarded even by others as unsubstantial? We must be wary before we commit ourselves. This is an age of speed, yielding rapid revolutionary harvests in every sphere. If we are not cautious we may leave to posterity a legacy which it will find difficult to live by or throw off for centuries to come.

Besides, we have to take heed of the warning given by Swami Vivekananda. 'If any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries, that nation dies, if it succeeds in the attempt.'

Swami Vivekananda did not stop with placing this idea before us, but he worked for its implementation, to revive the drooping religious fervour in the country. For as he said, 'Religion and religion alone is the life of India, and when that goes India will die, in spite of politics, in spite of social reforms, in spite of Kubera's wealth poured upon the head of everyone of her children'.

Swami Vivekananda, we must remember, was not against material prosperity. On the other hand, we know that the main purpose of his going to the West was to search means to ameliorate the condition of the masses. And after his return from the West he stressed that India should learn science from the West to increase the wealth of the nation and improve the condition of the man at large. But this did not make him ignore the vital question. At the time he advocated the cultivation of scientific knowledge he also gave the warning that has been referred to above, the gist of which is that we must not lose our spiritual moorings, in our pursuit of material prosperity.

## II

What did Swami Vivekananda mean by religion or spirituality? If we go through his works we shall find that to him religion did not constitute in merely some external observances, or dogmas or creeds. It was a way of life, a transformation of the inner man. "Religion," he said, "is realization," realization of God, of our inner Being, of Brahman or by whatever name you may call it.

According to this definition we have to live the life in such a way that in the end it will lead us to that ultimate Reality. And this is not the work of the anchorite alone. If it were so it will be the religion of a few thousands only. But India is much more than that. Man in every stage of his life should uncover such an attitude, breathe out such an atmosphere. It is all a preparation. It is like ploughing the land and making it ready to

receive the seed in the proper season. Unless we are trained early in life to discipline our minds and tune it to a higher purpose, it is not possible to change overnight into a saint, a sage. And unless one has become a sage he has not reached religion according to the above definition of Swami Vivekananda.

You may wonder, why such a pessimistic attitude is put forth. If we have to be true to our concept of religion we cannot but state what are facts. What then about all that take place in the name of religion, i.e., all rituals, and other practices? Let us give a parallel illustration. According to a definition given by Sri Sankara the word *Upanisad* means knowledge that destroys the cause of worldly existence viz., ignorance, and leads to liberation, loosening all bonds of this world. But traditionally and conventionally when we utter the word *upanisad* some book is meant. Sankara explains that though a book as such cannot free us from ignorance, but because the book contains the knowledge which when realized sets us free, it can justifiably be termed *upanisad*. He then cites an ancient saying of such usage: 'Clarified butter is indeed life'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly all that leads to realization is also called religion.

Another objection that may be raised here is: why should we devote our whole life to it? Have there been no cases of sudden transformation? Well, it is not a rule but an exception. And all of us cannot be exceptions, for in that case it will not be an exception but a rule. And we do not see any such rule prevalent in this world. If it were so we would all, the moment we get disgusted with this world, be transformed into higher beings. And no one can say that he had not at some time or other, experienced a distaste for life, however momentary it might have been. These fleeting moments are of course good but unless their frequency increases and till they leave a permanent impress on the mind they will be useless for the present life of that person. That is why it was said by the wise men of the olden times that one should be 'Religious while yet young.'

Why did India pitch upon this choice viz., spirituality as its basis? There is a significant verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* which brings this to the fore. 'What purpose is served by the wells and tanks, is served in a much better way by the flood, (an extensive reservoir), likewise all the results of actions and sacrifices prescribed in the Veda come to a *brahmana* who has attained knowledge (of Brahman).'<sup>3</sup> India did not make this choice therefore inadvertently or by any mischance. Its sages deliberated over all that went before it, as also all that went against it and then firmly held on to the religious ideal. They had no doubt, whatsoever, that this would be for India's good, nay for the good of the world too.

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<sup>2</sup> See Sri Sankara's Introduction to the commmentary on Kathopanisad.

<sup>3</sup> Bhagavad Gita, II.46.

How do we justify that everything is included in this ideal? What about ethics? Well, it is foolish to think of living the life of the spirit without a moral foundation. One who has not abstained from wicked deeds can never even dream of leading a holy life. If any man poses as holy and yet be immoral, he only tries to deceive others, as also himself.

Some Western scholars have imputed that there has been no stress on ethics in the Hindu scriptures. To this we might answer that ethics was not the goal, the be-all and end-all of the Hindu life. It was only a means. Besides, in ancient India religion was taught through personal contact and what was necessary to be taught was the highest value, the other side, the moral side, being communicated by example. It is a pity that these scholars do not go deeper down into the subject and take cognizance of the lives lived according to the injunctions of the scriptures. For then the ethical rigour involved therein will be obvious even for a superficial observer if he cares to note the good points in the Hindu system. Perhaps, their approach, far from being sympathetic, has been antagonistic, with a view to find out some way of showing Hinduism at a disadvantage, with some ulterior motive. Otherwise, a single verse of the *Mundakopanisad* is enough to silence these critics. "To him, who had approached in the proper manner, whose mind had attained quiescence, who has controlled his sense organs, the wise one (the preceptor), should teach that knowledge of Brahman by which he could know the immutable reality termed *Purusa*, in His true perspective."<sup>4</sup> What greater morality or ethical eminence can we expect anywhere? And what severe code of conduct one has had to pass through to attain quietness of the mind, which includes the wiping out of the ego, can best be known through experience. To those who want to criticize Hinduism about the so-called ethical lacunae we would ask to cultivate this one virtue, which Hinduism insists on the aspirants to liberation to follow, and then come out with their experience frankly. Many, we are sure, will fail miserably. The very fact that they are out to slander others shows their 'holier than thou' attitude which is the corner stone of the edifice of egotism and not spirituality or religion.

So, in spiritual attainment is also included the perfection of morality and heights of humanism. A spiritual man does not become like a stock or a stone but feels for the entire humanity. He feels not only for those who are his kith and kin, not only for those of the same caste, of the same faith, but for all, without distinction; nay his sympathy reaches beings which in our ordinary mortal eyes are in the lower order in the animal kingdom. Such an attitude alone can save India from degenerating and not factions and fights over paltry things. And this attitude cannot be developed until the unity of our being is stressed, practised and realized

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<sup>4</sup> Mundaka Up. I.ii.13.



in life. At least an intellectual basis must first be laid for this purpose, the masses should be educated towards this end. By feeding them with the poison of hatred and jealousy we are only ruining the chances of a recovery that is most essential at the present time, if we have to consolidate the freedom that has been gained and be of use in the comity of nations.

It may be asked: Spirituality is a personal affair; why should it be linked with the regeneration of a country? To this we would put the counter question: What do you mean by the country? Is it the geographical state or the persons inhabiting it? The geographical state is inert. It does not do any violence to the rules of Nature and therefore needs no correction. If you say that you are concerned with the people of the country, with persons, is it unreasonable to say that men and women of the land should have a higher motive and live up to it for the upliftment of their status? Swami Vivekananda points out, 'The basis of all systems social or political, rests upon the goodness of men. No nation is great or good because Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good. Men are more valuable than all the wealth of the world'. He continues, 'When you have men who are ready to sacrifice their everything for the sake of their country, sincere to the backbone — when such men arise, India will become great in every respect. Then only will India awake when hundreds of large-hearted men and women giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost, for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen'. How is this possible unless we feel our affinity, oneness with the masses? How can we feel oneness with them until we know that they are the same Lord manifesting in various forms? In short, except through religion? That is why Swamiji said that all our reforms should have religion as their basis. That is the only firm ground where it is not possible to stumble.

Further, he emphasised the necessity of unity. 'The first plank in the making of a future India, the first step that is to be hewn out of that rock of ages, is the unification of religion. All of us have to be taught that we Hindus have certain common ideas behind us, and that time has come when for the well-being of ourselves, for the well-being of our race, we must give up all little quarrels and differences. National union in India must be a gathering up of its scattered spiritual forces. A nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune.'

If we are earnest in the well-being of our country we should rise above our petty selfishnesses, and think of the nation. Everyone of us has to do it. There is nothing that cannot be achieved when we become united. Even the scarcity of food that we feel now will be borne cheerfully once we unite and try to share and share equally all that we have with one and all. How is it possible unless we overcome our selfishnesses? Let

us start to put this idea of Vedanta, of seeing God in everyone, in the practical field. Then everything will go on smoothly. All the rubs and frictions and clashes are due to the projection of our selfish interests. Regeneration of India is not possible unless this idea of Vedanta is practised in the day-to-day life.

### III

Swami Vivekananda's other suggestions regarding the regeneration of India were education, uplift of women, reformation of the social fabric keeping in view the cultural background and religious basis, and uplift of the masses. Each one of these are to be deeply pondered over and made part of our life if we mean to revive India to her past glory and make it a useful member of this world.

## TAPAS IN SPIRITUAL LIFE (\*)

**Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – AUG 1962; Vol. 49; page 162

The idea of austerity, in an age of plentiful amenities and luxuries, is something which seems to the average man as ludicrous. He thinks of them, that abstain, as pitiable creatures. Why should not one enjoy the luxuries bountifully provided by nature or circumstances? That seems to be his question. Possibly, he thinks of them as pessimistic fools. For, who else but a fool fails to avail of an opportunity of leading an easy life? seems to be his contention. Of yore, there were the injunctions of the Sastras, which man respected, to hold him back from going headlong over the precipice of excessive indulgence. But, for some centuries now, that hold has gradually slackened and is mostly lost. Man now treats the teachings of the scriptures as the devices of the priests to cheat him of his valid rights. He, therefore, treats them with scant respect. He thinks that, so long as he abides by the law of the land, he is at perfect liberty to do as he pleases. In such a context why should he abstain? Why should he restrain? That is his idea.

Let us now see, how far this attitude of the commoner is justified. Man is not a machine that he can go on indefinitely in this manner. Even machines have their longevity curtailed, if worked incessantly and without respite. That, machines worked moderately give longer and better service is an experience within the purview of one and all. Similarly, every thinking man will concede that, this human machine also can work better and serve fruitfully, if it is not pressed into any and every kind of service. So moderation and regulation are necessary even for the person, whose idea of himself is not more than a body, and whose happiness lies in the enjoyment of the senses.

As in secular life, the body and the mind are to be carefully handled, so too in spiritual life they are to be deftly processed. There are several processes through which they have to be passed through. One such process is *tapas*. The meaning of the word *tap* in Sanskrit is, to heat. Most of us are familiar with the smelting of ores. The ores are thrown into a furnace where the heat sometimes reaches 2000°C or more. This heat melts the ore, burns away the dross, and the pure metal is let out. Man's mind is also like the ore. It has gathered, in its passage through innumerable lives, encrustations in the form of propensities. And these propensities, like the impurities of the ore, have so mingled and fused

into the mind, that their separation is a more formidable task than the extraction of the metal from the ore. The process of separation is also a more prolonged and complicated one. But until we have done it, we cannot see God, cannot know the Reality: the one aim of all spiritual life.

We must remember here, that no earthly heat can be applied to the mind as it is subtle. We have to find a subtle heat. What then is this subtle heat? It is the dwelling of the mind in the thought of God. The word *tapas*, in the sense of heat, is used here in a metaphorical sense and by usage it has come to mean right-thinking or meditation. Continuous dwelling on good thoughts helps, like fire, to burn out the dross of the mind. Mark the word 'continuous' here. Each one of us does think good thoughts sometime or other, for a shorter or longer duration, but that does not help us much to attain the covetable goal: God realization. As long as the good thoughts last, we feel an elevation of the mind and we are apt to think we have achieved our end. Soon bad thoughts lure the mind away, after which depression sets in as a reaction. Therefore, a continuous flow of the thought-current in the direction of things higher is absolutely essential to purify the mind, just as a continuous fire is necessary to smelt the ores.

### ***Body and Mind Inter-related***

Now the question may arise, if *tapas* means meditation, thinking of good thoughts, then where is the necessity of bodily restraint? To this we ask, does the body act without the collusion or connivance of the mind? No. On the other hand, human experience has been and is, that the mind acts on the body before the body functions. For instance, if a procession, accompanied with music, were to pass by your house and if at that time you were deeply poring over some interesting book would you hear the noise? No. Why not? Though your ears had heard and conveyed the message duly to the mind, the mind had shut itself off to the hearing. It, consequently, follows that the body by itself is powerless to do any action. Conversely viewed, every bodily action is done under the tacit consent or with the actual co-operation of the mind. The bodily features change with the change in the mind. Again the desires of the body in the majority of us, make the mind subservient to the body. Bodily needs or passions move the mind. Thus we find a close and inseparable relation between the two.

This relation is not a chance occurrence, not existing in the past, nor that will not be in the future. Our very physical features are representatives of the mind. We have read, how Sri Ramakrishna used to test his disciples before accepting them. He would look at their

physical features, and if he was satisfied he would further test them by taking their palms into his hands. He would move the palm of the disciple up and down, as if he was feeling its weight. And if he felt it light he would accept him. When he visited Devendranath Tagore he asked the latter to bare his chest, so that he could see how far he was advanced in spiritual life. Further, we read how strongly opposed the Master was to an aspirant's sitting with the chin on the palm of his hand. He said that it indicated a mental depression, a pensive mood. Swami Ramakrishnananda too used to upbraid his students if he found them shaking their legs when seated on a chair or bench as it showed the restlessness of the mind.

Again, take the evidence of the Sastras. *Svetasvataropanisad* exhorts how one should sit for meditation: 'Keeping the three limbs of the body (viz. the trunk, the neck and the head)<sup>1</sup> erect, merging all the senses into the mind, a wise one should by the boat of Sabda Brahman (*pranava*) cross the terrible currents of *samsara*, of birth and death.'<sup>2</sup> All these conclusively prove what close affinity lies between the body and the mind.

### ***Modes of Tapas***

It is a matter of common knowledge and experience that the mind can concentrate on an external object more readily than on something abstruse. The concrete, it finds, more easy to grasp than the abstract. Swami Vivekananda, by means of a story, illustrates how the subtle *prana* can be grasped by regulating breathing, a comparatively gross function of the body: 'There was once a minister to a great king. He fell into disgrace. The king, as a punishment, confined him to a very high tower and left him to perish there. He had a faithful wife, who came to the tower at night and called to her husband at the top to know what she could do to help him. He told her to return to the tower the following night, and bring with her a long rope, some stout twine, pack thread, silken thread, a beetle, and a little honey. Wondering much, the good wife obeyed her husband, and brought him the desired articles. The husband directed her to attach the silken thread firmly to the beetle, then to smear its horns with a drop of honey, and set it free on the wall of the tower, with its head pointing upwards. She obeyed all these instructions, and the beetle started on its long journey. Smelling the honey ahead it slowly crept onwards, in the hope of reaching the honey, until at last it reached the top of the tower, when the minister grasped the beetle, and got possession of the silken thread. He told his wife to tie the other end to the pack thread, and after he had drawn up the pack thread he repeated the process with the stout twine, and lastly

with the rope. Then the rest was easy. The minister descended from the tower by means of the rope, and made his escape. In this body of ours the breath motion is the "silken thread"; by laying hold of and learning to control it we grasp the pack thread of the nerve currents, and from these the stout twine of our thoughts and lastly the rope of *prana*, controlling which we reach freedom.<sup>3</sup> Similarly have we, who desire liberation, to control simultaneously the body and the mind.

Our ancient sages thought deeply over this, experimented, and then gave out what they thought beneficial to posterity. Though in the Upanisads we hear quite often about *tapas*, a little clear definition of it we get only in the *Sandilyopanisad* which says: 'Tapas is the drying up of the body by the observance of the injunctions of the Vedas — vows like *Krcchra* and *Candrayana*.'<sup>4</sup> One reason why the Upanisads do not define *tapas* more elaborately may be that, the preceptors were there to guide the aspirants. However, Sri Krishna in the Gita removes this ambiguity with a detailed analysis of the subject. Sri Krishna must have observed, in his time, what a parody was made of the concept of *tapas* and, therefore, felt it necessary to describe its meaning at great length. This must have not only disabused *tapas* of its harmful acquired meanings, but also warned the laity against frauds and cheats.

Sri Krishna classifies *tapas*, austerity, under three heads, viz. austerity of the body, speech, and mind. 'Worship of God, the twice-born, the preceptors, and the wise; purity (internal and external), probity, chastity, non-injury are said to be austerities of the body. Speech which causes no vexation, and is true, agreeable and wholesome; and regular study of the Vedas — these form the austerity of speech. Serenity of mind, kindness, silence, self-control, honesty of motive, these constitute austerity of the mind.'<sup>5</sup> Sankara commenting on these verses says, 'Speech should be endowed with all the four qualities mentioned here. Absence of even one does not form the austerity of speech. Silence, means not absence of speech alone but also speech controlled by mind.' Sri Krishna further says, 'All these austerities undergone with the utmost *sraddha*, without any desire for enjoyment of the results, and by persons of controlled nature alone are called austerities born out of *sattva* material.'<sup>6</sup>

How painstakingly did not Sri Ramakrishna watch over his young disciples? He took care to see what and how much they ate. What company they kept and on what subjects they talked. Last but not least he insisted on their meditating, regularly. Whosoever spent the nights with him would be awakened in the early hours of the morning and would be asked to meditate. He stressed on continence and warned against the lure of lucre. Lust and lucre he said were the two main hurdles in the path of God-realization.

### ***Importance and Value of Tapas***

*Tapas* has been extolled even in the Rig Veda, the most ancient of all religious literature extant now. The Upanisads and the sages have given an eminent place for it in spiritual life. 'Seek to know Brahman by means of *tapas*, for *tapas* is (the means of knowing) Brahman,'<sup>7</sup> says *Taittiriya Upanisad* repeatedly. As discipline it occupies a place of its own, declares the same Upanisad in another place: '*tapas*, learning and teaching (the Vedas)'.<sup>8</sup> The Upanisad at the end of the same chapter says, 'Learning and teaching alone are to be practised for they alone are *tapas*.'<sup>9</sup> The first word in our great epic, Ramayana, of sage Valmiki, is *tapas*.<sup>10</sup>

Every ancient sage required of his pupils, when they approached him for instruction, to live under him a life of *tapas* for some time — the duration depending on the progress in study and spiritual life, already made by the students. Sage Pippalada in *Prasnopanisad* said to the six pupils who approached him, 'Live again for a year a life of *tapas*, *brahmacarya* and *sraddha* and then ask about your doubts.'<sup>11</sup> In the *Chandogya Upanisad* Brahma asks Indra to live a life of *brahmacarya* for a hundred and one years, before he finds him fit to receive *Brahma Vidya*. It has been conceded by all sages that, purification of the mind is the only way paving to the descent of God's grace or for receiving His untarnished reflection, gaining which man becomes liberated, becomes immortal. And *tapas* helps a great deal towards this. It inevitably constitutes the corner stone of spiritual life. That is why the entire religious literature of the world, especially of our motherland, has enshrined *tapas* in a prominent manner.

How do the observance of austerities help one to liberation? Have we to take this on the authority of the Scriptures alone or can they be logically proved? These questions will surely trouble the moderns. Before trying to satisfy these doubts we shall also place before them some questions. Do they question their professor when they are asked to experiment in a certain way? What is their authority for their conviction? Were they logically convinced? It was written in some books that a certain scientist worked out a problem and noted down his findings. And any one else who tries, will also achieve similar results. So, here, something was taken for granted in the beginning, it was only a hypothesis for the experimenter until he reached the end of his research. Similarly our ancient sages too have given us their findings and we have to test them before decrying them as superstition; that is the scientific way of viewing things. If we fail to face the hardships therein involved, it means we are not sincere, it shows our dilettante attitude as well as cowardliness, and all decrying is to cover our inability

under the cloak of reasoning.

Now, let us take the scientist's own views. He says that the beings undergo change or metamorphosis to suit the environments. This is the theory of evolution that he presents. Now, as it is in the outside world so it is with each organism. But he says that this process is very slow. He believes that the process can be expedited under certain circumstances. That is exactly what our sages also say. They say that the *Atman* (Soul) is pure bliss, pure knowledge and absolute existence. All that lives must experience this. All that exists must go back to God from where it originated. All this suffering here is only an evolution towards, a return to, God. Our sages were interested in man's attaining this primeval nature by the expediting process. They said that, this primeval nature which bestows tranquillity on man cannot be attained by having recourse to excitement. They are poles apart. Hence, eschew all excitable things. How to do that? By cultivating the opposite virtues. Now, take the austerity of the body prescribed in the Gita, viz. worship of God and the like. None of them excite us, at least towards worldly things, if done in the proper spirit. They teach us humility, not in the sense of engendering the spirit of our unworthiness but respect for things higher and nobler. Purity makes man stand up to any vilification and not crouch before a false report. Who would not like to be dealt with in a straightforward manner? Without continence man can never attain God, that is the verdict of all realized souls without exception. Continence is the conservation of energy. An energy, which is more powerful than all the powers on earth, which gives man grit and tenacity to persevere in his spiritual quest. All these austerities tend towards bodily tranquillity. We have also simultaneously to practise the austerities of speech and mind.

Science says every action has a reaction. Our sages do not differ from them on this point. They only ask people to apply this not only in the case of mere scientific experiments but in daily life too. If our speech be harsh, the reaction will not be palatable and that will be bad for the tranquillity of the mind. We need no laboratory to demonstrate to us how perturbed our minds become when we give ourselves up to passions such as anger, jealousy and the like. Serenity of the mind is an essential requisite in our spiritual path, so that is called a part of *tapas*; it is to be cultivated. By all these methods the spiritual aspirant creates an atmosphere, an environment — to quote from the vocabulary of the scientist — wherein the metamorphosis or transmutation of the mind is accelerated until it reaches perfection, purity. The pure mind is then able to grasp the reflection of the Reality, which is the consummation of all spiritual effort. Necessity of *tapas* is therefore not inconsistent with reasoning, on the other hand, that it is the only path, seems to be



reasonable.

### ***Misdirected and Fruitless Tapas***

But as it happens in the case of all paths prescribed with all good intentions, the spirit of the injunction is forgotten and people cling to the letter alone, so in the case of *tapas* too, we find, the real purpose was forgotten and all sorts of tortures of the body came to be designated as *tapas*. Stress came to be laid on external purity and bodily suffering. Sometimes they were carried to such extremes as to inveigh against themselves. Once Swami Brahmananda was asked by a disciple as to what austerity was. He said: 'Austerities are of many types. Once I saw a man who took a vow not to sit or lie down for twelve years. When I met him, he had nearly finished his period. Only five or six months remained. Standing continuously for so many years had made his legs grow fat as they do in elephantiasis. While sleeping he held himself up by a rope. Such are not real austerities. Anyone can perform them. The body is easily controlled. But it is another matter to control the mind.' Sri Ramakrishna deprecated show in practising spiritual disciplines. He said: 'One should meditate in the mind, in a corner of the house (meaning a secluded place), and in the forest.' Sri Krishna too says that all *tapas* done without *sraddha* is *asat* (fruitless). It neither brings good here nor in the other world. Here he does not obtain the approbation of the wise and after death they yield no fruit of liberation or union with God. In the same way austerities performed with the intention of doing harm to enemies or gaining supernatural powers are not considered as *tapas* in its right perspective.

### ***Conclusion***

Spiritual life is a life of abstinence from the worldly enjoyments, for the sake of an everlasting felicity. It is, as it were, to cautiously step aside from being caught in the wheel of birth and death. Sri Ramakrishna calls that dexterity, dexterity which enables one to get away from being caught in the net of *Mahamaya*, the great illusive power of the Lord, and not that dexterity which enables one to amass wealth or lead a comfortable life. *Tapas* is a limb of spiritual life. It develops in man clear thinking with regard to the values of life. It guides the boat of our life like the mariner's compass. Yet, we must remember that, it is only the means and not an end in itself, the end being God-realization.

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<sup>1</sup> Gita.VI.13.

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<sup>2</sup> Svetasvataropanisad. 2.8.

<sup>3</sup> Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.I,seventh edition, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> Sandilyopanishad, 1.2.

<sup>5</sup> Gita, XVII. 14,15,16.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,XVII.17.

<sup>7</sup> Taittiriya upanishad, 3.2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1-9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Valmiki Ramayana

<sup>11</sup> Prasna Upanishad, 1.2.

## THE DIVINE NAME

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – January 1965; Vol. 51; page 447

TO CALL on God by His hallowed name is as old as religion itself. In the Rig Veda, Agni, the presiding deity of fire is hymned profusely. For it was Agni who was to carry the oblations offered into the mortal fire to the higher gods. Indra, Varuna and the like are the other names that we come across there. But Indra of the Rig Veda is not the same as of the Puranas. Indra was considered as the supreme deity, having overlordship over all the worlds. For the matter of that all names, says the Rig Veda, are of one and the same God. Those are not several gods but the same God addressed variously by different sages.<sup>1</sup>

“Name and form” constitute the whole phenomena of the universe. You cannot recall a form without referring to its name. And conversely also when you think of the name, the form too spontaneously comes before the mind's eye. So, as long as man is aware of these differences of ‘I’ and ‘you’, world and its objects, he must have recourse to names and forms of God also. And we have to remember that persons who are able to go beyond the idea of the phenomena are very few. People may be able to give splendid discourses on Advaita but those who have attained the *nirvikalpa samadhi* state alone can do without ‘names and forms’. But it will be the height of absurdity if everyone that has a smattering of the knowledge of the scriptures thinks himself competent to tread such a path.

Again, taking the Divine Name is a wholesome method by which spiritual aspirants can turn their psychological being to good account. Man by the principle of association of ideas connects up life and actions. If by this principle man hooks his train of thoughts on to God and His blessed attributes it would be easier for him to approach God. Every day, every minute of his waking state man is engaged in this pursuit, nay even in dreams this principle works. So what is required is only a shift of the centre of attraction— from world to God.

A very high place has been given by the sages of antiquity to the Divine Name. Narada, Vyasa, Shuka, Shandilya, besides the sages mentioned in the Vedas, are some of those who laid great store on the repetition of the Lord's name. Again, it is not Hinduism alone that prescribes God's name as a means to realization. Christianity, Islam and

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<sup>1</sup> R.V. II. Iii.22.

other faiths too have the same consideration for it.

## TRADITION

Taking the Divine Name as a means to God-Realization is a long-standing method. If we go into the religious history of India, or for that matter of any country, we will find that this process is time-honoured and very effective too. By repeating the Lord's name alone people have attained to the Highest. And our sages have in unequivocal terms declared this with all the firmness and certitude at their command. For it has been a tried and well established practice. People for ages have put faith in these words of the sages and have enshrined the Divine Name in their hearts.

In India, particularly, the Divine Name is taken with all solemnity before the commencement of any undertaking great or small, auspicious or even otherwise. Protected by the name they feel sure of themselves in their endeavour. People have become so much accustomed and habituated to take the Name that even unconsciously they do not take a step without uttering it.

It is a great source of power armed with which a man of faith defies the world to do him any harm; nay, he even defies death with a challenging voice, 'O Death where is thy sting?'

Sings Ramaprasad, a poet-mystic of Bengal, praising the efficacy of the *Name*:

*I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother;  
Am I afraid of Death any more?  
Unto the tuft of hair on my head  
Is tied the almighty mantra, Mother Kali's name.  
My body I have sold in the market-place of the world  
And with it have bought Sri Durga's name.  
Deep within my heart I have planted the name of Kali,  
The Wish-fulfilling Tree of heaven;  
When Yama, King of Death, appears,  
To him I shall open my heart and show it growing there.  
I have cast out from me my six unflagging foes;  
Ready am I to sail life's sea,  
Crying, "To Durga, victory!"<sup>2</sup>*

Replete is the religious lore of India with songs that depict vividly the glories of God's name. A host of saints and sages from every part of India can be quoted in support of this. A parable is told of a crow that preferred to die of thirst but would not lose the time, it was utilizing in

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<sup>2</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p.245. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4.

taking Rama's name, to slake its thirst.

Religious literature of India is full of the names of God. There are the *astottaras*, and the *sahasranamas*, (the hundred eight and thousand names) of every name of God, to remind the aspirants about the exploits of that particular form or aspect, or Incarnation of the God-head. People there are who cannot live or breathe without taking Lord's name, without tasting its divine bliss. For the believing and the trustful their one ambition in life is to make their exit from this world with the Lord's name on their lips. To do it they retire from all worldly entanglements and cares and live in holy places like Varanasi during the later part of their lives.

God's name is very efficacious in more ways than one. In the Bhagavata we read of Ajamila's episode: Ajamila was a brahmana by birth but after living for a long time the life required of him according to his station fell on evil ways, infatuated with lust. In that condition of his, he fell seriously ill. He despaired of his life. He saw the messengers of Death approaching. In his anguish he cried out to his dearest son, who was fortunately given the Lord's name, Narayana. Now, it is said, that the name of the Lord though unmeaningly uttered brought to the scene Vishnu's messengers who disputed the right of the messenger's of Death to take away a soul that had become pure by the repetition of God's holy name. Ajamila was spared his life that time and was given an opportunity to mend his ways and attain the Lord's abode. Man cuts off the bonds of birth and death if he remembers the Lord at the time of his death — is an assurance of Sri Krishna.

The Lord's name does not go in vain. It must bear its benign result. It is like the philosopher's stone converting all baser metal into gold. It is like the magic wand of the magician performing unbelievable and unthought of miracles; the only difference being that in the latter case it is of a moment's duration, whereas in the former it leaves a permanent impress on the devotee. It transforms man's life for ever.

Man seeks refuge in God's name also when he is confronted with difficult situations or involved in crises. Innumerable stories are extant which go to illustrate this fact. When Draupadi was being subjected to insult and humiliation in the court of the Kauravas it was Krishna's name that saved her honour. When Radha, the cowherdess of Vrindavana, was asked, as a test of her chastity, to bring water in a multi-holed pitcher it was with the name of the Lord that she came off more glorious than ever, out of this fiery ordeal. The great hero of the *Ramayana*, whom Tulsidas calls the 'jewel in the great garland of *Ramayana*', Hanuman crossed the ocean to Lanka merely by taking the name of Rama. These are not fictitious stories, but explanations to illustrate the principles.

There is a beautiful story, told to emphasize the identity and inseparableness of the Lord and His name. Sri Krishna was once being weighed against gold and ornaments. Even when all the gold and jewels of his palace were heaped in the other pan, Krishna's pan did not move up nor was it balanced. Then Rukmini, the divine consort of Sri Krishna,

had put in the place of the ornaments a *tulsi* leaf with Sri Krishna's name written on it on the counter pan to weigh the Lord. And lo! The pan moved up and there was the Lord weighed against His own name. Such really is the potency of the Lord's Name. It has its peer only in the Lord, nothing else can compare with it.

### SCRIPTURAL INJUNCTIONS

We find references as to the efficacy of the Name in the Rig, Yajur and Sama Vedas, which prove that it is not a later development in religion. One *mantra* reads: 'O, Glorious, all-pervading Lord, we use no sacrificial stakes, we slay no victims but we worship Thee by mere repetition of Thy name.'<sup>3</sup> The minor Upanisads, the *Ramayana*, the *Gita*, and the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavata* and other Purānas overflow with hymns and injunctions that enjoin this practice of taking the Name of the Lord, on the devotees. The *Yogasikhopanisad* defines a mantra as a 'holy formula', 'because of its scope for reflection, because of its saving power, because it reveals the Lord's nature and also because it forms the Lord's abode', and thus helps to realize Him. 'Rama established by his conduct and life the path of Righteousness and the path of knowledge by His name,' says the *Ramapurvatapani Upanisad*<sup>4</sup>. The *Mahabharata* declares, 'The aspirant always repeating the name of the Lord, reflecting on its meaning and observing the vows of Brahmacharya attains the highest.' Sri Krishna says in the context of His *vibhūtis*, 'Among yajñas I am the *japa yajña*.'<sup>5</sup> Thus we find that the recourse to the Name as one of the methods to God realization has been known from time out of mind.

### IN WHAT WAYS CAN THE NAME BE TAKEN

The well-known forms of taking the Lord's name are many. *Mantra Japa*, repetition of the holy formula given by a competent Guru is the most auspicious and helpful. Next comes singing hymns and songs in praise of or describing the exploits of the Lord. Sankirtana, singing in chorus the names of God, is also another method. Formal worship by offering the five, ten or sixteen articles or even mental worship (*manasa puja*) is still another. Here, we may remind ourselves that worship when done conscientiously, noting the meaning of all the mudras and rituals, which to the uninitiated and the ignorant may appear meaningless, can burst open the flood-gates of devotion and knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> Sama Veda II.2-9-2.

<sup>4</sup> I.4.

<sup>5</sup> Gita 10.25.

## EXAMPLES AND PRECEPTS OF INCARNATIONS

The world has before it the shining examples of the Avatars, their apostles, sages and saints to demonstrate what the Divine Name can do. Sri Chaitanya, an ultra logician of his times even up to the day of his initiation into the name of God, was a changed man at the very first mention of the Name by the Guru. All the stored up waters of devotion flowed then onwards like a mountain torrent carrying with it all that impedes or resists its path. The entreaties of his pupils to the life of the scholar and teacher, of his mother to the life of the householder were carried away in that current. The pull of God was irresistible for him; and in his turn his own attraction too became irresistible to many.

Sri Ramakrishna stormed the citadel of God with nothing but the name of Mother Kali. All his other *sadhanas* may be said to have come after the first vision of the Mother. The Divine Mother could not hold Herself back from the earnest call of Her dear child. He almost forced Her to yield him Her presence. We know that Sri Ramakrishna breathed his last uttering the name of Kali and entered into *mahasamadhi*. In the life of the Holy Mother we read how incessantly she repeated the Name in spite of her varied duties of the household and onerous responsibilities of the spiritual ministry. She set for herself a huge number for her *japa*, but she did it regularly till the last days of her life. Her day dawned at 3 in the morning and her time for rest arrived only at 11 in the night, yet the repetition of the Lord's name continued unhampered.

In the disciples of Incarnations too we find this trait prominently present. A look at the life of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in the initial stage of the organization will amply hold out this fact. In the very throes of penury, of suffering and privacy there flowed a constant stream of divine bliss expressing itself now and then in the form of Sankirtan, songs and ecstatic dances, at the Baranagore Math.

It may now be said: 'O! Well, it is all right with the Incarnations and their apostles who were pure from their very birth or who had mighty Gurus to help and guide. But what about us who have a load of inherent tendencies to overcome?' To this we draw attention of such people to the precepts and the assurances given by these holy men. We have to follow in their footsteps; there is no other way. When we despair, observing no progress in our spiritual life, let us hearken to the words of the Avatars which bring solace and infuse confidence. Here is Sri Chaitanya telling us: 'The name of God has very great sanctity. It may not produce an immediate result, but one day it must bear fruit. It is like a seed that has been left on the cornice of a building. After many days the house crumbles and the seed falls on the earth, germinates and at last bears fruit.' Even in the case of ordinary vegetation we have to wait for the season to yield fruits and how then can we be impatient when it is concerned with the highest fruit of life!

Again, Sri Chaitanya says that it is not possible in this Kali age to do

the sacrifices enjoined in the Vedas on their elaborate scale, nor is it possible for every one to do them. For the Kali age, therefore, he avers, the name of Hari alone, without any doubt, is the path for liberation.

Sri Ramakrishna confirms that by chanting the Lord's name one gets rid of all the dross of the body and mind; and in a purified mind reflects the image of God in all splendour. One of the songs of another poet, that Sri Ramakrishna cherished very much, describes what merits accrue to one who takes the Divine name:

*Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya, to Kasi, Kanchi, or Prabhas,  
So long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name upon my lips?  
What need of rituals has a man, what need of devotions any more,  
If he repeats the Mother's name at the three holy hours?  
Rituals may pursue him close, but never can they overtake him.  
Charity, vows, and giving of gifts do not appeal to Madan's mind;  
The Blissful Mother's Lotus Feet are his whole prayer and sacrifice.  
Who could ever have conceived the power Her name possesses?  
Siva Himself, the God of Gods, sings Her praise with His five  
mouths!<sup>6</sup>*

Sri Ramakrishna gives the example of a devotee, Krishnakishore, who though a brahmin had no hesitation in drinking water from the hands of a person of low-caste when he had uttered Shiva's name. Another time Sri Ramakrishna said, 'A man was about to cross the sea from Ceylon to India. Vibhishana said to him: "Tie this thing in a corner of your wearing-cloth, and you will cross the sea safely. You will be able to walk on the water. But be sure not to examine it, or you will sink." The man was walking easily on the water of the sea — such is the strength of faith — when, having gone part of the way, he thought, "What is this wonderful thing Vibhishana has given me, that I can walk even on the water?" He untied the knot and found only a leaf with the name of Rama written on it. "Oh, just this!" he thought, and instantly he sank.'<sup>7</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the milk-maid and the Guru is amazingly revealing as to what faith in the Name did to the disciple and how the teacher himself could not get over doubt.

Holy Mother too in her teachings has exhorted us to be devoted to the Divine Name. In the Bible also we have certain passages glorifying Name. We shall quote a few of them here. 'Let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee' (*Psalms*, 5.11). 'Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name', (Ib. 29.2). 'O, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together,' (Ib. 34. 3-4). 'Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious,' (Ib. 66.1-3), 'I will lift up my hands in thy name,' (Ib. 63.4).

However, real faith in the potency of the name can come out of

<sup>6</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. P.76.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.33.



one's own personal experience. We, therefore, leave it to every reader to find out the truth of this thesis by consulting his own experiences in life. Even an average man might have received a response from on High when he in his difficulty had called on Him.

### HOW TO TAKE THE NAME — THE MODUS OPERANDI

It is easy to say that we should not at all discuss how we are to take the Divine Name. But the question remains whether we should take the Name to gain material ends, with ulterior motive. It cannot be gainsaid that such a step is not proper. It may lead to material prosperity, no doubt, for the Lord like a kind mother will bestow on us whatever we pray for, but it will throw us into the whirlpool of innumerable births and deaths. It is religion which comes to help us out of this predicament. And religion being the most practical of all the sciences under the sun, any practisant will find out in no time that utmost caution and guidance are required to chant the Name effectively.

When one chants it with due regard and propriety, said Swami Vivekananda once, one can have both Bhakti and Jnana through it. Again, we sing in the *Ramanama Sankirtan*, '*dhanyāste krtinah pibanti satatam sri rāmanāmārtam*,' 'Blessed are those virtuous persons who drink the nectar of immortality of Sri Rama's name.' Shall we not try to become blessed!

In conclusion, we have to impress on our minds that purity of thought and sincerity of purpose are the essential conditions one has to achieve and develop in the religious life if it is to be expeditiously fruitful. He must practise Brahmacharya, physically and mentally. He has to avoid all slips in the ethical life and should live a life of discipline. These are the *sine qua non* of the higher life, and it is well-known that nothing will happen if *sadhana* is practised perfunctorily. So, when that purity of purpose and sincerity in *sadhana* is achieved and when one tries in secret and in solitude and with single-minded devotion to repeat the name of God, His vision will come and the devotee will get absorbed in Him.

## THE FOUR-FOLD BONDAGE AND RELEASE THEREFROM

Swami Paratparananda

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THE average man's life on earth is a hopeless dependence on circumstances. He has several masters to serve: those under whom he works, those to whom he owes obligations, his own passions and lastly the ego. Among these, the passions are the worst tyrants; they exact out of him all his energy and they will not leave him at that but would continue to torment him. Man's senses are at the root of all passions; the eyes hanker after beautiful objects, the ear after sweet sounds and so on and these senses are never satisfied. They appear to be pleased for a time, but there is no appeasing them. Without any compunction they repeat their demands. Their hunger is enormous. They make man work like a bond-slave, like the bullock that is tied to the yoke of the native oil mill. Tantalized by the wisp of grass that hangs before it, the bullock, in order to reach that coveted piece of food, grinds the mill day in and day out, but never gets the promised delicacy. Likewise, man expecting happiness grinds this mill of the world as a slave. But the pity of it is, that even when he becomes aware of his condition, aware that he is only made an instrument of, aware that he is himself being crushed in the mill, is unable to get out of it. He finds himself bound hand and foot, as it were. He finds that the flame of desires that he had himself kindled is burning him through and through. Then he cries out: Is there no way out? His real search begins then.

### II

Let us try to understand the reaction of man, down the ages, to this fourfold bondage viz., to nature, to the relations and the like, to the senses and the ego. Man has tried in various ways to overcome external nature. He has come out of the cave and built up towns and cities to be free of the fear of the ferocious beasts and the whims of the ever-changing nature. He has overcome heat and cold by various methods. He has made nature yield its secrets bountifully. So, in a sense we can say that man has been successful in conquering outer nature. Yet a great question remains to be answered: How many have actually been

benefited?

Perhaps a few countries may have been successful in breaking man's attachment to relatives, and the like. But whether that has improved man's nature in living peacefully with his neighbours, is a matter of dispute.

But when humanity is considered as a whole man's inner nature, i.e. the predominance of the senses and ego over man, has remained at, almost, the same level as what it was thousands of years ago. Civilization has not improved that nature to any appreciable extent. Now, consider what follows: a thousand years ago two nations would have fought out and done with any quarrel, within a few days or months. But today though hot war has gone under, it has been replaced by cold war. Nations are afraid to trust one another. Therefore each is trying to build up its defences to its utmost capacity, with the result that what revenue should normally have gone to build the economic structure of a nation goes into the war machinery. But there is no way out. No nation can, without danger to its very survival and territorial integrity, dare neglect to keep pace with others regarding armaments, especially of those of its neighbours. So this cold war goes on and on. Similar is the situation in every other field of man's contacts, family as well as society. So, where is the change? To consider, therefore, the question of change of nature in man taken on the collective plane is of little avail. We shall confine to man as an individual, for if in a society there were to arise a sufficient number of good individuals that society may ultimately be beneficial not only to itself but to the world as a whole.

### III

We have seen how much handicapped man is. Each individual, who seeks to master his lower nature, therefore has to fight his own battle. But what humanity has given him as a legacy is not soft clay but hard rock. From this hard rock he has to cut his image and according as his instruments, that is, his mind and inherent tendencies, are sharp and sound, and his efforts in this direction are ceaselessly continuous, regular and unwavering to that extent the image he will carve out, will also prove attractive and divine. But how to carve that image? In other words, how to attain that perfect mastery over our lower nature? There is a great difference here between the outer and inner worlds. In the outer world we may, if we have enough of wealth, employ the best sculptor or painter to do our job for us. But in the internal sphere, in the case of the mind, ordinarily, none can help, none can get you out of the morass. You have to find your own way out of the labyrinth. It is like the silkworm which builds its cocoon round itself. None can help it to break its house. But if it intends to come out, it may, in the form of a beautiful butterfly, do so. If man eagerly yearns and earnestly makes efforts, he can break this fourfold bondage. But the path is difficult and requires immense patience.

It is like walking on the sharp edge of a razor. One should always be on the alert. That has been the experience of sages who have travelled the path.<sup>1</sup> For, in the case of the ordinary man, attachments insinuate themselves, in several ways and once they get hold of him they do not leave him easily. The story of Jadabharata, in the *Mahābhārata*, is aptly illustrative of this fact. Leaving his kingdom and wealth Bharata had retired to a forest to live in contemplation of God. There he came upon a young-one of a deer which was just then delivered by its mother on the bank of a stream and was being carried away on its current. Its mother had died in fright hearing the roar of some ferocious beast. Moved to pity Bharata rescued the deer and he thought it would be cruel to leave it in the forest with none to take care of. He reared it up with loving care. But when it grew the native urge in the animal took it into the forest; all the love the sage had showered on it could not hold it back. The sage was broken-hearted and roamed the forest calling the deer by its pet name, but it never returned. The thought of the deer however continued to haunt him and when he died his last uttered word was the name of the deer and his last thoughts were of it. Such is attachment. The king in spite of his right resolution could not restrain himself from being attached.

Now, it may be asked: How then to live in the world? Sri Ramakrishna has given us the prescription. He said to the householders: 'Live like a maid-servant in a rich man's house. She takes care of her master's children and calls them my Ram, my Shyam and treats them as her own but all the time she knows that her own children are there in her native village.' But this idea gets root only by long practice of discrimination and detachment. When one is able to detach oneself from the most dear thing without the least wrench at one's heart one can live like a master. The outer circumstances will then fail to produce any lasting impression on one's mind.

This discrimination is the sheet anchor of spiritual life. It is the faculty which makes man choose the right path and discard the vicious. The senses present one with a panorama of objects and sensations, which causes desires to arise. It is discrimination which says whether you can fulfil those desires without any detriment to your spiritual health. If you wisely submit to the dictation of discrimination you are safe, otherwise you involve yourself into insurmountable difficulties.

All sages have unequivocally declared that desire is at the root of all evil. The Buddha said that *tanha* (*trishna*) for things of the world was responsible for man's miseries. Sri Krishna says, 'This *kāma* (desire), this anger, is produced from the Rajoguna. It is a great appetite (*mahāshana*) and the most sinful (*mahāpāpmā*). Know it here (in this world) to be your enemy.'<sup>2</sup> Here desire and anger are bracketed together as one. For anger is desire obstructed. All other passions may be said to be the offsprings of this desire. As the *Gītā* observes, 'Man who thinks always about sense objects grows attached to them. From attachment desires arise, and when desires are obstructed anger springs up; anger clouds the mind. A

darkened (infatuated) mind loses hold of memory (of what is good and what is evil). With loss of memory one fails to command the discriminating power and consequently loses one's hold on spiritual life.<sup>3</sup> Herein we get a clue as to how man becomes increasingly a slave to his passions, and indirectly we get a hint as to what is to be avoided by a spiritual aspirant.

Another great drag on the mind of the present generation is its obsession about reason and logic and the related philosophy. Philosophy, as mere intellectual propositions, without their practice may be all right for a pedant, for a pedagogue and one who wants to earn name, fame and wealth. But as far as the religious life is concerned its use for man is very limited. A mere pundit cannot have peace for himself, not to speak of his being able to bestow it on others. His peace if at all he must find in what the common run of men also experience i.e. in sense pleasures. But that is exactly what a spiritual aspirant has to avoid and tries to break through. Idle is a man's hope, if he thinks that he can reach the summit of spiritual life by mere theorising about Reality without living a pure and unsullied life and doing assiduous and arduous practices. If any one wants to believe in a person who advocates living any sort of life but doing some intellectual gymnastics, about philosophy, he may well be sure that spiritually his ruin is certain and sealed. For even in the ordinary world, mankind does not trust a man devoid of integrity to be at the helm of affairs of a Government or even an establishment, what then to speak of spiritual life! Let us beware of such wolves in sheep's clothing who come to advise in this manner.

Having pointed out the pitfalls we shall see what is the way towards breaking these bonds and becoming master of ourselves. Man from his first appearance on earth has fought for freedom. Swami Vivekananda says that not only man's but the exertion of every being is to get back its freedom. Because in essence every being is that Brahman which is unfettered and eternal. All beings have somehow fallen from that state of freedom and so are struggling to get back to it. Two types of people tried in two different ways to obtain this freedom. The West concentrated their efforts in the external world whereas in the East, in India, our sages having explored the regions of outer life found that freedom was not to be sought there. They found another world inside themselves, unexplored, untouched, and vast. Commanding it, they realized, man could live like a master and eventually be free from this 'ring of return'.

But this word 'master' has a peculiar ring for an average man. It at once brings before his mind's eye the picture of man with many servants and vast wealth. But this is not the proper form of a master. For control over others may give us momentary satisfaction but cannot give us peace. Even dictators have a fall and while they rule they live in deadly fear of their lives. But to control one's body, one's senses and mind and turn it towards God is to become the real master, to be free from any

fear. Man then cares not for anything. Nothing disturbs his peace. That was what our sages found out. And that mastery they said is to be achieved if anyone wants lasting peace and bliss.

Again, the mansion of man's body is constructed of a highly inflammable and explosive material. That is what he forgets. Śrī Śankara observing man's pitiable plight says in his *Vivekacūdamani*: 'The deer, the elephant, the moth, the fish and the black-bee, everyone of these have died by their attachment to one or the other of the five senses, viz., sound etc. respectively. What then is in store for man who is attached to all the five senses!'<sup>4</sup> It is said that the deer is enamoured of music. Even though it is beset with danger the moment it hears the sweet sound of the flute it stops rooted to the spot and then is slowly, without its knowledge, drawn towards the sound. This is how, it is believed the hunters used to catch the deer. Similarly the other animals are drawn by their respective dominant senses. But man is a slave to all the five. How much then should not he be careful not to be entangled or ensnared by them! There is no way of controlling the senses than not to indulge in them. Not to give them any rope, short or long. One should not give any scope for them to occupy one's mind. One should always be engaged either in good works, good thoughts or thought of God.

Sri Ramakrishna recommended taking the name of the Lord as the most efficient remedy for the malady of these passions. He further said, 'As you go to the east, the west is left behind. As man progresses towards God, his passions fall off from him.' Now to remember God, an Unknown Entity to a large section of mankind, is really a great problem. Most of the people have not seen Him, how then can they remember Him? Again, people can remember only things which they have seen and to which they are attached. How can they love God whom they have not seen? True, it is not possible all at once but on the other hand this physical attraction does not last; love in the world wanes and crumbles after a time. Things of the world are transient; today they are, tomorrow they are not. Nothing is permanent. Affliction and joy alternate. Love and hatred follow one another. Śrī Śankara has an exquisite couplet describing the nature of human behaviour: 'As long as man is able to earn money, so long does the family respect him and regard him but when the body becomes feeble and decrepit, no one in the family asks about his welfare.'<sup>5</sup> And that is literally true in most of the cases. So, man must prepare himself for disillusionment if he is not to lose heart in the end. If he remembers these facts his outlook on life will change. He will then turn to a higher source of solace which neither fails him in his need nor makes any exacting demand. This constant remembrance of the Most High will enthuse man with new vigour to fight his lower nature; then the temptations will begin to have less and less effect on him.

There are, however, ups and downs in spiritual life also. It is not at all a smooth sailing. To tide over the rough weather man must have recourse to holy company. The company of the holy gives a fresh lease of

life to his drooping spirits. From these holy men he comes to know that those phases of depression have to be gone through by every aspirant and are not insurmountable barriers, as they first appear to be. The practicant has to persevere until he reaches the goal. This is what the *Gita* calls, continuous practice. The *Gita* gives a high place for practice in religious life. It says that *abhyāsa* and *vairagya* (renunciation) are the two ways of controlling the mind.<sup>6</sup> Further, the *Gita* declares: 'The wayward mind is to be repeatedly brought under control though it may stray away from the Self from time to time.'<sup>7</sup> There is no other way to subdue the mind than this. When the mind becomes tranquil, free from all impurities and is not disturbed by anything, then man becomes one with divinity. Then only he can be the master, not otherwise.

Purity of the mind, the *sine qua non* of spiritual life, can be achieved by several ways : (1) by living with a realized soul or holy men and serving them with sincerity, and devotion, (2) by good deeds, (3) by prayer, (4) by taking the name of the Lord, (5) by meditation, and (6) by yoga. Unless one's mind is pure the reflection of the Divine will not be perfect in man; it will appear distorted. That is why man sees evil everywhere. When man becomes one with the Divine or sees the Lord, to use the devotee's phraseology, he gets rid of all bondages. This has been repeatedly stressed in the Upanisads. And when the bondages are broken man becomes master of himself.

And that is the most covetable state. We may move unconsciously towards it and make false steps in the attempt and retard our progress. But to move consciously and intentionally and deliberately, man must have a clear vision of his goal and the means that he is going to adopt to reach it and then without let or hindrance stick to his path firmly. If he is successful in his attempt, even while he is progressing on the path he will be peaceful and blissful, in spite of the heavy strain he will be subject to, even then he will feel that he is master, unfettered and free. In short, to live like a master one needs, not hoards of wealth, or progeny, or servants, but mastery over one's own mind and complete identification with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Katha Up. 3.14.

<sup>2</sup> Bhagavad Gita, III.37.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, II. 62&63.

<sup>4</sup> Vivekacūdamani, 76.

<sup>5</sup> Mohamudgara, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Bhagavad Gita, VI.35.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., VI.23.

## THE GRACE OF THE MIND

Swami Paratparananda

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### I

A very significant saying of Sri Ramakrishna is, 'You may have the grace of the Lord, and the guru, but if you have not the grace of your mind then the other two will be of little avail for your spiritual uplift'. It seems really a paradox. How can the mind overrule the grace of God? Is it then such a potent factor as to set at naught the grace of the preceptor as well as of the Lord? These are the questions that will confront one's mind on hearing this utterance. Where shall we find the answer for these questions? By thinking deeply in and on our own minds.

First of all, we have to know that the mind is a mechanism which can divide itself, as it were, into two separate entities; one as the player, the actor and the other as the observer, the witness. Of course, we do not refer here to the Self or the Ātman, which is the witness, the illuminator, the operator of the body-mind machine, the prime mover of all our thoughts, volition, and action. We shall confine at this stage to the mind alone.

This phase of the mind, that is its capacity to bifurcate into two channels, as it were, will not be clear to the ordinary people who are moved by impulses in most of their actions. Take for instance a man in a fit of anger. What will he not do? He may commit any crime. He is carried away by the impulse and cannot use that part of his mind, which the Indian psychologists call *buddhi* (intellect). Similarly men under the impelling force of other passions fail to utilize this faculty. Their mind is completely lost in the impulse to act, or in the act, during those moments.

But it is not a fact that the generality of mankind does not possess or develop this faculty. That man regrets some of his actions for whatever reason, demonstrates that this faculty is not absent in him. Also, commerce, science, literature, music, art, and architecture have developed because of it. Yet the very same persons who have reached the pinnacle of glory in these spheres may be swayed by passions, may commit crimes. How could such a thing be possible if they were not swept off their feet in the current of their passions, thus losing hold of their intellect?

Again, it is a psychologically proved fact that a part of the mind



should always cooperate with the body for the performance of any action; there is no automation in it. Even when we allude to automation in man we imply that he does not do his deeds devoting his full mind to them, does not use his discriminative part of it.

All this will be obvious if we but begin to analyze every thought that we think, every word that we utter and every action that we perform. This self-analysis, if we may say so, is the laying of the foundation of man's character on a firm basis. All other codes of outward conduct, mores, traditions and so on are only aids to develop this intuitive self-analysis. These codes and mores cannot make you a new being unless you accept the disciplines involved in them whole-heartedly and not as drudgery. Perhaps, in the beginning even this drudgery should be accepted and may prove fruitful provided there is a real hankering after the spirit, after God. But if it remains as a burden, as a shackle which you think is impeding you every moment of your life then the outer disciplines will only weigh on your mind and create tension.

Well, what creates tension? Many of us might have seen the sport called the 'tug of war'. A rope is usually the medium by which the strength of the parties is tested. The two parties try to pull the other its own way. When the sides are balanced the pressure on the rope is such that it becomes taut. Likewise in the mind there are two tendencies, the good and the evil, each pulling its own way. When neither of these want to yield ground, tension is created. Let us take a concrete example. Suppose a man is impelled by his tendencies to wicked actions, at the same time his intellect functioning properly refuses to submit to the impulse. If the intellect is strong the man may wean away the mind, but if it is neither strong nor weak, is just able to counter the pull of his evil tendencies and no more, the mind then gets taut. Tension may also result when one is facing misery continually and for a long time. Then the resistance of the mind, however strong, wears off and a stage is reached when there arises an intense conflict, whether to go the easier way or fight and stay in the right path.

It is this period of tension that is critical in man's life. Either he succumbs to allurements and temptations or overpowers them and comes out victorious. History of religion is the history of these conquests of the lower self by the higher or, to be consistent with our subject, of lower desires of the mind by the higher values. That it is the mind which is responsible for what we are, is epigrammatically given in one of the Upanisads. 'The mind alone is the cause of man's bondage and liberation. That (mind) which is enraptured in worldly pleasures makes for bondage and that which has freed itself from such allurements helps towards liberation,'<sup>1</sup> says the *Brahmabindu Upanisad*.

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<sup>1</sup> Brahmabindu Upanishad, 2.

## II

After this preamble the subject, the grace of the mind, we believe, will be easier to grasp. We can now say that the willingness of the mind to take the yoke of God is what can be said to be its grace. Many of us have not noticed how wild horses behave when they are caught, to be tamed. But, it is said that this is a tough job which trained, strong and adventurous men alone can do. These horses are very turbulent, and would not like to lose their freedom. Some of them struggle to the last limit of their physical energy, before they give in. Even when they are caught, it is a task to tame them and ride or yoke them to the plough or the wagon. Man's mind is like the wild horse. Unrelenting should be the pressure that is made to bear on it. Not so much as to create tension but to watch and root out the thoughts that bring tension on. But this is most easily said than done. It is a lifetime's work to bring the mind into subservience and give it to God.

What then is the meaning of God's grace if it cannot detract us from our foibles, shortcomings and follies and attract us towards Him, if it cannot transform us? Sri Ramakrishna's simile of the mother engaged in her household chores and the child busy with the red toys is a very apt illustration to the point. As long as the child is happy with the toys the mother goes on with her household work, but a part of her mind remains always on the child. She hears it laugh and toss the toys, crawling or toddling about in great glee. So she allows it to play on but when the child has nothing more to do with the toys and cries for the mother, that moment she runs to it, discarding the work, whatever it may be, that she is engaged in. As long as we are busy and happy with our worldly life God allows us to be so. Otherwise like the children that are snatched away from their games we will be miserable. Do not the best dishes taste common and insipid when one has no hunger? Also, do not the ordinary dishes taste like nectar when one has toiled hard or had foregone food for many a day? That is the contrast. There should be hunger for God, thirst to taste His sweetness. Without this yearning even if God bestows his vision we would not welcome it. We may willy-nilly go on but a lingering back glance will always remain. But once this thirst develops then any yoke will be welcome and be cheerfully borne. When the mind can create such yearning for God then it can be said that its grace has dawned on that person.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the breeze of the Lord's grace is always blowing, only we have to unfurl the sails to catch it. Unfurling the sails is to make the mind receptive to thoughts about God. Ordinarily our mind is receptive to the impressions that the senses bring and though not averse, in some cases, to thoughts about God, the mind cannot be described as overflowingly avid towards them. Man, by his mistaken notion searches after everlasting bliss and peace in the external world but finds it nowhere. Like the astronauts that went round space and found

God nowhere, he becomes disappointed in the end if he searches for joy outside.

### III

All investigations either in the sphere of science or religion is to find out that one Principle of Bliss which runs through every being and non-being and manifests in a variety of ways. But the veils, both in the internal and the external worlds, are too thick, very opaque, to allow penetration for our ordinary minds.

These clouds that veil our being from getting in contact with God are our passions which incessantly create a turmoil in the mind and never allow the image of God to reflect there. For as we have already noticed the swift stream of passions carries away man along with it, without giving him respite or any chance to deliberate over the actions which he is rushed in, intimidated, as it were, to do. That is what Arjuna complains to Sri Krishna, 'When this is so, urged by what does man do evil deeds though unwilling, as if compelled by force'.<sup>2</sup> Arjuna's question is when it is well-known that one has to reap the bitter fruits of one's evil actions, why does man persist in doing them. Sri Krishna's reply is, 'It is desire, it is anger (passion), that is born of *rajas* which is a voracious consumer, and a great evil (that makes man engage in evil deeds). Know this to be your enemy here.'<sup>3</sup> Sri Krishna continues, 'Just as the fire is concealed by smoke, just as the mirror is covered by dust, just as the foetus is covered by the amnion even so this knowledge is hidden by passion'.<sup>4</sup> The three examples here, imply three different stages of growth; smoke is natural to fire likewise passions are inherent in the mind in the form of impressions, and therefore give rise to the innumerable bodies which we pass through; the dust that covers the mirror is an external element, similarly, the attractions of the senses which come from outside have the tendency to make the desires stronger; the membrane that covers the foetus limits all its movements, even so man's freedom is curtailed by his enhanced passions, and he is bound by them even as a prisoner is by fetters.

The Bhagavata in an exquisite verse depicts how man gets entangled in this world. 'The mind creates these bodies, qualities, and deeds for this Self. That mind again creates ignorance (Māyā) from whence results all this transmigration.'<sup>5</sup> We try to imagine things and by the sway of our imagination we bring them into being. So, as Swami Vivekananda says, 'Let visions cease. Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams, which are Eternal Love and Service free'.

Perhaps, we are apt to brush aside the above as a poetic sentiment. But before we pass on to the scientific explanation about it let us recall

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<sup>2</sup> Bhagavad Gita, III.36.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., III.37.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., III.38.

<sup>5</sup> Bhagavata, 12.5.6.

that one of the epithets of God, in the Hindu scriptures is Kavi,<sup>6</sup> the intelligent one, one of insight, the poet. All poetry is not mere sentiment for some of the best thoughts in philosophy have been expressed in the form of poems. The Vedas, and some of the Upanisads are examples in point. The above statement of Swami Vivekananda is not merely poetry but is an expression born of profound spiritual insight.

#### IV

How imagination and hence the mind plays a great part can be easily explained. Let us take up the scientific and technological achievements of the present age. There was a time when even great thinkers and literateurs satirically wrote about man's attempt to fly in the air. But today it is an accomplished fact. All this has been made possible by imaginative thinking of the creative genius. In the present age no one can criticize as impracticable the wildest imagination of the scientist, of their being able to travel to the Moon or the Mars. The critic or the sceptic will then be considered as living in an antediluvian age, not aware of the advance science has made. As it is possible to lift ourselves by an imaginative process it is also possible to involve ourselves into difficulties by the same process. That is why Swamiji warned us to 'dream of truer dreams'. Thus we see that the mind has infinite power.

We can arrive at the same conclusion even from the physical point of view. Take up the science of biology. The biologists are of the opinion that germs of most of the diseases are present in our system but they bide their time, and become active only when the body gets weakened. We should not therefore allow our body to become weak. Swami Vivekananda says, 'There are hundreds of thousands of microbes surrounding us, but they cannot harm us unless we become weak, until the body is ready and predisposed to receive them. There may be a million microbes of misery, floating about us. Never mind! They dare not approach us, they have no power to get a hold on us, until the mind is weakened. This is the great fact; strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery: weakness is death'.

Thus from every point of view, we see, that the mind has a great part in the moulding of our lives. We should, therefore, be careful, to think thoughts, to visualize things, as would benefit us spiritually. And the grace of the mind, in a sense, is its capacity to think spiritual thoughts in a continuous and sustained manner.

Now, the English word grace can be translated into Sanskrit as *prasāda*. And this word *prasāda* in another sense means tranquillity also. If we equate these two words, viz., grace and tranquillity, with reference to the mind, we do not think we will be committing any error. On the

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<sup>6</sup> Bhagavad Gita, VIII.9 & Isa Up., 8.

other hand the grace of the mind is its very ceasing from going into modifications, attaining tranquillity, which, according to Patanjali, may be termed as Yoga.<sup>7</sup> It is the end towards which all our efforts, knowingly or unknowingly, are directed. Even the feverish activity and interminable desire for pleasure, though misdirected efforts, are to attain this tranquillity. But the tranquillity born of attaining worldly goods or pleasures is short-lived.

How can eternal tranquillity be attained? Sri Krishna says, 'One who is free from attachment and aversion and moves about amidst the sense objects with the senses and the mind governed by a controlled self attains serenity'.<sup>8</sup> Only then when one has acquired tranquillity of the mind, 'all miseries are destroyed; and the wisdom of a man of serenity soon becomes steady'.<sup>9</sup>

## V

The main purport, which runs through all our scriptures, is that we should be able to cleanse our minds of all dross, of all other thoughts which make us hanker after things here, and point the mind towards God. The more we are able to hold on to the thoughts about God, the more, we should say, is the grace of the mind bestowed on us. For there are instances when everything has been favourable, yet due to the lack of an inner urge we fail to do our spiritual practices, do not feel any inclination to do them. The reason is that the mind ordinarily flows out towards external objects and that is why one can concentrate one's mind on things external, but it is very difficult to concentrate on the mind itself or on our inner being. Because there the instrument and the object are one. It is only for this reason that we have images and symbols. The outgoing mind is given an outward object which reminds us about God. Thus helped to think of the abstract through the concrete, the mind which has lost taste for worldly pleasure, will take up this idea. Only when the mind has taken up this idea seriously to the exclusion of all other thoughts, can it be said that the grace of the mind has dawned on that person. Swami Vivekananda informs us that, 'This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced'.

To sum up: the grace of the mind means its willingness to think of God, its eagerness to contemplate on Him, which in turn arises only when its hankering after pleasures has begun to abate, when it feels restless for God, when nothing disturbs its equanimity. It is a long process but one should not get disheartened. For nothing has been achieved by the weak; to the brave and the persisting alone have gone all the laurels in this world. And the laurels that will crown us in the field of spirituality are the only ones that give us peace that passeth understanding'.

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<sup>7</sup> Yoga Sutras, I.2.

<sup>8</sup> Bhagavad Gita, II.64.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., II.65.

## THE HUMAN MIND - ITS NATURE AND GOOD USE

Swami Paratparananda

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THE most perplexing organism, to a thinking man, is his own mind. We have deliberately used the word 'thinking' here to indicate a definite class of people, who are not satisfied with the natural trend of events and of life. People, generally, are not interested in taking note of the working of their own minds. That is: how the mind works? How it reacts to situations? Is the reaction conducive or not to future tranquillity? And so on. They concern themselves with the fulfilling of their immediate needs, in attending to their daily necessities anyhow, without caring to see whether it hurts others or not. To live a happy life, as they consider it, is all they desire and do. Normally people act within the bounds of the letter of the laws of the land though they may not respect the spirit behind them. Sometimes they cross the limit, and by clever stratagems escape the hand of justice. But cleverness is not wisdom. Wisdom is something different. Man may give the go-by to human laws sometimes but not his inherent ones. By clever manipulation he may evade the laws and amass money or enjoy other objects of the world but that will not give him peace of mind, because there will be lurking in his mind all the impressions (aroused or dormant) of the actions he has done.

The human mind is such a mechanism that it records everything that one takes interest in. For instance we may see many sights or meet a number of persons but the mind will record indelibly some scenes, some faces in which we get interested. Others are no more than vague, hazy, shadowy figures. Not only does the mind receive impressions but it stores them away. To borrow an expression of Swami Vivekananda, each impression is pigeon-holed and is revived or taken out for reference, as it were, when the experience is repeated, or when we meet again the person whom we had seen on a former occasion. And then we remember the experience or recall the person to our mind. This particular ability to recall an instance back to the mind is called memory. And memory forms one of the *vr̥ttis* of the *citta* (mindstuff)<sup>1</sup> according to the Indian psychologist Patanjali. It forms a part of the subconscious mind, if we are

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<sup>1</sup> Yoga Sutras, 5 & 6.

to speak in the language of the Western psychologists. We all know what a wonderful gift this memory is. Everyone has this faculty in smaller or greater measure. Without memory man would be a strange, pitiable being. As an illustration of this we can cite people who either due to great mental shocks or concussion of the brain in accidents suffer from amnesia permanently or for a time.

This subconscious mind plays a very great part in human life. Perhaps this statement may not be readily accepted by one and all. A little discussion may help to remove doubts regarding its veracity. We think we are acting consciously in the waking state. Very few do that. The majority of people are moved by their impulses, their habits and tendencies which are imbedded in the subconscious. We can observe our own minds to verify the phenomenon. In spite of our best efforts to the contrary we are forced to do certain actions which we know are harmful to our well-being — actions of which we in our saner moments are likely to regret, nay be ashamed of. And this will happen not once but repeatedly. And every time, perhaps, we may resolve that we would not be doing it again. But when the impulse comes, when the desire arises all our control slips away like water from a sieve.

Sri Krishna, with great pathos, says in the *Gita*, 'As per one's nature even a man of knowledge acts. Creatures follow their own nature. What will mere prohibition do?'<sup>2</sup> Wise counsel has no effect at that time. Men do evil actions or think evil thoughts when they are wide awake, conscious of what they are doing, yet they do not do them with all their heart, a slight heartache persists, the pricking of the conscience remains. Remorse, regret and shame set in afterwards. Does this not show that people are mostly moved by their subconscious mind?

Further, how much of our life do we live in the present? Much of it is spent in ruminating over our past or planning for the future while the present slips by every moment. Well did Pascal, the French mathematician and philosopher, say: 'Let any man examine his thoughts, and he will find them ever occupied with the past or the future. We scarcely think at all of the present; or if we do, it is only to borrow the light which it gives for regulating the future. The present is never our object; the past and the present we use as means; the future only is our end. Thus, we never live, we only hope to live'.

Whatever may be the other implications of this saying of Pascal, it also conclusively brings forth the fact that the subconscious has no mean contribution to make in the shaping of man's life and character, and hence cannot be overlooked, neglected. In fact the psychoanalysts have more to do with the subconscious mind of their patients than the conscious. They have somehow to ferret out the causes of the nervous tensions of the patients in order to know what suggestions they can make for their removal.

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<sup>2</sup> Bhagavad Gita, III.33.

## II

It is important to note here, at this stage, that every thought, word or act of man goes to form his tendencies, impressions, *samskara*, in the subconscious. Man comes into this world with a load of *samskaras*. As Swami Vivekananda categorically points out, a child does not come into this world with what some of the earlier Western philosophers called the *tabula rasa*, a blank slate. 'Such a child,' he continues, 'would never attain to any degree of intellectual power, because he would have nothing to which to refer his new experiences. We see that the power of acquiring knowledge varies in each individual, and this shows that each one of us has come with his own fund of knowledge.' Another reason that Swamiji adduces to the existence of these impressions is that 'knowledge can only be got in one way, the way of experience; there is no other way to know. If we have not experienced it in this life, we must have experienced it in other lives'. He then proceeds to cite the example of the fear of death which is everywhere: 'A little chicken is just out of an egg and an eagle comes, and the chicken flies in fear to its mother'. It had had that experience in the past. So also with other feelings. A young one of a duck though hatched by a hen runs into water as soon as it gets near a pond. Each one of us has many such imprints in our mind and it is the sum total of these impressions that forms man's nature, *prakrti*.

We have now a fair idea why it is so important to control our thoughts, speech and actions. For they are going to shape our future. As a poet sings:

Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,  
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

Like shadow the impressions of past acts will stalk us all our life and there is no escape from them. That being so we have to be cautious in our acts. We now know how formidable is the task set for us to fit ourselves to a religious life. But there is a silver lining to the dark clouds. If the tendencies with which a person is born are good and the environment provided for his growth is conducive to spiritual well-being, the momentum of these tendencies will carry him a long way and a little exertion will meet with great success. But this fortune, good luck is given to a few. Others have to earn everything by the sweat of their brow. We are speaking here in the language of the worldly man. For in fact, as Swami Vivekananda remarks, 'No one can get any thing unless he earns it. We are responsible for what we are'. If, therefore, we see disparity in the world we should remember that it is not due to any whimsical fiat of Providence but due to the earned merit or demerit of the beings that the differences are there.

What then about the rest of us? We have somehow gone wrong in



our previous births. Is there no redemption? Is there no way out? These are the questions that will naturally come to one who is desirous of liberation. The Hindu scriptures never speak of eternal damnation. They say every one can reach the Highest provided he patiently and ceaselessly applies himself to the task. And it is here again that the subconscious comes into the picture. As we have already observed, man's character is the aggregate of the impressions he carries within him. There is no chemical or physical process by which we could wipe out all imprints of our past actions however much we may wish for it. They have gone and formed into brick or mortar in the edifice of our character. But we can build again, as Swamiji asserts, 'And what we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves'.

How can we remake ourselves? We have noticed what happens when we pay heed to the promptings of the pleasurable sensations. We are drawn back and again into their unsatiable vortex, and then our discriminative mind is, as it were, put on the rack. It is torn between the intention to restrain and the lure of the siren senses. But the more you let loose the reins of the senses the more will they draw you down into the mire. Yet those who have had enough of all these pleasures will turn to something that is non-transient, something that is real and eternal. And to them Sri Ramakrishna suggests prayer to God as a remedy to overcome their baser nature.

Let us find how prayer helps. We get attached to things when we constantly come in touch with them either physically or mentally. Sometimes in the physical world the faults and defects of the things we love are visible and are likely to destroy the image that we had projected about them. On the other hand, the mind can construe images, of what we like, more perfect, ideal, and blemishless, inducing man to involve himself deeper and deeper with the attractions. Now, when we pray to God, sincerely, not for the things of the world but to reveal Himself, our mind is taken off the object on which we dote. And as long as we pray the mind is flooded with the vibrations of the Divine. When this process is repeated constantly the mind naturally rests in God. By repeated practice one is able to inundate the mind with the consciousness of God. What happens is nothing extraordinary, nothing unusual. The mind which was being disturbed by various types of waves is now subjected to a vibration of a particular kind and then faithful to its duty it goes on recording the ripples until other imprints become stale and wane.

How to turn the naturally sense-bound mind towards God? Let us ask ourselves whether even a trial of practice is so difficult. Do we not lose our most loved relations and friends by estrangement or death, yet recover from the shocks? Do we not become cheerful after a time? We do. We make new friends, attach ourselves to something else and go on living. Likewise let us estrange ourselves from the senses which pose as friends and yet betray us; let us turn our mind towards God, who is our own. He is the innermost essence of our being. 'No one who believed in

God has come to grief;’ sings a poet-saint of South India, ‘it is those who did not have faith in Him that were ruined.’ Sri Ramakrishna says that God is like the wish-fulfilling tree. Whatever you ask for will be given to you. Why then should it be impossible to turn our mind towards Him, a little at least? In this instance alone do we have to consciously struggle. We are to undermine the baser inclinations, which have taken root in our subconscious. The mind should be trained to forget its old friends and cultivate new ones. The furrows that have been dug should be smothered by the newly ploughed ones.

Pray to God a hundred and a thousand times mentally, and forcibly make the mind accept it and then the subconscious will take it up. Once that part of the mind absorbs a theme it goes on recording the idea all the unconscious hours of our time. Thus we create a new habit. This is remaking of man. Only those people who can remake themselves, live a man's life, others are much like the dumb-driven cattle, slaves to their nature.

It should not however be taken to mean that the mind will immediately yield as soon as we begin to pray. It would definitely put up a stubborn fight. But we should not despair. Sri Krishna advises Arjuna, ‘As and when the fickle and unsteady mind wanders away should it be brought back repeatedly and placed under the control of the Atman’.<sup>3</sup> Pascal, perhaps, had this struggle and assertion of the inner man in view when he made the statement about living, quoted earlier. How long should this struggle go on? ‘Till one falls asleep and till one's last breath, should one pass one's days in the contemplation of Vedanta’, says a sage. What has been said about Vedanta can be said of the other practices also. The practices may be trying but there is no shorter road to immortality and if we have manliness we must stick on. The assertion of the higher nature over the baser one, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is real manliness. Jesus said, ‘For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?’<sup>4</sup> Truly there is nothing which can be compared with the soul.

### III

As in the case of prayer so also in the case of good actions the subconscious remoulds itself. Engaged in good acts the mind is forced to be occupied with good thoughts and as such keeps away, as far as possible, the lurking robbers (evil characteristics). But the way of motiveless action, the Karma Yoga is a difficult path. We may like to do unselfish action, make a good start too, but desire for results, in the last instance the desire for name and fame, somehow puts forth its stealthy shoot and in no time grows into a mighty banyan tree. That is the reason why it is expedient to have recourse to prayer and surrender to God along

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., VI.26.

<sup>4</sup> Gospel according to St. Mathew, 16.25.

with the performance of unmotivated actions. Sri Shankara, with his far insight into the nature of things, had probably observed the drawbacks in the performance of mere rituals, when he declared, 'Karmas are for the purification of the mind and not for the attainment of the goal. Even millions of rituals without meditation on the Atman can give us no peep into the Highest'.<sup>5</sup> We are apt to miss the point made out by Sri Shankara if we lay stress only on the second part of his statement. He has recognized the value and place of *karma*, in the purification of the mind, of sublimating the thoughts. Purity of mind is a great boon and if it is attained it is a great achievement. For a person of pure mind the goal is not far off.

When is the mind said to be pure? When there are no desires, no hankerings, no attachments whatsoever lurking in it and when it naturally rests in God. If we analyze the impurities of the mind — they are many we shall be able to trace back their origin to one single feeling, desire. Arjuna asks this pertinent question of Sri Krishna: 'Impelled by what does man, though unwillingly, engage himself in wicked actions as if compelled by force?'.<sup>6</sup> Sri Krishna's reply brings us to the same conclusion: 'This desire, this anger which is the product of *rajoguna*, is a voracious eater, and a great sinner. Know that to be the greatest enemy here (in this world)'.<sup>7</sup> It is a significant statement. Sri Sankara commenting on this sloka of the *Gita* says: 'This desire, because of which there result every kind of misery, is the enemy of all. This desire of the creatures when obstructed results in anger and therefore anger also is only desire in another form'.<sup>8</sup> Every one of our passions, in the ultimate analysis we will find, has originated with this desire. Therefore, becoming desireless, not for a time or for a day, but for ever, is to be pure in mind. For a person of pure mind the light of the Atman is ever present; as such, action when done without motive, though not directly, leads us towards the Highest.

#### IV

The method of psychic control also indicates how the mind has much to do with our religious life. 'The mind alone, for man, is the cause for bondage and emancipation — the mind which is engrossed in sense objects makes for bondage whereas when it is not entangled in them takes us to *moksha*',<sup>9</sup> says one of the minor Upanishads.

From the foregoing we might have had some idea of the value of the mind. It is a great treasure. It now depends upon each person to what use he puts it. He may squander it away in false pursuits or utilize it in noble endeavours. Only he should keep in mind that his reward too will be

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<sup>5</sup> Vivekachudamani, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Gita, III. 36.

<sup>7</sup> IBID., III.37.

<sup>8</sup> Shankara's commentary.

<sup>9</sup> Amrita Bindu Upanishad.

according to his desert, that he will have to lie on the bed he has made.

No one can force anyone into any path, especially so into the right one. The utmost that can be done is to show the dangers underlying the journey on the wrong road and the peace that is awaiting on the right one and leave the choice to the pilgrim. That is what Sri Krishna said to Arjuna after teaching him the whole of the *Gita*. 'I have taught you all this knowledge, which is subtler than the subtlest. Pondering deep over their meaning do as you wish.'<sup>10</sup> Let us too think whether we will give the mind free reins to move along the roads of the senses or turn it on the Atman, on God. If we choose the latter course it will be the best use we will be making of it.

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<sup>10</sup> Gita, XVIII.63.

## **THE IDEAL, ITS NECESSITY AND REALIZATION (\*)**

**Swami Paratparananda**

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – March 1963; Vol. 49; page 450

### ***Ideal is not illusory***

Many are the dreams and imageries of a boyhood. Many are the ambitions and plans of the adolescent youth. But much of these remain unrealized. They remain only as illusive visions. The nightmares of this matter-of-fact world crush out most of these beautiful dreams. But man understands this not. On the other hand in spiritual life when anyone speaks of an ideal, he is immediately put down as an idealist. And this very word brings out a smile on the lips of the so-called realist, puts a jeering laugh into the mouth of a naturalist or materialist. They point him out as a dreamer on a wild goose chase.

But is idealism such an evil? That is the question. As we see, in daily life, most people set out ambitions for themselves; they may not call it an ideal; but that matters little. What goads such people to work, sometimes to the very verge of death, many times to death itself? Ambition to reach the ideal state, in which they think they will have peace of mind and unbounded pleasure. So pleasure is their ideal. But can man have unalloyed pleasure? All agree on this point, that it is not possible. Even the seeker after pleasure knows it, but he thinks that he is going to make the best of a bad bargain. This is only a face saving device; it is like having been stuck up in the quagmire pretending to be at prayer. The pretender does not know that the quagmire may soon act like quicksand and swallow him up. So, it is actually the materialist, who puts his faith in pragmatic values, that is after the will-o-the-wisp and not the spiritual idealist. It is again the so-called realist who is out to be disillusioned when he realizes what he considered real was after all only like water in the mirage, a semblance, a ghost, a shadow and not the real.

### ***What is idealism***

Idealism has been variously interpreted and defined. We shall not go into all the details here, but try to know what the Hindu philosophers point out as idealism. The term 'idea' plays a very prominent part in Hindu philosophy and to some extent we can say in other religions too. There is the Upanisadic statement: 'In the beginning this was only Sat (Existence), one without a second. . . . It thought, let Me be many.'<sup>1</sup> Here

it is stated that the creation came into being because of the idea in the Reality to manifest Itself. This is so in every sphere of activity in life. Without the idea, the thought, nothing creative is possible. In other words the ideal is the motive force, the dynamic power behind the working of this universe. To know the nature of this ultimate reality in the above sense is Idealism. This again is too abstract an 'idea' to be grasped by ordinary individuals, and still less practicable in their case. Yet it will not do to neglect the need of the common man. At least our Sastras did not maintain that 'highbrowed' attitude. They are solicitous like the mother for the welfare of humanity. So the Srutis prescribed various types of disciplines and graded them to suit the temperament and evolvment of the individual. Yet all of these are only ideas. These ideas can be understood only when they materialize into the concrete.

### ***Ideal in the concrete***

It seems paradoxical to say that the ideal can manifest in the concrete. But if it were not to manifest, the ideal would have remained only an idea, a poetical concept, and there would have been no motive force to move man on his onward march to know the Ultimate Reality.

Let us now try to understand what we mean by 'the ideal' here. One meaning of the word ideal, that the dictionaries also give, is the 'perfect type'. Here there is no visionary conception. We set before us a concrete example of the standard which we want to attain: perfect men, or God-men, like Krishna, Buddha, Christ or Ramakrishna are the examples. So it is not an airy something which man wants to attain, but perfection as exemplified in these persons. Perfection not after death, in some other world, but here and now. Here again the spiritual man is more definite. He does not want any uncertain external material aid. For, whatever is gained by material help cannot be eternal, because it is a thing that is caused, a degradation, a degeneration and is certain to deteriorate, to decay and to be destroyed. It is the law of nature that a compound is unstable, its tendency is to go back to its elements. That is also what the Upanishads say.<sup>2</sup>

What is meant by perfection in this context? Only one thing can be perfect and that is the Atman, Brahman or God, which is said to be of the nature of eternal purity, eternal consciousness, and eternal freedom. It is the manifesting of this perfection that is in man, that is called religion says Swami Vivekananda. For, we cannot manifest what is not already in us. Christ also says, 'The Kingdom of heaven is within you.' What is it then that covers our nature? Our desires, our being extrovert, our running after things that are unreal. But it is also certain that this nature of ours cannot be annihilated. Even in the material world we experience this. For example, the nature of fire is to burn, we have not found at any time fire losing its power to burn and still being called as fire. We cannot say, therefore, you can come across cold fire. But it is possible that the fire

may be covered with ashes, and may not be perceivable for the time being. Likewise the Atman may be covered by ignorance but its nature cannot be destroyed. So all our efforts are to uncover this Self, this Atman, to know our true being.

Now to manifest the divine we have to get rid of the veils; veils of body, senses and mind. Are we then to court death? Not at all. For there is no certainty that the soul thus forcibly relieved from one cage will not enter into another. On the contrary our Sastras say it does take up more and more bodies, according to the desires most prominent at the moment of its release. 'I shall tell you now the eternal secret as to what happens to the Atman after it leaves the body. For the sake of embodiment it enters other wombs according to its actions in this world, and according to its knowledge, sometimes it takes the form even as immovable things like trees and plants,'<sup>3</sup> says Yama in the *Kathopanisad*.

### ***Practice & Renunciation***

But there are other ways of overcoming this transmigration. What are they? We have here to recall that all paths, which speak of realization of Brahman, emphasize on tranquillization of the mind, on equanimity. This is the prime and foremost condition for the reflection of the Infinite in the mind. For, as when the surface of a lake is disturbed the reflection of even the most proximate object is hazy or unperceivable, so also the mind lake when in a wave form cannot catch the reflection of the Atman, which is next to it.

This serenity of the mind is what is called yoga, says Patanjali. It is to be acquired by renunciation, and practice,<sup>4</sup> which are, as it were, the systole and diastole of the heart, or the hub and spokes of the wheel of spiritual life. One without the other cannot be thought of. And to posit one without the other is to make a parody of religion. Sri Krishna too says in the Gita, 'O son of Kunti! This (mind) can be controlled by practice and dispassion.'<sup>5</sup> Every religious leader says that, and acts up to it.

Swami Vivekananda relates a story from the *Æsop's Fables* to show why perseverance is necessary: 'A fine looking stag is looking at his young one, "How powerful I am, look at my splendid head, look at my limbs, how strong and muscular they are; and how swiftly I can run." In the meantime he hears the barking of dogs in the distance, and immediately takes to his heels, and after he has run several miles, he comes back panting. The young one says, "You just told me how strong you are, how was it that when the dogs barked, you ran away?" "Yes, my son; but when the dogs bark all my confidence vanishes." Such is the case with us. We think highly of humanity, we feel ourselves strong and valiant, we make grand resolves; but when the "dogs" of trial and temptation bark, we are like the stag in the fable. Then, if such is the case what is the use of teaching all these things? There is the greatest use. The use is this, that perseverance will finally conquer. Nothing can be done in a day.'

### ***Necessity of an ideal***

This practice becomes easy when we take hold of some ideal, have before us the example of some great personality who has attained perfection. And this is one of the methods which Patanjali asks us to adopt as an assistance to our concentration: 'Meditation on the heart that has given up all attachment to sense objects.'<sup>6</sup>

What a torment is this life! to be dragged by two forces set diametrically opposite, we mean the temptations that come in the form of sense pleasures and the desire to be free, free of all shackles! Confronted with such a situation, the life of those who are free of all attachment to the sense-pleasures, puts some hope into our hearts. They light our paths and lighten our burden. They are as it were, ever ready to take our burden. Sri Krishna exhorts in the Gita, 'Giving up all duties, take shelter in Me alone. I shall free you from all sins, do not grieve.'<sup>7</sup> Christ says, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'<sup>8</sup> Sri Ramakrishna too said, to some of his disciples specially those who were hard pressed for time, 'Visit here (meaning himself) now and then and you will achieve everything.' That kind of assurance the God-men alone can give. Even the remembrance of those personalities washes off all dross, drives away all vulgar ideas from our minds. Sri Ramakrishna relates a story to illustrate this: 'Some friends said to Ravana: "You have been assuming different forms for Sita. Why don't you go to her in the form of Rama?" Ravana replied, "When I contemplate Rama, even the position of Brahma appears insignificant to me, not to speak of the company of another man's wife! How could I take the form of Rama for such a purpose?' Such is the sanctifying power of these God-men. Such are to be our ideals.

Swami Vivekananda remarks; 'The ideal is far away, no doubt, but at the same time, we know that we must have it. We must have even the highest ideal. Unfortunately in this life, the vast majority of persons are groping through this dark life without any ideal at all. If a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, I am sure that the man without an ideal makes fifty thousand. Therefore, it is better to have an ideal. And this ideal we must hear about as much as we can, till it enters into our hearts, into our brains, into our veins, until it tingles in every drop of our blood, and permeates in our body. We must meditate upon it.'

Again he observes, 'It is a great thing to take up a grand ideal in life and then give up one's whole life to it. For what otherwise is the value of life, this vegetating, little, low, life of man? Subordinating it to one high ideal is the only value that life has. Live for an ideal, and that one ideal alone. Let it be so great, so strong, that there may be nothing else left in the mind; no place for anything else, no time for anything else.' And when that ideal is the Highest, it revolutionizes, transmutes man's life, ennobles him. He becomes a force unto himself, not for self-seeking but for the



welfare of the world.

### ***Different ideals***

The very fact that there are so many religions, so many sects and creeds, and that they still thrive in spite of all efforts to the contrary, shows that there is a need for this variety in the creation. These sects and creeds serve the inner cravings of certain particular temperaments and are very necessary for their growth. Just as you cannot make the water animals to live on land, nor can force the land animals to live in water, so it is no use prescribing one method, one path and one ideal for all. The ideals are for the progress of man in his spiritual life, not for his regression.

Now, growth is possible when there is freedom of thought and action. Observe a plant that is growing in the lap of nature and put one in a room shaded from sun and protected from wind, the former grows healthy and strong and yields plenty, whereas the latter grows weak and lank, and yields nothing.

The different types of vegetation we see from the Equator to the Poles is another illustration of this variety in creation. Similarly even in this age when distance is no distance, owing to the speedy communication and fast travelling, a cross section of the world's population will reveal a wonderful, divergent and colourful pageant of life, customs, and manners. As in external life, so in internal life too man varies in development and aptitudes. So the variety is inevitable.

Swami Vivekananda remarks: 'Every man should take up his own ideal and endeavour to accomplish it. That is a surer way of progress than taking up other men's ideals, which he can never hope to accomplish. For instance, we take a child and at once give him the task of walking twenty miles. Either the little one dies, or one in a thousand crawls the twenty miles, to reach the end exhausted and half-dead. That is like what we generally try to do with the world. All the men and women, in any society, are not of the same mind, capacity, or of the same power to do things; they must have different ideals, and we have no right to sneer at any ideal. Let every one do the best he can for realizing his own ideal.'

### ***Unity in variety***

However, we must understand that these are only the outer embellishments and they will naturally be varied, but there is a unity in the background, just as vegetation, however varied, has the earth's soil as its ground. Sri Krishna says, 'In Me all this is woven like the pearls on a string.'<sup>9</sup> Swami Vivekananda observes regarding the different ideals of the past: 'It is the duty of Vedanta to establish this connecting thread, however incongruous or disgusting may seem these ideas when judged according to the conceptions of to-day. These ideas, in the setting of past

times, were harmonious, and not more hideous than our present ideas. It is only when we try to take them out of their settings and apply to our own present circumstances that the hideousness becomes obvious.'

### ***Devotion to the ideal***

It is only when we love the ideal that we make real progress in life. It is only then that a tremendous power is generated in us. It is only then that even extreme sacrifice is possible without a wrench of pain at the heart, nay the pain itself turns to bliss. 'Devotion to one ideal is the only method for the beginner, but with devotion and sincerity it will lead to all. Nistha (devotion to one ideal) is, in a manner, placing the plant in the tub, shielding the struggling soul in its path,' observes Swamiji. He reiterates, 'You must have a great devotion to your ideal, devotion not of the moment, but calm, persevering and steady devotion, like that of a Chataka (a kind of bird) which looks into the sky in the midst of thunder and lightning and would drink no water but from the clouds. Perish in the struggle to be holy; a thousand times welcome death.'

There is always the error committed by man, the error of misconstruction, the error of judgement. He is apt to jump to conclusions, not warranted by statements or situation. We have to guard against committing this folly. So when our teachers say that we should be devoted to our ideal we should not misconstrue that they want us to hate other ideals or be intolerant of them. 'But I say unto you which hear, love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you,'<sup>10</sup> said Christ. Why? because he knew no waters of love can flow in the terrible desert of hatred; they would dry up in no time. But to root out hatred is a herculean task, no doubt, but there is no other way to perfection. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Charity never faileth; devotion to an ideal never fails in sympathy, never becomes weary of sympathizing with others. Love to enemies is not possible for ordinary men; they drive out others in order to live themselves. Only a very few men lived in the world who practised it.'

### ***Should not lower the ideal***

Another risk we run here is of lowering the ideal, seeing that its empyrean heights are not easily accessible. But with that degradation sets in. With that we begin to tread the downward slippery path and once we slip there is no knowing where we will be. That is why Swamiji warns us, 'There are two tendencies in human nature, one to harmonize the ideal with the life, and the other to elevate the life to the ideal. It is a great thing to understand this, for the former tendency is the temptation of our lives. I think that I can only do a certain class of work. Most of it, perhaps, is bad; most of it, perhaps, has a motive power of passion behind it, anger or greed or selfishness. When a man brings an ideal

which can be reconciled with my selfishness, I am glad at once, and jump at it.' We must be alert and avoid creating such a situation. In another context Swamiji exhorts, 'Let a few stand out and live for God alone and save religion for the world. Do not pretend to be like Janaka when you are only the "progenitor" of delusions. Be honest and say, "I see the ideal but I cannot yet approach it"; but do not pretend to give up when you do not. If you give up stand fast. You must struggle towards the ideal, and if a man comes who wants to bring that ideal down to your level, and teach a religion that does not carry that highest ideal, do not listen to him. Beware when anyone is trying to apologise for sense vanities and sense weaknesses. If anyone wants to preach that way to us, poor, sense-bound clods of earth as we have made ourselves, by following that teaching we shall never progress. . . . Take care that you do not swerve an inch from the ideal. . . . The ideal should never be lowered.' We need not dilate on this point for the teaching is clear.

### ***Realization of the ideal***

The ideal is to be realized and not merely thought of, or intellectually grasped. The Upanisad says, 'Atman is to be seen; to be heard, to be pondered over and meditated upon.'<sup>11</sup> The first injunction is the goal, the rest is the process to reach it. There is no hesitation here. Srutis do not mince matters. They definitely say it is to be seen. They do not encourage indolence or idleness. That is suicidal to the spiritual life of the aspirant.

We have all heard of the four paths that lead to God. Till now one or the other of these were exclusively practised, but Sri Ramakrishna has proved that they need not necessarily be exclusive. He showed that they can be practised in combination too. Man is endowed with the faculties of feeling, thinking and willing. And we can add to these his capacity for action. Sri Ramakrishna's plan of action did not exclude any one of these traits of man. He desired man to grow into a harmonious whole and not one-sided. He is the example of his own precept. He attained the dizzy heights of the philosophic speculation, viz., the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, yet he retained the attitude of a devotee. He was a past master in Yoga and rendered service to humanity which it can never forget.

Even in the process of development he wanted us to utilize our faculties and this he illustrated by the example of the goldsmith at his work: of melting gold in the crucible. The goldsmith uses the blowpipe with his mouth, the bellows with his hand to kindle the fire, to produce the intense heat and stops not till the gold is melted and put into the cast. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to his devotees was to be up and doing, to use one or all methods and realize the ideal, God. And realization of the ideal depends mostly on one's own efforts. Patanjali says, 'The success of Yogis differs according as the means they adopt are mild, medium or intense.'<sup>12</sup>

In this age the ideal path to God-realization would be as laid down

by Sri Ramakrishna; for as he himself has said, it is not possible to get rid of the body idea, by denying the needs of the body, as is required of a jnani; at the same time, mere stress on bhakti may lead to sentimentalism. So he said keep the knowledge of Vedanta in your pocket and work; at another time he advised us to follow the path of bhakti tempered with jnana. Let us, therefore, not forget that the ideal of life is God, and to realize Him is the highest end.

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<sup>1</sup> Chandogya Up., VI. ii. 1 &3.

<sup>2</sup> Katha Up., 2.10.

<sup>3</sup> Kathopanishad, V, 6.7.

<sup>4</sup> Yoga Sutra, 1.12.

<sup>5</sup> Gita, VI.35.

<sup>6</sup> Yoga Sutra, 1.37.

<sup>7</sup> Gita, 18.66.

<sup>8</sup> Gospel of St. Mathew, 11.28.

<sup>9</sup> Gita, 7.7.

<sup>10</sup> St. Luke, 6.27&28.

<sup>11</sup> Br.Up., 2.4.5.

<sup>12</sup> Yoga Sutras of patanjali, 1-22.

## **THE NEGLECTED PART OF MAN**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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WHAT is the idea that we have of man? Usually it is that he belongs to a certain race, a particular country, a certain religion, a distinct community and so on. He is also known to be wise or dull, active or lazy, healthy or diseased, young or old, virtuous or wicked, suffering pain or enjoying pleasure and so on. Here the common man's idea about a human being reaches the blind alley, as it were. What is beyond that he either does not strive to know, or is ignorant of it.

Now, let us analyse this view: race, health, disease, youth, old age — all these — what do they represent? What do they indicate? A little thought will show that all these distinctions can be only of the body. Again, the country, indicates the situation of the body, and wealth and property bring to our mind material possessions. So in all these descriptions we think of man as a creature made of sinews, bone, flesh and blood and we add some more earthly goods, when we think of him as possessing wealth.

However, when we think of him as enjoying pleasure or suffering pain, when we impute to him wickedness, dullness or laziness or when we ascribe to him virtue, activity, or wisdom, we, of course, to a certain extent do not think of man as made only of the body. We unconsciously acknowledge something more in him. For instance, when we say that a certain act of a person pains one it is not the physical pain that is meant, but the feelings of the person. We can understand it better if we substitute the word grief or sorrow in place of "pain". Similarly pleasure is felt only in the mind. It is also a feeling. Likewise the feelings, compassion, hatred and so on, cannot be of the body but of something else; some will say that it is of the heart, whereas others will posit it as of the mind. Then there are the faculties of thinking and willing. Now, wherever these feelings may be located, it is conceded that there is something which is other than the body which resides in it and which does this feeling, thinking and willing. Thus far all agree; though some materialists may still persist that all feelings are also due to the changes in the brain cells. However what puzzles the materialist is that the body, though its brain cells remain intact, fails to respond to the stimulus however strong from outside, when that vital power, life, has left it. On the other hand, this gives the believer the idea that there is something

else even beyond the body, the senses and the mind, which dwells in the body, and makes it live and move.

Now, how can a common man know that there is something which is beyond the body and mind? Vedanta gives us the answer. It analyses man's states of consciousness. Mostly man is satisfied with his waking experiences. And most of the intellectuals even do not care to know about the sub-conscious which is active in the dream state and subtly forms man's character in his waking. It is like a store-house. The impressions that are received in the waking by thought, word and deed of a man go to make this store. And whenever occasion arises that particular impression springs forward and presents itself compelling man's attention to itself. And if man succumbs to these impressions repeatedly it forms into a habit and habit becomes nature in no time. So it is necessary that we should know about our own sub-conscious state as well. It is here that we should be careful, for this sub-conscious forms the basis, the foundation, of man's character. Patanjali says that when one's mind is not devoid of waves, modifications, the mind becomes of the nature of the modifications.<sup>1</sup> The importance of the subconscious in the formation of character, as well as in mental and physical ailments, to a certain extent, has now come to be recognized by the Western psychologists too. But this is sadly neglected by most, even among the intelligentsia.

There is another state says the Upanisad, which it calls *susupti*, where man does not desire anything, does not dream anything,<sup>2</sup> that is where not only his body, but all the senses along with the mind take rest.<sup>3</sup> This is deep sleep. In this deep sleep man is not conscious of anything but after waking up he becomes aware that he had passed through a state which was 'blissful and where he did not know anything'. Let us probe a little into this experience which is every man's estate. When man says he was 'blissful and did not know anything', two experiences are perceived to go into the formation of that state, one as a corollary of the other. There is bliss and there is ignorance. Ignorance of what? Of the world. People are afraid when it is said that there is ignorance in this state. Even the advanced student of religion finds it hard to acknowledge this. In the Upanisads we find students even after living long under a teacher when asked to analyse this state have put forth their genuine doubt as to whether such a state can really be welcome, whether there is anything at all existing in that state. In the *Chāndogya Upanisad*, for instance, when Indra was taught, 'When a man is asleep, with senses withdrawn and serene and sees no dream — that is the Self',<sup>4</sup> he was confused. He thought over his experience in that state and came back scared to the teacher and said, 'Venerable Sir, verily, in this state the Self does not know itself as "I am this", nor does it know these creatures. It

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<sup>1</sup> Yoga Sūtras; I.4.

<sup>2</sup> Mandukya, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Chandogya, VI, viii.1.

<sup>4</sup> Chandogya, VIII, xi.1.

almost amounts to annihilation. I do not see any good in such a state'.<sup>5</sup> Yet who does not know that a dreamless sleep is the best invigorator for the body and mind, that it is the real restful state! Man also knows that there is bliss in that state. Yet, says the Upanisad, that is only the nearest approach to man's real nature that can be made by any living being. The real is far far above that. And that is the Atman. And that is to be seen.<sup>6</sup> When man knows his real nature, when he realizes who he really is, he forgets all the world. So we see that real bliss is not in accumulating treasures here but in giving them up, in forgetting all about the world and being one with the Self. As in deep sleep, we have not a care, not the slightest worry, not any hankering, so when man realizes his real Nature he becomes perfectly care free, like a child. Now we may ask why is it then that it is equated to *susupti*? No, there is no question of bracketing the two. As an experience that is in the easy reach of every man, the state of *susupti* is cited as an example where there is no desiring, no dreaming, just as in the true nature of man in order to give an inkling into the nature of the latter. *Susupti* is also a state where unalloyed happiness exists — a happiness which is not induced by something from outside of the Self. But there the comparison ends. In *susupti* there is ignorance of both the world and of one's own true nature.<sup>7</sup> But in the *turiya*, the fourth state, as the sages call the super-conscious state, there is knowledge and illumination. Ignorance has dropped off and that makes a great difference, as vast as between light and darkness. This fact should not be forgotten. If it is forgotten then we are certain to confuse the issue. The difference between the two, viz. deep sleep and the super-conscious is well brought out by Swami Vivekananda when he said: 'The super-conscious state cannot be described, but we know it by its fruits. An idiot, when he goes to sleep, comes out of sleep an idiot or even worse. But another man goes into the state of meditation, and when he comes out he is a philosopher, a sage, a great man.'

## II

Now this part in us, the spiritual element, the soul, the Ātman, is totally neglected by us. We take care of the body, of our health. Even from our childhood that has been done for us by our parents. They might have passed sleepless nights at our bedside on occasions, they have also taken precaution to cultivate our mind. For no parent likes to leave his child to develop into a dunce. No effort, within their means, will they spare to prepare the child to face the world. And when grown up we also try to keep ourselves abreast of the developments that are taking place around us, so that we may not be termed backward. Nevertheless, all this is done to face the world, the outside world alone. The inner man's

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<sup>5</sup> Chandogya, VIII, xi.1.

<sup>6</sup> Brihadaranyaka, IV.v.3.

<sup>7</sup> Kaivalyopanishad, I.13.

hunger is not appeased. Rarely do we come across people who think of the welfare of their children from this spiritual point of view. The thought of the life's purpose is not inculcated in children, as it should be, with the result that a great void is left. Further, life in the present times has become mechanical and it swiftly rushes through as if on a supersonic aircraft. Man is aimless today. He has not the courage to face the consequences of failure in the world, nay he trembles at the very thought of it. Poverty even for the sake of religion he dares not accept. And this keeps him clinging to some source of income or other till his end. Naturally in this stormy weather it is impossible that man could devote his time to think of things higher. And to make life more complex, man's necessities go on increasing at a telescopic rate; luxuries become necessities overnight, and therefore to keep up with the tempo of the increasing wants, man's life is spent in ever more servitude till the call of death snatches him away. Where then can he find time to devote to his spiritual exercises?

However, man forgets that nothing real can be achieved without sacrifice. Young men nowadays go on adventurous expeditions. They climb hazardous steeps of the mountains, cross difficult terrain, face worst weather, frost, gale and all. Are not many lives lost in such expeditions? Are not some permanently disabled or disfigured during these adventures? If we look at this phenomenon, we cannot say that the spirit of adventure has been lost, only it has been misapplied, misdirected. They do not pause to think, 'What after all is our gain in these expeditions?' A little fame, a great ovation for once, or at the most a living for life. But then is that all that we came for into this world? Is that the aim of human life? Sri Ramakrishna says it is not. The aim of human life, he says, is God-realization, to know God; to see him; to see him not only in the Image but also in our very being, to be aware of His presence always, first in ourselves and then in everything. 'Only he who sees Me in everything and everything in Me, he does not lose My presence nor do I lose sight of him',<sup>8</sup> says Sri Krishna. What is the meaning of God losing sight of us? It means that we do not put any barrier between the Lord and ourselves. Though it is not possible that we can hide anything from God yet we can hoodwink ourselves by ignoring His presence. That is what most people do. They ignore that Divine Being who resides in their hearts, and thus lose sight of Him. But when they get the vision of God back, there is no more delusion for them. That is what Sri Krishna means in this verse. The next sloka makes this clear, 'One who worships Me residing in all beings in a spirit of unity lives in Me, whatever be his mode of life.'<sup>9</sup> Such a person is always conscious of his true nature, conscious of God's presence; then he loses his identity in God.

But man is afraid of attaining oneness with God. He is perturbed when he thinks of losing his identity, his separateness. Sri Gaudapāda,

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<sup>8</sup> Gita, VI.30.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., VI.31.



the grand-teacher of Sri Sankara, declares, 'Even advanced souls, yogins, are afraid of this *asparśa* yoga, which is difficult of attainment, for they see fear where there is really fearlessness.'<sup>10</sup> So strong are our inherent tendencies, *samskāras*, that it is very difficult and painful to loosen our ties to this world, this body and the ego. Nevertheless, it is a fact that unless we cultivate a taste for the higher things these tendencies will bind us more and more and make us increasingly miserable. If, therefore, man wants to be rid of miseries he should strive to know his true nature.

How can it be done? The *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* gives us the direction: 'Hear about it, cogitate over it, and meditate upon it.'<sup>11</sup> Another Upanisad says, 'Many have not the opportunity to hear about this. Many even after hearing do not understand it. Wonderful is the teacher of that *Vidya* (knowledge). And rare indeed is the student who grasps it when taught by a wise person'. That this is actually so we can know from the state of affairs in the world, not only of today but from the history of all ages and of all climes. How this is too true can be known from some incidents which Sri Ramakrishna used to narrate. People used to come to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and among them some would go and stay to hear Sri Ramakrishna. But others, who accompanied them, after a time would begin to nudge their companions and ask, 'when will you go?' The devotees who were all attention to the Master would just sign to them to sit quiet. But after some time they would again prod and then would say to them, 'You can come when you like, we shall wait for you in the boat'. Does it not look strange? But that was what actually happened. So deep were the tendencies, that they could not bear even talk about spirituality. And if such *samskāras* are to be uprooted, it should be done when people are still young, when habits have not yet been formed, when resolution and strength can be utilized to curb their taking any ugly form. Then only can one be sure of detaching oneself from one's desire for mundane things and attending to one's Ātman. It is like the bending of a supple bamboo pole, when tender, to the required shape. It can easily be done. But once the pole matures you can do nothing with it except use it as it is. It is hard to master these tendencies, and very difficult it is to know our real nature. Does not Sri Krishna say, 'Among thousands of men one possibly endeavours for perfection, and among those that endeavour (one perchance becomes perfect) and even among the perfect, one possibly knows Me in My true perspective?'<sup>12</sup> Sri Ramakrishna used to sing a song, of a Tantric mystic, Ramaprasad, very expressive of the situation:

*'In the world's busy market place,  
O Shyama, Thou art flying kites;  
High up they soar on the wind of hope,*

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<sup>10</sup> Mandu

<sup>11</sup> Br.Up., IV.v.3.

<sup>12</sup> Gita, VII.3.

*held fast by Maya's string.  
 Their frames are human skeletons,  
 their sails of the three gunas made;  
 But all their curious workmanship is merely  
 for ornament.  
 Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed  
 the manja-paste of worldliness.  
 So as to make each straining strand  
 all the more sharp and strong.  
 Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best  
 but one or two break free.<sup>13</sup>*

You may be wondering what the neglected part of man has to do with God! It has everything to do with Him. If you are a dualist you are His servant and therefore remembering the Lord makes you conscious of your spiritual entity. If you are a qualified monist you are a part of the Lord, remembering the Lord you remember also your real relation to Him. Lastly, if you are a non-dualist you know that Ātman and Brahman are non-different and remembering about Brahman you know about the Ātman.

Therefore, as we tend our bodies, and cultivate our minds, take care of our wealth and do all other things in the world outside, so must we also look after our inner Being. For it is the source of all virtues. Grounded in it the virtues do not fail us. Apart from it, though we may develop some good qualities, when faced with tribulations the seeming virtues will wear off like the coating of a gold-plated ornament. Man today feels forlorn because he has neglected his inner Being. Let him try to remember his Self and work on, he will then find everything falling into its proper place again.

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<sup>13</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p.64.

## THE PLACE OF SVADHYAYA—SCRIPTURAL STUDY—IN RELIGION

Swami Paratparananda

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MAN is placed in a peculiar situation. He has been endowed with instruments which draw him out of himself, which entice him and display before him the kaleidoscopic beauty of the world phenomena. He has five such instruments each of which individually is powerful enough to ruin him who gets attached to it. Sri Sankara in the *Vivekacūdāmani* brings to our notice how animals and insects in whom one such sense alone was strongly cultivated brought destruction on them, and he observes with great pathos, 'What then to speak of man who is assailed by all the five!'<sup>1</sup> But fortunately for man, he has been endowed also with an intellect, a discriminative faculty and therefore the onus of the good and evil that he does is thrown upon him. Further, he has been provided with guides, which he is expected to consult, study and remember in all his deeds. The scriptures perform the function of the guides and these were taught by teachers who had not only attained high proficiency in their lore, but who lived according to the injunctions laid down by them. These scriptures enjoined certain observances and prohibited others and what they wanted to impress most they placed in a negative prohibitive. In the *Taittiriya Upanisad*, for example, you have: 'Be not heedless about the solemn recitation of scriptures. . . . Be not negligent to speak the truth; never fail to pay heed to the performance of duty; do not be careless about what is proper and good; be not negligent of well-being, never be indifferent to the study and imparting of the Veda'.<sup>2</sup> So much depends upon the study of the Vedas and striving to put their injunctions into practice that the Upanisad in another passage, even at the risk of being termed redundant, repeats the formula again and again, and then says that Nāka of the lineage of Mudgala stressed the study and imparting of the Vedas as the Tapas.<sup>3</sup> The *Taittirīyārānyaka* (II.12) also commands one to recite the Veda without fail, standing or walking or sitting or lying down, so that one may be pure.<sup>4</sup> The reason is that without truthfulness and austerity the study of the Vedas cannot be properly undertaken, and constant remembrance is the only way to ward off other thoughts. The study of

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<sup>1</sup> Vivekachudamani, 78.

<sup>2</sup> Tittiriyopanisad, I.11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., I.9.

<sup>4</sup> Taittiriya Aranyaka, II.12.

Veda also means the acquisition of other virtues.

All aspirants are not like Prahlāda, of the mythical fame, who having heard, while yet in the mother's womb, that Hari alone is real and all else is darkness of ignorance, like that of the dry wells, remembered it all through his life. That type of steadfastness comes perhaps only to one in a million among the aspirants. The character of Prahlāda and his one-pointed devotion to Narayana was so forceful that Sri Ramakrishna would go into ecstasy at the mention of Prahlāda's name. For such aspirants of course no study is needed. It is said that uttering the letter 'Ka' of the alphabet Prahlāda would go into ecstasy thinking of Krishna. But imitating him without the proper foundation of life was denounced by Swami Vivekananda, when he stressed the study of Vedas. Swamiji says, 'What I want therefore is to introduce the study of the Vedas by stimulating a greater regard for them in the minds of the people and to pass everywhere the injunctions of the Vedas'. This he said even regarding the reformation of the Hindu social fabric. Even on the last day of his earthly existence, it is said, Swamiji took a class on Sanskrit grammar to the novitiates of the Math, for a long time. As all know, it is well nigh impossible to understand the true purport of the Vedas without a proper grounding in grammar, etymology and other auxiliary limbs of the scripture. So intent was Swami Vivekananda that people should learn the Vedas thoroughly that till the very last breath, so to say, he impressed this on us.

This study of scriptures, in ancient times, was not done to conduct debating societies or prove the eminence of any scholar, though discussions and debates to arrive at the truth, were conducted, as could be seen, in the passages of the *Brhadāranyaka* and *Chāndogya Upanisads*. Acquisition of knowledge, that freed one from the fetters of the world, was the purpose of this study. We have to remember here that the moulding of the life went along with this study. Life was moulded according to the injunctions of the Vedas, and this study was imperative. A brahmin boy who did not learn the Vedas was not called a brahmin but a friend of a brahmin. And friend of a brahmin was not a palatable epithet in those days. If the father neglected the son's education in this direction, for any reason whatsoever, he felt small. Usually the age when a brahmin boy was to be sent to the teacher to begin his education was eight. In the *Chāndogya Upanisad* Śvetaketu's father, who could not fulfil this stipulation, for some reason, addresses his son, 'My child, go and live the life of a brahmacharin; it is not good that a person born in our lineage should, without studying the Vedas, be addressed as a friend of a Brahmin'.

Why was so much importance given to the study of the Vedas? As we have already said, the way of life during such education equipped the student to face the future bravely. Secondly, by this study he came to know about the purpose of life. He had not to grope in darkness or feel at sea. Thus equipped he was left to choose his way of life, as a householder

or sannyasin. It depended upon the pupil's intensity of dispassion. But one thing that was not encouraged, nay positively discouraged, was pride which a student may develop during his study. It was the firm belief of the ancients that education should infuse humility; for from humility alone fitness for further progress was attained.

The study of Vedas, however, does not end with the knowledge about the methods of performing sacrifices and rituals. They form only the beginning. They are the kindergarten of religious life. Heaven, which is at best a place where an intensified form of sense enjoyment is possible, is not the ultimate aim of the Vedas. It is meant for those who have a great load of unfulfilled cravings in their minds. They have not as yet thought about the problems of life, being engrossed in sense enjoyment and thinking that alone to be the be-all and end-all of life. Though this attitude is tolerated in the beginning it is criticized later on. As Sri Krishna points out in the *Gītā*: 'People of little intellect who are enamoured of the flowery statements in the Vedas (which describe about heaven etc.), who are steeped in enjoyment, whose ultimate end in view is heaven, who maintain that there is nothing else, than heaven, to be attained, are attached to those passages of the Vedas which deal with the performance of various types of sacrifices that yield plentiful wealth and enjoyment. To them, who cling to enjoyment and wealth and as a consequence are engaged in sacrifices, do not come the intellect of firm determination which flows towards concentration (*samādhi*)'.<sup>5</sup> Sri Krishna further instructs Arjuna: 'The Vedas deal with the subjects coming under the three *gunas* (hence of the nature of transmigration). O Arjuna, go beyond them. Being free from the pairs of opposites and being stationed in *sattva*, be established in the Self, giving up all thought of acquisition and care of worldly goods'.<sup>6</sup> 'All the worlds beginning with that of Brahmā are those of return; only attaining Me there is no rebirth,'<sup>7</sup> thus does Sri Krishna emphatically state about the pettiness of the fruits of sacrifices. It is not the opinion of the *Gītācharya* alone but the Śruti too supports this view. It gives only a secondary place for the sacrifices. 'That which is Great is alone blissful; there is no joy in the little; the Great alone is to be known',<sup>8</sup> teaches the *Chāndogya Upanisad*. 'Everything else but Him is mortal',<sup>9</sup> informs the *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad*. In the *Kathopanisad* the god of Death says to Naciketa, 'The Hereafter never reveals itself to the ignorant who are devoid of discrimination and are deluded by the infatuation of wealth. Thinking that nothing else but this world alone exists they come under my sway again and again'.<sup>10</sup> 'If one is able to know Brahman before the fall of the body then he is freed from the bondage to the life of transmigration; if not he will have to be born in the

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<sup>5</sup> Gita, II.42-44.

<sup>6</sup> Gita, II.45.

<sup>7</sup> Gita, VIII,16.

<sup>8</sup> Chāndogya Up., VII.xxiii.1.

<sup>9</sup> Br.Up. 3.7.23.

<sup>10</sup> Kathopanisad, II.6.

different worlds.’<sup>11</sup> These boats,’ warns Yama, ‘of the form of sacrifice, conducted by eighteen people, without knowledge of the deities, are frail indeed. Therefore those foolish men who take delight in professing them as the highest fall victims to old age and death again and again’,<sup>12</sup> says the *Mundaka Upanisad*. Here the Upanisad brings out the inefficacy of sacrifices done without the knowledge of the deities or meditation on them. Lest people should misconstrue that sacrifices done with knowledge of the deities are the highest good, the Śruti immediately qualifies its statement thus: ‘Those ignorant fools, who consider performing of sacrifices enjoined in the Vedas and humanitarian works as the supreme, do not know that there is any higher good, they having enjoyed the results of their good actions in the heights of heaven again enter into this world or still lower one’.<sup>13</sup> We can go on citing the evidence from different passages of the Upanisads where attachment to enjoyment has been repeatedly stressed as entailing return to this world. But we presume the instances given here are sufficient to dispel any doubt regarding this subject. Thus we see that the study of the Vedas does not stop with sacrifices. There are still higher things to be known, a higher Reality to be realized, that is what the Vedas convey.

Now this part of the Vedas wherein the philosophy of the Vedic religion is imbedded, being their end portion is called the Vedānta. They are also called the Upanisads; eleven of them are considered to be most important and have been commented upon by the great teachers of religion. Without a grasp of the truths of these philosophical portions of the Vedas their study remains incomplete. The Hindus consider these Vedas as revelations that came to the sages and who passed them on to their competent disciples as they were revealed. They did not find any necessity of imparting any reasoned cogency in their arrangement. The Upanisads are very difficult to understand unless they are taught by competent teachers, well read in the lore and were brought up in the tradition and who also had experienced the highest truth taught therein.

How profound and hence how difficult of comprehension the Reality is, has been expressed by the god of Death himself: ‘About Him it is not given to many even to hear; hearing about Him many do not comprehend. Marvellous is the expounder and competent indeed is the hearer; wonderful is the knower of Ātman taught by an able preceptor’.<sup>14</sup> Others may teach and we may be able to intellectually grasp the meaning but the truth will not sink deep into our minds, nor leave any lasting impression. We may be able to repeat parrot-like what is taught therein but our life will not be able to assimilate the teachings. It is then, in the language of Sri Ramakrishna, that the *Granthas* (the scriptures) become *granthis* (bonds). Pride of knowledge will sprout there, but knowledge as

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<sup>11</sup> Kathopanisad, VI.4.

<sup>12</sup> Mundaka Up., I, ii.7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., I.ii.10.

<sup>14</sup> Kathopanisad, II.7.

such will not be useful to the possessor thereof. It will be only one more bond, one more conditioning adjunct, in the armour of Māyā to bind man to the world.

The real assimilation of knowledge of the scriptures manifests itself in a different manner. It makes man look on this world with a new vision. He is called a man of wisdom, a Pandit, who sees with an equal eye on the brahmana endowed with knowledge and humility, the cow, the elephant, the dog and the dog-eater.<sup>15</sup> The meaning is that man's vision becomes widened. He no more sees the individual but the Lord residing in everything. So he does not hate anybody, nor is he deluded any more. All other seeing is only ignorance. 'One who sees the Paramātmā residing equally in every being, the indestructible Principle among the destructible things, he only sees properly.'<sup>16</sup> What happens to a man who has attained that state is that he reaches a state of non-return. Sri Krishna conveys the result in these words: 'Seeing thus with the eye of sameness the Lord resident equally everywhere he does not injure the Self by the self; therefore he attains the Supreme goal'.<sup>17</sup>

Unless this state is reached all study becomes useless. That is what Sri Śankara says in the *Vivekacūdāmani*. 'If the highest Truth is not known the study of scriptures is fruitless.' Again he remarks, 'when the highest is known the study of scriptures thereafter is purposeless'.<sup>18</sup> What the Ācārya means to convey here is that mere study of the scriptures without practising the disciplines enjoined in them, has no meaning. It is only a waste of labour and life. A Sanskrit proverb puts it rather bluntly, 'The ass that carries the load of sandalwood knows only its weight but not the sweet smell that emits therefrom'.

In these days of hectic activity, speed and mechanized living, this *svādhyāya* is all the more important. Today man, engaged as he is in the pursuit of his immediate wants, which go on increasing everyday, is more likely than ever in the past, to forget what he really needs and what is ultimately good for him. Therefore it is good to be reminded once in a while that there is an inner being whom we are starving, while we are tending all the time with great care the pillow-case which but for the former's presence would be feared even by the most beloved. As we feed the body and attend to its needs so too have we to look after the inner being. First of all, we must know how the body gets so much importance, wherefrom it has arisen, in what it is sustained. That the body is not permanent is a fact known to everyone; for we see people dying, the old die, the young die. Death does not spare anyone. Then why is this creation? If it was only to die that we were created it seems to be meaningless. It seems like a child's play. The child builds houses, digs wells in the sands of the sea and then breaks them all. Is that all the

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<sup>15</sup> Gita, V.18.

<sup>16</sup> Gita, XIII.27.

<sup>17</sup> Gita, XIII.28.

<sup>18</sup> Vivekachudamani, 61.

purpose of creation? In the child's play no one is involved, no injury is suffered by anyone; but not so in the case of creation. The whole world suffers misery, lives in tensions of various kinds. Is all this play? If so whose? Why should we be the sufferers in the sport of an unseen Power? Is there no way out of this labyrinth? These and other questions will come to him alone who has developed dispassion to the world, who has risen above the humdrum life. The answers to these and other questions are to be found in the Vedas. One who will search will find it. That is the reason that study of the scriptures was made imperative.



## TRUTH - THE PATH AND THE GOAL (\*)

By Swami Paratparananda

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – June 1962; Vol. 49; page 82

Nothing is so much sought after in this world and at the same time nothing is so eluding man's grasp as peace. Hundreds of conferences have been held for its accomplishment on a permanent basis since the last war. Every country that possesses nuclear weapons professes that the tests it conducts, the stocks it piles up and the increasing lethality of the weapons it produces are all for securing peace. But peace seems to be far far away. This is the world situation today.

In individual life too man amasses wealth, works incessantly and has progeny all with the fond hope that he may rest and enjoy peace in the evening of his life. But rarely is man successful. Maybe the man loses the power of his limbs or his sons turn ungrateful and prodigal or some such denouement overtakes him, and like the *ignis fatuus* peace recedes for ever from his grasp.

Naciketa in the Kathopanishad says to Yama: 'Man can never be satisfied by wealth. By seeing you we will have it in plenty. We shall live as long as you so command, but for me the boon I desire is that alone (the knowledge of the Self). For what fool is there who coming in contact with persons like you who are immune to old age and death will still ruminate on the short-lived colourful panorama and desire to live a life of sensual enjoyments for a long time.'<sup>1</sup>

In the life of the staunchest hedonist and excitement-mad person too a time comes when his nerves refuse to respond to the titillations offered. Depression then mocks him in the face. The day to day experience of a common man points out to us the insufficiency and incompetency of the body to enjoy and to cope with the increasing number of allurements the world holds out, without peril to body itself. King Bhartrihari in a pathetic strain cries out 'we did not enjoy the pleasures but were consumed ourselves by the desires.'<sup>2</sup>

After a hard day's labour when the time of rest draws nigh then the eye-lids care not our injunctions; the most beloved at that time appears as a shadow or is no more than a dream. Willy-nilly we slip into the arms of sleep, that panacea for all worries, but in the eyes of the matter-bound the impediment of all joys. Unfortunately the peace that man enjoys in sleep is short-lived. Either dreams encroach into its realm or the sordid reality of the work-a-day world perforce drags him back to wakefulness where all the horrible situations and painful remembrances which haunted him before await and welcome him with their hideous faces. What a piteous predicament?

Placed in such a situation is it too much to expect man pining for peace? What can bestow peace? Our scriptures declare that a pure life

and a perfect character alone can guarantee peace. How to acquire such a character? Character is not formed in a day. It is a life-long process. It is the sum total of the impressions of our actions done in the past or present lives. A pure life therefore depends on certain fundamental principles of which truth is one.

Truth plays a significant role in the formation of an individual's character and consequently the culture and advancement of society. For society is but an aggregate of individuals. The value of truth cannot be over-emphasized whether it be in the family life, or in social contacts; in national organization or in international communications. Its potentialities are immense. Like the mythical nectar it has the power to rejuvenate a worn down organism. It tears down all cowardliness and infuses great strength. It is the source of tremendous power, being the axis round which all virtues revolve and being the backbone of pure character.

What then is this truth that has so vast a hold, that has so complete a grip — to the point of obsession — on man? The common man's idea of truth is the verbal expression of an incident as it occurred or of a fact as it exists. There is another sense in which this word truth is used: that of adhering to the given word; to act as we say and to think as we speak. Everyone understands this. But how difficult do we not find to keep to truth? Suppose a man commits an offence, be it ever so trivial, his first reaction is to hide the offence, or to run away from the punishment and in case he is unable to do both, to shift the blame on to someone else. Naively does he think that a falsehood uttered to save himself from an embarrassing situation, innocuous to others -is harmless to himself. But there he commits the greatest error. In this way he beguiles himself. How is the man sure that he will be able to hold fast to truth when a greater calamity confronts him, even when he is not able to face a small embarrassing situation?

Falsehood is like the forbidden fruit. Once tasted it makes a slave of man by creating a longing to have recourse to it more and more. For does it not provide opportunities to live an easy and comfortable life without much exertion? Man, therefore, stoops not to conquer but to be vanquished. He bows not in humility, but in cupidity, and bends not in age but under the weighty burden of falsehood. There is an adage in the Indian languages: 'a man of deceit dies many a death before he takes his final leave of this world.'

How innocently do we not mix untruth freely in our speech, colour reports just to make them attractive. No doubt no mischief is contemplated in the beginning but what happens is that the habit persists and probably another time when it really injures another we cannot control ourselves from weaving webs of untruth into our narratives. That is the bane of walking into the trap of falsehood. Oftentimes we find that we have to spin yards of lies in order to support the original one. Further when man consistently lies his con-science becomes blunted. He no more feels for another; woe to the man who crosses his path or intercepts his

interests. In his material pursuits he sinks lower and lower into the mire of hatred, for it requires tremendous moral courage to be magnanimous enough to own one's fault and accept the consequences with composure, whereas the other way seems so wide and strewn with flowers and bouquets.

We have in our Hindu literature two of the brightest examples of steadiness and steadfastness in truth: Sri Ramachandra and Harishchandra. Both were kings of great integrity. They never went back on their word even if it meant the greatest sacrifice. No price was too heavy for them when it concerned truth. Rama gave up his title to the throne on the day of his installation as heir to the kingdom and trod the forest path bereft of all retinue and stripped of all royal grandeur just to honour the promise extorted from his father by his step-mother. This was not all, true to the spirit of the promise, he never entered the gates of a town or enjoyed the comforts of a royal guest for the fourteen years he was under exile even when they were repeatedly and honourably offered to him.

Harishchandra gave up his kingdom to the sage, Viswamitra, as a gift and when he found that he had no money, — the royal treasury having already devolved to the sage under the gift — to pay as fees for the conveyance of the gift, he sold his wife and himself too to raise the requisite wealth. It is a tale full of pathos. A king turned overnight a beggar, a slave, with no right even on his own body. His son dies and the wife brings the body to the cremation ground. But as the guard of the ground, Harishchandra, demands the death duties before cremation. The poor mother wails in distress, for where could she procure money slave as she was? He recognises her but does not relent. Would he be untruthful to his master? Never. It is a melodrama. The emotions raised draw even from the hardest heart sighs of compassion and tears of sympathy from the driest orbs. The sage at that instant appears, restores to the king his kingdom and all. He is pleased to find the tenacity and persistence of the king to bear all catastrophies without a regret or murmur in the cause of truth. That is the ideal set before us even in the so-called secular life.

What then is the place of truth in religious life? In the real sense of the terms the life of a Hindu is not segmented as secular and religious. It is a one great offering to the Most High. The so-called secular is also lived in pursuance of the Ideal. Starting from his tutelage as a boy under the parents and later under his preceptor to the day he renounces the world the Hindu's life is a preparation, an equipping for the higher life, for dedication to God. Truth enjoys a paramount position throughout this preparatory stage. A boy of eight enters the teacher's abode. He is first taught to be steadfast in truth. His morning begins with incantations to Truth. He, with his teacher believes that truth alone protects them. Whatever value the sceptic moderns may assign to such repetitions and chantings, they had no doubt a salubrious effect on the boys of those days. For those were the days when education was imparted not for the

sake of wealth, nor name, nor fame, nor even at the command of the sceptre nor in fear of the sword of haughty kings but with the sole object of benefiting society, through worthy students. No consideration other than the genuineness of the taught, and their worthiness to receive weighed with the teachers. The bond between them was that of mutual trust and love. The law that governed their relations was that of truth.

There is a striking instance of such a teacher, who humbled the pride of the mighty conqueror Alexander. Drawn to a scanty clad but serene looking man on the banks of a river, Alexander accosts him and pleads with him to accompany him to his land, definitely with the idea of learning the Wisdom of the East. The sage content with himself refuses all the great and grand things that Alexander offers. Annoyed and angered the conqueror threatens the sage with death. The sage smiles, but the words he spoke spat fire. 'You never uttered a more foolish thing' said he 'you may tear this frame but Me your sword cannot pierce. Me the fire cannot burn nor wind dry, for I am the Eternal Spirit.' The touch of Truth, of Reality, had transmuted the man from the idea that he is a mere cage of bones and flesh to the realization that he is the immutable Spirit.

In religious vocabulary, therefore, truth gets an added meaning. It means the final Reality, Ultimate Existence, the Absolute Truth. The Upanishads describe this indescribable thus: 'Brahman is Truth, Knowledge and Infinity'<sup>3</sup>. That is the only Reality, by whichever name it may be called, others are only appearances.

The Upanishads declare that as the clay alone is the true substance of the different types of vessels and things prepared out of it, so also this Reality is alone the true entity of this world. If we know the Reality we know all. Again they say its secret name is '*satyasya satyam*, Truth of truth' i.e. if we take these worldly things as true it is because that Reality which is true is behind them. 'The vital force is truth, and It is the truth of that,' says the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*. Further they impress upon us the eternality of this Truth compared to the relative world by their statement '*Nityo-nityanam*, The Eternal of the eternal' or as some interpreters like to put it as 'the Eternal of the evanescent'.

From the all-illuminating Supreme, by His resolve, the right and the true were generated.<sup>4</sup> Because of Truth the wind blows. Because of Truth the sun shines in the firmament. Truth is the foundation of speech. Everything rests in Truth,<sup>5</sup> says the Upanishad.

Truth seems to be the first casualty in this so-called age of culture. But even those engaged in worldly activities such as office work or business should hold to truth, says Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly. One should not swerve from truth.<sup>6</sup> 'A person of truthfulness alone succeeds and not a man of falsehood, this is the common experience in the world but even the path of the devas widens before truth.'<sup>7</sup> The meaning is that even those that are desirous of going to heaven must adhere to truth. Now about the final liberation, realization of the Ultimate Reality, the *Mundakopanishad* says: 'This Atman is to be reached by truth, austerity,

true knowledge and continuous practice of chastity.’<sup>8</sup> As in the outer life so too in the inner life, the life of the soul, truth plays a vital role.

On one occasion recounting his experiences Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘After my vision of the Divine Mother I prayed to her, taking a flower in my hands: “Mother here is Thy knowledge and here is Thy ignorance. Take them both, and give me only pure love. Here is Thy holiness and here is Thy unholiness. Take them both, and give me only pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thy evil. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy righteousness and here is Thy unrighteousness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love.” I mentioned all these, but I could not say: “Mother, here is Thy Truth and here is Thy falsehood. Take them both.” I gave up everything at her feet but could not bring myself to give up truth.’ If this is the state of a God-man how much more should not the aspirant who is still to go a long way be guarded against untruth? Again Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘It is said that truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kali Yuga. If a man clings tenaciously to truth he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for truth, one gradually loses everything.’ That is the invulnerable position truth occupies in life.

This Reality, this Truth, God, is to be realized. First we must have the intellectual conviction that all these things that we perceive, being evanescent, are of little value. They are appearances projected on the Reality by our own ignorance. What is this ignorance? Ignorance is identifying ourselves with everything that is not our true Self, such as the body, senses and mind. In simple language, this I and mine is at the root of all ignorance. The ego stands as a barrier to knowing our true self. The two methods of doing away with this ignorance is either to expand the ego to be all-inclusive, all-pervasive or to annihilate it altogether. Considering every creature that lives and moves as one’s own and extending sympathy to them all without distinction whatsoever, with the attitude that everyone is mine since they are my Lord’s creatures is the first method.

The other method is: all this is material, had a beginning and has an end but the Reality that I am, is immutable, indestructible so I shall place no value on these. Even the body is a limitation so I must transcend the body.

One is the path of bhakti, the other of knowledge, the position of each of the paths is quite tenable and equally helpful, for both are founded on truth. As long as we have the consciousness that we are the body we cannot deny the world. If we hold one as true, the truth of the other also must be conceded. So instead of confining ourselves to our little bodies, to our small circle of relations and to our limited possessions if we widen out our horizon and embrace all the world in our arms of love we reach the same goal as one who denies the world attains. This is the easier path. We have not to tear ourselves forcibly from anything. We have only to sublimate our love. Give our love to God and love every

creature in and through God.

Others take the Ultimate Reality and deny everything else. They say this world is a mere superimposition like a serpent superimposed on a piece of rope. The rope alone is real and not the snake but due to darkness we are perceiving it as snake. In our everyday experience too we often mistake one thing for another. The Sankhyas posit the reasons for this thus: 'Non-perception may be due to the extreme distance, immediate proximity, injury to the organs, unsteadiness of the mind, subtlety, obstruction, suppression and blending with what is similar'<sup>9</sup>. What is said here in the case of non-perception holds good in respect of mis-conception also: A bird flying at a distance is not visible. The collyrium on the eye-lids is not perceptible. A blind man cannot see. A wavering mind cannot grasp things properly. An obstruction like a wall intercepts our vision. We cannot distinguish one particular bean among a heap of beans. Likewise in our perceptions we mistake one object for another or do not see them at all.

One day when Sri Ramakrishna was speaking with the devotees he alluded to the topic of God's nearness and said though God is very near to us, we cannot see him because of the veiling power of Maya. And to illustrate what he said, he suddenly held up a piece of cloth between himself and the audience. 'You cannot see me now though I am so near. So maya too covers God.' On another occasion he gave the instance of a tank covered with scum. Let us quote his own words: 'Once, when I was explaining God's actions to some-one, God suddenly showed me the lake at Kamarpukur. I saw a man removing the green scum and drinking the water. The water was clear as crystal. God revealed to me that Satchidananda is covered by the scum of maya. He who puts the green scum aside can drink the water.' So though Reality is nearest to us we do not perceive it because of the many veils with which we cover it, the veils of relations, name, form and the like. And to it we also add the veil of untruth and make vision of God an impossibility. Our endeavour, therefore, should be to cut through these veils by the sword of truth. To give up what is unreal and hold fast to the real.

In conclusion: we have seen how truth plays a great part not only in the exclusively spiritual life but also in the worldly activities. It is both the path and the Goal. The highest goal of mankind. This Ultimate Reality being the highest truth the sooner we comprehend it the better can we account for our life here and in the lives to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Katha Up. 1.1.27-28.

<sup>2</sup> Vairagyasatakam, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Taitti. Up. 2-1-1.

<sup>4</sup> Mahanaraya.Up. 1-63.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 79-2.

<sup>6</sup> Taitt.Up. 1-11-1.

<sup>7</sup> Mund. Up. 1-1-6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 3-1-5.

<sup>9</sup> Sankhya Karika 7.

## VALUE OF PRACTICE IN RELIGION

Swami Paratparananda

\* Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – October 1963; Vol. 50; page 373

There was a time, and that not very distant, when religion was considered by some as the opium of the infirm, and the invalids. But that age has passed or is passing away. The materialistic science, which impinged this thought on the world, failed to propound an alternative principle which could give man eternal solace. It had to eat the humble pie and refrain from blowing its trumpets of triumph, when all it could offer in exchange came in the form of competition, strife and destruction. The two world wars have shown this and the Damocles' sword of the third war has frightened the supporters of materialism into silence. Besides, a greater awakening to the truths of Vedanta — which took up the challenge of science to religion boldly and proved that the content of true religion was sound and that it alone could lend support to life — has badly shaken the theories of scientists that they could do away with religion as of no import. The advent of the twin personalities, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, on to the stage of the world, and their illuminating lives have rejuvenated the faith of the doubters and imparted *sraddhā* even into the faithless. For they based their arguments not on words but on deeds. There was ocular evidence of spiritual vigour and attainments in their case and an earnest seeker who went to them obtained something tangible, something solid, in the form of spirituality. There was little speculation in their teaching. It was all here and now. Everything was definite about God, without being dogmatic. This can be, without any hesitation, said to be the turning point in the history of the world, though it may still take time before it is acknowledged or fully realized. But acknowledged or not, there is clearly written in bold letters, as it were, that the scientific methods of Vedanta had completely upset the apple-cart of the material scientists.

How was Vedanta able to do it? In India, by religion was meant something which was practical. It was not an aid to either politics or social developments nor a curio meant for decoration, as it happens to be in some other parts of the world. In India religion was for its own sake, therefore the ancients were bent upon making it most practicable, livable. There is not a principle in Vedanta which could not be put into practice. Vedanta is not only a speculation but also a practice and a realization. It is not from the erudition in the presentation of the philosophy that the eminence of a person is judged, but how far he had been able to put that philosophy into practice. Sri Ramakrishna's words in this regard are final

and bring out the importance practice bears to our soul's well-being. He says: 'I consider a pundit (scholar) without any asset of *sādhana* (practice) to his credit as mere straw. Such pundits are like vultures that soar high in the sky when all the while their eyes are fixed on the charnel pit below.' How true it is! Unless one practises spiritual disciplines the longing for the things of the world do not abate in the least. It is being proved everyday by science that one has to go beyond the gravitational pull before one can manoeuvre freely, with safety, in space. So too, unless the pull, the drag of the world is nullified it is impossible to rise beyond the worldly attractions. What an amount of power they put in the rocket that fires a ship into space! Once in there, however, the occupant is safe and can at will come down. That is exactly what the science of religion professes to teach: To rise beyond the gravitation of the worldly desires. But the power is to be built by oneself. No one can do it by proxy, though everyone would have liked to benefit if such were the case.

### ***Practice: The Sign of Earnestness***

There is a sequence of events, rather a succession of actions that settle, that signify whether a man is earnest about religion or not. He may profess vehemently but unless he practises spiritual disciplines, in India at least, he is not believed to be of any consequence as a religious person. Neither can he hoodwink people for all time, though some may be duped for sometime. Like the counterfeit coin he gets caught when observed at close quarters. So practice is a necessary limb of religion. Take even the ordinary arts like music or painting: What pains does not one take to play on a single musical instrument, be though it may, even to a moderate success; what labour does not one put in to culture one's voice in singing or to become even a third rate painter? How many years does one not spend in these pursuits! Does one consider it a waste? There is an earnestness in such people, so no effort seems too much for them. Why then should not religion which reveals the inner beauty of the soul not attract as much attention; make us as much earnest? Swamiji picturesquely brings this out: 'What an amount of attention does business require, and what a rigorous taskmaster it is! Even if the father, the mother, the wife or the child dies, business cannot stop! Even if the heart is breaking we still have to go to our place of business, when every hour of work is a pang. That is business, and we think it is just, that it is right.' Have we at least this much of application to religion? Swamiji says, 'This science calls for more application than any business can ever require.' Unless earnestness gets hold of you, you will not practise. And earnestness comes when religion is sought for its own sake, and not as a means to something else.

The purport of religion is one thing, and one thing alone, that is realization of God, liberation from this round of births and deaths, 'being and becoming' as Swami Vivekananda aptly describes it. And every true



religion emphasizes this. Christ said, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.'<sup>1</sup> He did not stop with that. He continued: 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'<sup>2</sup> The Upanisads say, 'Not by action, nor by progeny or wealth but by renunciation alone immortality was reached by some.'<sup>3</sup> 'Establish your mind in Me alone and in Me alone merge your intellect. And then, after the fall of the body, you will, without doubt, live in Me alone,'<sup>4</sup> says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gitā. Thus every prophet has vouched to the fact that religion means practice of renunciation and culture of other good virtues. And practice alone testifies to earnestness. Wheresoever there is non-compliance of this fundamental principle there can be no true religion, however much it may be lauded, however much it may be of utilitarian value. In short, there cannot be a comfortable religion, if we can but properly assess the ideas contained in the quotations cited above.

### ***Religion is not in frothy words***

Having defined what religion is, we like to point out what it is not. For more often than not the wrong is taken to be the right and vice versa. It has been a practice with some to condemn, vilify and downgrade other sects and other religions, so much so that it has become their second nature. 'They cannot glorify their religion without condemning others. But is this necessary? We think not. If one's religion is good and great it must be able to convert one into the image of God whom one worships. If not, it is simply lip service they are offering to religion. They are interested in argumentation and fights and not in bringing religion into themselves. Swami Vivekananda rightly points out: 'The very fact of these disputations and fightings among sects shows that they do not know anything about religion. Religion to them is a mere mass of frothy words, to be written in books...They fight and talk about religion, and do not want it.' When we leave off all these vain talks and seek God alone then we are on the path. For 'This Atman cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, nor by intellect, nor even by much learning. By him alone it is attained whom It chooses — to him Atman reveals Itself in Its real form,'<sup>5</sup> says the Upanisad.

### ***Purpose of Practice***

As we have said, religion proposes to make man realize his own nature, which is divinity, perfection. It makes us kindle the flame of infinite knowledge; a light that dispels all darkness once and for all time. But it cannot be done in a day. There are so many things that have covered the lamp of our Atman, so many obstacles and encrustations in the form of attachments. These are to be removed and then only can we

reach the lamp. We know that the mind is the seat of all attachment and aversions, in fact of all that man is. It is the store-house of all previous impressions and repository of all knowledge too. Every thought man thinks, every action he does leaves an impress on the mind and the sum total of these go to form his character. Impelled by the previous *samskāras* an ordinary man acts. It is the purpose of practice to overcome the vicious tendencies that have gathered in the mind, to purify it. This can be done by creating new and good possibilities. 'The evil tendencies are to be counteracted by good ones,' says Patanjali in his *Yoga Sūtras*. To think good thoughts and do good actions and check the mind from swerving away from the righteous path is practice. But it is a difficult task. Sri Krishna exhorts in the *Gīta*, 'Undoubtedly, O mighty-armed one, the mind is of a fickle nature and cannot be easily controlled, but O son of Kunti, by practice and renunciation it can be subdued.'<sup>6</sup>

Practice is a struggle no doubt but through struggle alone everything grows. For our very existence we have to struggle. Much as we would like it, there is no alchemy by which man turns overnight into a saint. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that mere knowledge that there is fire in the firewood cannot cook the rice; one must light the fire and put the pot of rice on it, then only will it cook. Again he said: 'Merely uttering "hemp!" "hemp!" does not make one intoxicated. One must bring it, grind it and drink it and then only will one feel the intoxication.' Likewise, merely uttering 'religion', 'religion' does not make a man religious. Swamiji remarks: 'We want to strike the light in a second, but we forget that the making of the candle is the chief thing.' Without the candle where will you light the flame. And in making the candle is all the struggle; when once it is made the lighting takes but little time. Sri Ramakrishna compared this struggle to a boatman's rowing in the winding alleys of the river. The boatman has to struggle hard, no wind can help him there. But once he has gained the main current of the river, he hoists his sail finding a favourable wind, leans back and enjoys a smoke. It is smooth sailing from then on. He has only to hold the rudder slightly steady and the boat reaches the destination safely. This is the purpose of practice: not to get stuck up in the brambles and bushes, to steer clear of the sand dunes and avoid being swept into shallow waters and running aground. It is not a shot in the dark, not an unexpected chance that man is asked to take, by practising religious disciplines; the Yoga practices have scientifically demonstrated how man can rise in the ladder of spirituality with full awareness of his progress. You do certain practices and then attain certain perceivable results.

### ***What to practise?***

It now remains to be said what one must practise. Though there are many paths and various disciplines there are certain fundamentals which are common to all the paths. Taking the name of the Lord, prayer,

meditation are some of them. But there are some preliminaries which help an aspirant in the practice of these. One of them, the most important one, is the desire for liberation, *mumuksutvam*. It is also the primary condition of religious life. When this condition is fulfilled others follow as a matter of course. If there is no real yearning for liberation, religious life becomes dull and drab. On the other hand, the desire for liberation being present even the harshest of disciplines become enjoyable and their sharpness fails to cut into the mind. The malady with the world is that it sees the unreal as the real. Let us be clear here about this reality: By reality we mean that which exists at all times, nay in which even time exists. If this definition is firmly grasped there should be no scope for miscomprehension. No one, not even the Advaitist says that this world is an illusion as we comprehend an illusion to be. What he says has been twisted and tortured to make him look ridiculous. What he says is that the world is not real as God is. And this is the basis of all religious life: To discriminate between the real and the unreal. Even a bhakta has to concede that God alone is real, otherwise how could he abstain from being attached to the things of the world?

Real spiritual life begins when man discriminates between the real and the apparent and rejecting the apparent clings to the real. The next disciplines are control of the senses and the mind, forbearance and repose of the mind. With long practise of these disciplines man's mind becomes purified and in the purified mind God is reflected, says Sri Ramakrishna. Seeing God face to face and knowing Him intimately alone is religion said Sri Ramakrishna time and again. So practice too must lead us to this and if it does not, it is time that we reassessed the motive that is hidden in our mind. Yet it must be conceded that some attain success more easily than others. The reason may be that the intensity of the longing for God in one case is more than that of the others, for does not Swami Vivekananda say, 'What want is there without its object outside? 'When the want is intense it will be fulfilled. And this wanting will be expressed in the practice. That is the value of practice in religion. Finally, let us recall what Swamiji says about religion and practice: 'Religion is ever a practical science, and there never was nor will be any theological religion. It is practice first, and knowledge afterwards.'

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel of St. Mathew, 19.21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 19.24.

<sup>3</sup> Kaivalyopanishad, 1.3.

<sup>4</sup> Gita, 12.8.

<sup>5</sup> Kathopanishad, 2.23.

<sup>6</sup> Gita, 6.35.

## WHAT DOES TAKE MAN AWAY FROM GOD

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – December 1965; Vol. 52; page 339

INDIAN psychologists of old were aware that man's senses were not infallible, nay they were definite that the senses were easily fooled by Dame Nature. They knew that something stood between us and the thing experienced and made us perceive them in a different state. In the *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* we come across a passage where the author enumerates the several reasons due to which man cannot perceive objects. These same reasons may be given as to why we see the world not as it is but in quite another way. The passage runs thus: "Due to extreme distance, extreme proximity, deformity of the receiving senses, an unreceptive mind, subtlety, veiling, suppression and becoming one with what is similar, non-perception is possible."<sup>1</sup> We can in the light of scientific discoveries add some more reasons for our not being well posted with the exact situation we are in. Take the natural phenomena, for example the rising of the sun. According to science the expression itself is faulty. Science says that the earth moves round the sun as also on its own axis and therefore, the days and nights, the months and seasons result. But the common man's idea of rising and setting of the sun is naive, not in consonance with the scientific explanation, yet it is in vogue. Similarly man — aver the scientists of the soul, the Rishis, the saints — does not see himself as what he truly is. The sublime experience of these sages was that the one Brahman has become all these: our own self, these creatures and all that is seen in the universe. The *Chāndogya Upaniśad* says: 'It (Brahman) thought, let Me be many'.<sup>2</sup> Again, 'this same deity thought that let Me entering into these devatas (viz. fire, water and earth) by means of the living self, (*jīva*) manifest as name and form.'<sup>3</sup> There are many passages in the Śruti which assert this type of relation between the *jīva* and Brahman or God.

The question now is why do we not perceive this relation. What prevents us from experiencing it? This has been the quest of philosophers and seers through the ages and this is the real purpose of religion: to find out who we are, from whence we came and where we go. The Advaitin will tell you that it is due to *avidyā*, ignorance that you see variety in unity, and *avidyā* has been variously described. Sri Ramakrishna has given us a simpler definition of this *avidyā*. He used to say egotism in

<sup>1</sup> S.K., 7.

<sup>2</sup> Chandogya, VI.ii.3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., VI.iii.2.

man is *avidyā*. Another time he said it was lust and lucre. It stands between us and God. Now a doubt may arise: Is then this *avidyā* more powerful than God as to come between Him and us? The answer has been given by Sri Ramakrishna himself. He says, 'It is not so. Even a tiny thing can veil a great object'. He cited the example of the sun — which we know is very much larger than the earth itself — which can be prevented from being seen by a flying piece of cloud. Can we on that account say that the cloud is more powerful than the sun? The cloud owes its very existence to the sun and not the other way about. An effect can never be greater than the cause. Sri Ramakrishna further drove home this truth by holding a piece of cloth between himself and the audience. He said, 'You cannot see me now because of this veil. Such is *avidyā*, such is the nature of egoism'. It hides the true nature of the world and even of oneself.

## II

How can we overcome this egoism? If we have to proceed scientifically, first of all we must know what it constitutes. The Upanisads speak of the *jīva* as endowed with the five sheaths, the *pañcakōśas* — the *annamaya*, *prānamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijñāmayā* and *ānandamaya*. The very idea that these are termed sheaths shows that they are not the real thing. We know the scabbard is not the sword, it is but a receptacle for the sword. Likewise these *Kōśas* are not the self, not the Atman. But as the scabbard is a necessary accoutrement for the carrying of the sword, so these *Kōśas* are necessary for the purpose of transit of the soul through the world of experience back to its own nature.

The above *Kōśas* are sometimes regrouped and named as the *sthūla* (gross), *sūksma* (subtle), and *kāraṇa* (causal) bodies. The *annamaya kōśa* is the gross visible body; the *prānamaya*, *manomaya* and *vijñāmayā kōśas* constitute the subtle body and the *ānandamaya kōśa* forms the causal body. In this regrouping or reclassification though the word sheath has been dropped, the substitute used, viz. *śarīra*, body, has not much more respect in Indian philosophy than the word sheath. Sri Krishna in the *Gītā* likens the body to a garment. 'Just as man discards the worn-out garments and puts on other new ones, similarly the *jīva* (*dehi*) discarding the old and decrepit bodies takes on other new ones.'<sup>4</sup> There is the *śarīri*, the dweller in the body, for whom the body is the house. A house is not built for its own sake, nor for mere architectural beauty, but for some one who wants a habitation. By itself it has no value. Only because someone dwells in a house it is worth all the trouble and the labour and the cost. Likewise the body is worth less than the dust of which it is made as soon as the indweller leaves it. Yet such is the infatuation, that the indweller identifies himself with the body and forgets himself. This superimposition of the insentient body on the conscious

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<sup>4</sup> Bhagavad Gita, II.22.

entity (the self) and vice versa, i.e. the admixture of truth and falsehood is the natural basis, says Śrī Śankara, of all the transactions in this world.<sup>5</sup> Not to know about this is what constitutes ignorance, and identification of oneself with any of the three bodies above cited is what is called the ego (*ahamkāra*).

The range of this ego is very vast. As if not satisfied with the embellishments of these bodies it takes on new ones. There are the *upādhis*, the limiting adjuncts which further cramp our soul when it gets attached to them. There is scholarship, and there is wealth. There is name and fame, property and progeny. If these *upādhis* are not properly used they are sure to use man improperly. Instead of the dog wagging the tail, the tail will wag the dog as the saying goes. Each one of this is enough to swell the ego to infinite proportions and when such a thing happens there remains but very small space for the Ātman to occupy, for God to manifest. For by whatever name we call that Conscious Principle, according to our leaning towards Advaita or Dvaita, it has to be accepted on the grounds of authority of Śruti and Smṛiti that this Principle lives in man. The *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* says, 'He who lives in all beings but is within them, whom no beings know, whose body is all beings and who controls all beings from within, is the Internal Ruler, that is your own immortal self'.<sup>6</sup> 'The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the heart of all beings and makes them move by His power, Māyā, as if mounted on a machine,'<sup>7</sup> says Sri Krishna. Even such a Being we are neglecting and accumulating tinsel and burying ourselves into the heap of scrap to such an extent that for all practical purposes the Ātman in us sinks almost into insignificance. As someone referring to the Upanisadic passages, humorously said, 'because of man's preoccupation with the other things of the world the Ātman has entered into a very secret place and hidden Itself<sup>8</sup> in the smallest space in the heart.<sup>9</sup> It is afraid to be seen by unholy eyes'. What happens by this process of increasing our accretions is that the thickness of the veil that we project between ourselves and God increases, until it becomes too opaque for us to have any glimpse of Him. It takes the shape of a wall, a barrier too thick to penetrate.

An impressive example as to how the ego of wealth acts was given by Sri Ramakrishna. He said, 'If a thief steals ten rupees from a rich man's house and is caught, the owner exclaims, "what to steal from my house!" First he takes away the stolen money, gives the thief a good beating and not satisfied with that hands him over to the police'. Why does this happen? Because the rich man had identified himself with his wealth. That is the ego of wealth. Sri Krishna describes this as *āsuri sampat*, demoniacal traits in man, thus: 'This I have acquired now; this

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<sup>5</sup> Br. Sutra Bhashya, Introduction.

<sup>6</sup> Br. Up. III.vii.15.

<sup>7</sup> Bhagavad Gita, XVIII.61.

<sup>8</sup> Kathopanishad, II.12. and III.12.

<sup>9</sup> Chandogya Up., VIII.i.1.

desire I shall soon have; this wealth is mine, the other also will soon become mine. That enemy of mine I have already killed and shall slay others as well. I am the Lord; I am the enjoyer; I have attained everything that can be coveted, am powerful and happy. I am richly endowed with wealth; I am of noble birth; who else is equal to me? I will perform sacrifice; I shall give gifts; I shall sport'.<sup>10</sup>

### III

How to overcome this ego that prevents us from seeing God? The Upanisads prescribe the method of discrimination. What is it that sees and perceives things in this world? It is the Conscious Principle, the Ātman that perceives, whereas in the world it is believed that the aggregate of the mind, senses and body is the seer, is the experiencer. 'That which is the ear of the ear, mind of the mind, speech of the speech, it is the vital force of *prāna*, and eye of the eye. The wise man distinguishes It from these faculties and rising above sense-life becomes immortal,'<sup>11</sup> says the *Kenopanishad*. From this it is clear that it is not the eye that sees, but that which keeps the eye alive; it is not the mind that thinks but that which keeps the mind alert. And that resides in all beings and makes them live, move and have their being and that is God. The *Kathopanishad* affirms this stand tirelessly and denies experience to every other faculty or entity. 'Realizing the One, which sees the things that are in the dream and things that are in the waking, as the Great Omnipresent Being, a wise man does not grieve.'<sup>12</sup> 'The meaning is obvious. That which is in us and takes note of things in the waking state as well as in the dream, that is the Omnipresent Being, God. And realizing it as such one does not have any sorrow. As another Upanisad remarks, 'Where is infatuation, where is sorrow for him who sees oneness everywhere and knows that his Atman alone has become all beings?''<sup>13</sup> It is very near to us, yet very far.<sup>14</sup> It is very far for those who get engrossed in the world. They have to travel a long distance before they can reach or see Him. But it is very near to those who have discrimination, who know that it is God alone that exists in so many forms. For them it is there inside every being as well as outside of them.<sup>15</sup> When these ideas are repeatedly forced upon the mind and when it learns to assimilate this fact and make it its own, be one with that idea, then man has made some progress towards his ideal, towards God.

But this discrimination is to be preceded by the discrimination of what is real and what is unreal. First we have to discover, we have to ask ourselves whether riches, the outward possessions — name and fame —

<sup>10</sup> Bhagavad Gita, XVI.13 to 15.

<sup>11</sup> Kenopanishad, I.2.

<sup>12</sup> Kathopanishad, IV.4.

<sup>13</sup> Isavasya Up., 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

are they real? Then comes what we most prize, the body. Is that eternal? No it is not. Now when we say that one thing is ephemeral, something of an opposite nature is accepted as existing always. So there is something eternal compared to this existence. Man clings to things here because they are tangible to him and he thinks he can hold on to them. But when he comes to know the true value of things he longs to reach a more permanent abode. He hears about the enjoyments in heaven and seeks for them as they are more lasting than those on the earth. But that is not the goal. The heaven is only this world of senses multiplied, a thousand or million fold if you like, but when the enjoyments in heaven which were earned through merits of actions done here, come to an end, as the merits are exhausted, there comes the fall. Therefore the seers advise that even heaven is not the goal. So one who hankers after peace and true immortality, should see God, seek the knowledge of Brahman. Such a person should have intense dispassion for enjoyment here, and hereafter. When for a long time, without let or hindrance, ceaseless efforts are made in this direction then the knowledge of the Atman dawns, then the ego dies its natural death. It has no more power to bring one back into this world. For the fruits of action, which bring man into being, are then completely burnt out.<sup>16</sup> They become impotent to fructify, to bring about a further birth for that person just as the fried seed is unable to germinate.

#### IV

Now this path can be followed by very few chosen persons. Their number is a microscopic minority. What is the way for the common man? Sri Ramakrishna says, 'This ego is like the peepal tree, very difficult to get rid of. Cut it down today, tomorrow again it puts forth its shoot. So let this intractable ego remain like the servant. Then it cannot do you any harm. "I am the servant of God". This ego is not harmful'. But then one has to serve the devotees of God and learn from them the way to reach Him. Such a man's riches are put to the service of the Lord and His devotees. He may give in charity but that does not inflate his ego. On the other hand he is happy that he has been the instrument in the hand of God to serve His creatures. It is the Lord that commands him and he is there only as His servant. When one can truly cultivate this attitude one gets rid of one's unripe ego, as Sri Ramakrishna calls it. The ripe ego either knows that everything is Brahman, everything is from God, and lives in Him, or that it is only His servant and as a servant cannot pride himself on the achievements attained through him by his Master, the Lord, this ripe ego too has nothing to show off and therefore remains meek and subservient to God's will. These are the two ways of overcoming the ego. In this case of surrender, of remaining as a servant, what we call, *Karma yoga* also

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<sup>16</sup> Bhagavad Gita, IV.37.



plays a great part. Men have to work, completely effacing their egos, and without the least idea of any return. It is only for the pleasure of the Lord that they have to work and not to claim any rewards therefrom. Such a man's mind should always be plunged in God to know His will and act up to it. Bhakti or devotion does not free man from his obligations in the world. Rather they make him fulfil these obligations more conscientiously and meticulously than before. Thus doing every thing for God, establishing one's mind in Him, bowing down to Him and fully dedicating oneself to Him, one is able to tear down the veil of this ego and stand before His resplendent presence.<sup>17</sup> This is the way for going back to Him from whom for a short while we have the feeling that we are separate. This experience is like the divided appearance the ocean presents when a stick is floating on it, while all the time it is one and undivided. Such is the nature of the ego. Penetrating and knowing it as such we go beyond it and reach Him.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., IX.34.

## WHAT IS MAYA?

Swami Paratparananda

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### **Appearance and Reality**

Often we are confronted with this term Māyā and more often than not has it been misconstrued and misinterpreted. It has been translated as illusion in English and this has given rise to all the confusion. But, for an impartial observer and thinker all this need not necessarily be so. He sees almost a parallel between the scientific theories of today and Māyā.

Take for instance the first proposition of the doctrine of Māyā: viz. that appearance is not reality. It appears real because something else which forms its substratum is real. This is also what science tells us. Let us take some concrete examples instead of beating about the bush in a maze of words. What revolutionary changes have not the common conceptions, regarding ordinary phenomena, undergone! A thousand years ago people accepted the world as a flat piece of surface and there were very queer ideas regarding how it was held in position. Do we believe in such stuff now? If anyone does he will be considered as coming from the neolithic age, though modern science is not so old as that. It was only when Columbus, who said that he could reach India going round the world, if the other route was not available and when he did succeed to a certain extent, that there was some sort of belief in the statement that the world was round.

Again, we say the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Even now this phraseology has not changed, but does the sun go round the earth as it appears to the ordinary eye. No, says the scientist. It is the earth that is moving round the sun, as also on its own axis. This latter rotation produces the night and the day, whereas the former movement the seasons. Another wonderful theory or fact, whatever you may like to call it, of science is that our earth is moving at a tremendous velocity on its own axis - the rate is approximately 17.5 miles per minute. Yet we do not feel the impact of such a speed. For us the earth seems to be stationary. Then there are many other things than these which very powerful telescopes and a practised eye at that alone could find out. For instance it was recently discovered by 'Soviet and American astronomers simultaneously and independently that one of the most distant visible galaxies, 3C-273, is changing in brilliance.'

'The spectrum of 3C-273 shows that it is receding from us at about 30,000 miles a second — hundreds of times faster than any stars in our

own galaxy could possibly be moving — hence its identification as a galaxy.

“Hitherto variable radiation has been observed only in stars and no one has even suspected that galaxies, too, can change their brilliance.”

‘The mass of this mysterious space colossus must be millions of times greater than the mass of our Sun.

‘The very existence of such superstars was regarded as impossible until very recently.’<sup>1</sup>

We can go on piling up evidence to prove that what people fondly believed once about the world had to be discarded and new faiths, formulated according to scientific theories, were to be cultivated. But our purport being to show that the world cannot be taken as it appears even from the standpoint of science, these few illustrations must suffice. The doctrine of Māyā does not demand any more than this recognition: that appearance has a conditional existence and when the condition varies the existence also undergoes a change, in short, it is not eternally real.

### ***Māyā as Ignorance***

Before going into the nature of Māyā let us see how it has been generally construed. Māyā is described by one of the Upanisads, as *prakṛti* and the wielder of Māyā as Iswara.<sup>2</sup> It is also called ignorance. Ignorance need not necessarily always mean the absence of worldly wisdom or of material sciences. One may be ignorant of all these, yet aware of his true nature which is the real wisdom. Whereas another may have known many sciences yet be ignorant of what he really is. The latter wisdom leads to material welfare and the former to spiritual emancipation, which is everlasting and endowing peace.

Here we face some knotty questions. Whose is this ignorance? Whence does it come? How can the effulgent One, the Ātman, be covered by this ignorance? Is not then Maya more powerful than the Ātman? Let us take these questions one by one. The ignorance, says the Vedantist, is of two types, one is the *primaeva*l Māyā having recourse to which Iswara projects this world; and the other, which controlling *jiva* binds him to the world. So there is Māyā in Iswara, which is His own power, and ignorance in the *jiva*. This ignorance is therefore of the *jiva*. We now come to the second question: From where does this ignorance come if the Atman is self-effulgent consciousness or Knowledge Absolute? The Vedantist’s proposition that appeals to reason is: that this ignorance is without beginning. Or as Swamiji says: ‘Truth never dreams . . . Illusion arises from illusion alone.’ No satisfactory answer can be obtained to this question so long as one is in the realm of Māyā. This is true not only of Māyā but of the world as well, which again according to the Vedantist is nothing but Māyā. One does not know wherefrom this universe came into being and in what it is sustained. This statement may seem absurd to many, as so much has been discovered about it by the scientists. But we

forget that science deals only with things which have already come into being, of perceivable objects, or to tell it briefly, objects which come under the purview of the senses. They cannot say what was there before creation, may be billions of years ago. Yet again scientists cannot think of a time when there was no creation. That is, they work in time, in space and in terms of causality. When they can go beyond these then only can they come to know from whence this creation came into being. Swami Vivekananda pertinently and categorically sets down, 'No amount of knowledge of the external world could solve the problem (of the mystery of the universe). "But," says the scientist, "we are just beginning to know a little. Wait a few thousand years and we shall get the solution." "No," says the Vedantist, for he has proved beyond all doubt that the mind is limited, that it cannot go beyond certain limits —beyond time, space and causation. As no man can jump out of his own self, so no man can go beyond the limits that have been put upon him by the laws of time and space. Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time and space, would be futile because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three.' These modes of thought according to time, space and causation is what the Vedantin calls Māyā.

### ***Sri Ramakrishna on Māyā***

Sri Ramakrishna in his inimitable simple way described Māyā as 'lust and lucre'. Let us see how far this statement goes along with the traditional view of Māyā and how far it agrees in the practical field of life. The Vedantist says that Māyā binds the jiva to the world, and that is exactly the work of lust — lust for power, for enjoyment and for wealth. That this is so has been proved over and over again. That is why all teachers of mankind enjoined upon a true spiritual aspirant to renounce these, if he wanted release from this bondage. Analyse the motives behind any action of any individual placed anywhere in the world. Is there anyone, — except, of course, those who have gone beyond worldly attachment — whose motive cannot be classified under these divisions. If we probe into the motive of an individual who murders, robs or cheats, or a nation which trespasses, overrides or overruns its neighbouring states we will surely find that it falls under one of these categories. Religion, however, is not in exercising our power to enjoy but to overcome the strong urge to do so. This simple definition of Sri Ramakrishna is so apt, and at the same time so completely clears the cobwebs of confusion that had gathered round this word Māyā that it looks too simple to be true. But as Swamiji remarks, 'Truths of life are most simple,' but we cannot understand them at once because of their simplicity. Again, this definition does not contradict in the least the Vedantic meaning of Māyā, viz. power to veil the real and present the unreal as the real. For is it not infatuation of the unreal that drags man into the whirlpool of this world? This will be clear if we quote Sri Ramakrishna again where he says, 'Attachment to

one's relatives is Māyā.' The whole world knows how powerful this pull is.

### **Swami Vivekananda on Māyā**

Swamiji further illustrates this same idea of Sri Ramakrishna when he says, 'Māyā is a simple statement of facts — what we are and what we see around us.' He does not merely peremptorily remark and ask us to believe or leave the rest to our imagination. He substantiates this statement with illustrations. He takes the tremendous fact of death and remarks: 'The whole world is going towards death; everything dies. All our progress, our vanities, our reforms, our luxuries, our wealth, our knowledge, have that one end — death. That is all that is certain. Cities come and go, empires rise and fall, planets break into pieces and crumble into dust, to be blown about by the atmospheres of other planets. Thus it has been going on from time without beginning. Death is the end of everything. Death is the end of life, of beauty, of wealth, of power, of virtue, too. Saints die and sinners die, kings die and beggars die. They are all going to death, and yet this tremendous clinging on to life exists. Somehow, we do not know why, we cling to life; we cannot give it up. And this is Māyā.' Further he points out how, 'the least amount of material prosperity that we enjoy is elsewhere causing the same amount of misery.'

Swamiji then goes on to depict forcefully the fact of the universe: How though like a seesaw, alternating between misery and happiness, it enchants man and holds him down in its grip. 'This,' he says, 'is Māyā.' For a bit of happiness a load of misery is suffered patiently. Nature makes us work like an ox attached to the grinding mill. With a wisp of straw dangling in front and attached to the yoke the ox is tempted and it moves on and on but never reaches the coveted straw. So too are we employed to plough the nature's fields and grind the nature's mill and still think that we will one day overcome this nature. This is Māyā.

Another fallacious argument which man is always prone to is: that he is progressing towards good, and that a time will come when it will be all good and no evil. If that were so, why are there an increasing number of law-courts and ever increasing number of law-suits? Why are there so many police posses, so many anti-corruption squads, and then again the security police, the plain-clothes men and so on? Is this the sign of lessening of evil? No doubt, man of the present age compared with the man of the forest has considerably improved towards good, as also in his power to do good. But from the above it is also clear that in that very proportion evil too has increased. Still we do not believe it and this is Māyā.

This world is a place of contradictions. It is at best Tantalus's hell, and yet we do not recognise it as such, for when we know it we would like to get out of it. We cannot add a drop more to the happiness of the world without adding misery to it in the same proportion. We may be asked

here whether it is wrong to do good. No one will say that. But we have to remember that all this doing good is only for one's own edification. We must do good, for that is the way to avoid evil; only let us not do so with the idea that we will be able to wipe out all the misery from this world. For as Swami Vivekananda says, 'It is like chronic rheumatism. Drive it out from the legs, it will go to the head.' We have thus seen, how Swamiji's idea on Māyā, far from being contradictory to his Master's, explains it more fully and therefore is at the same time in no way a deviation from the traditional meaning. He has only cleared the labyrinth and put it in plain language so that even an ordinary man, not brought up in the tradition, can also understand and assimilate it.

### ***Is Māyā endless?***

When the Vedantist says that Māyā is without beginning, does it not, as a natural corollary, follow that it will have no end? Vedanta does not leave these doubts in the lurk: It says, 'No, Māyā can be ended.' This position of Vedanta will be clear when we discuss the nature of Māyā. For the present let us accept it as a working hypothesis. If this statement of Vedanta is accepted then liberation which is the goal of human life becomes an assured fact. Māyā ceases to have influence on the individual when he sees himself in his own true form, that of Sat-Cit-Ananda. And this seeing is liberation according to any known concept, though a little modified here or mended there in conformity with the individuals' leanings. What if we maintain that Māyā being without beginning must also be endless? Then there is no point in striving for liberation: in that case the individual soul cannot go beyond Māyā, which is the criterion of liberation.

### ***How does Māyā or Ignorance cover the Self-Effulgent Ātman?***

This brings us to the third question: If the Ātman is said to be Knowledge Absolute how can ignorance cloud it? We shall answer this by a familiar example. Let us take the sun, which is a luminous body. It is obscured by the presence of clouds in the atmosphere and according as the density of the clouds is thick or thin the sun is partially seen or totally unseen. It may be, we may not be able to see it for days together. How do we account for it? The clouds are after all not so vast as the sun, yet they do cover it in a particular area. It may be here objected, that the simile is out of place and not a proper comparison, on the ground that the sun is far away and the clouds are very near compared to the distance of the sun whereas it is not the case with the Ātman. The Ātman is one's own being. Yes, says the Vedantist, though it is near it appears very far being tainted by the clouds of attachment to things, like the body, other than the Ātman. That is why the Upanisads say, 'It is far; It is the inmost;

It is inside everything as well as outside of all these.’<sup>3</sup> So it is not a fancy nor a groundless, parallelless argument to say that ignorance clouds the self-effulgent One. Now, when the above answers have been thoroughly grasped, it is easy to know what to expect for the fourth one. If Māyā or ignorance can be ended, how can it be more powerful than the Ātman? We have let ourselves be tarnished and are weeping, or as Swamiji says: ‘We put our hands before our eyes and weep that it is dark. Take the hands away and there is light; the light exists always for us, the self-effulgent nature of the human soul.’

### ***Māyā as Name and Form***

We spoke of Māyā as ignorance. What is meant by this is explained by an Upanisadic passage. ‘All the forms and names are only play of words, the clay (the substance) alone is real.’<sup>4</sup> Our ignorance is about this substance. We take the name and form to be real. And this is what deludes us. The Upanisad gives us three instances: of clay, of gold and of iron. The Upanisad says that whatever the forms that a substance has been changed into or by whatever the names they are called, they have no existence apart from the substance. Pots, pans and pitchers which are made of clay can have no existence except in and through clay, the substance. The necklaces, bangles and rings of gold can have no existence separate from gold. ‘We can never see name, form or causes standing by themselves. This phenomenon is Māyā,’ says Swamiji. As it is in the world of matter so also it is with the universe — whether man, beast, sun, moon or stars, it is all name and form while the true substance is only One. When the names and forms are destroyed what remains is only that Eternal Spirit, Ātman, Brahman. This name and form brings in duality and thus creates delusion. It is the ignorance of the substance, of which the universe is only a distorted vision, that brings in all delusion. Now the question is how does the infinite Spirit become finite. We dealt with this question earlier in a different context but it bears repetition here. Vedanta says this duality is only an appearance, in reality it is Non-dual.<sup>5</sup> When we look through Māyā, through time, space and causation, the Infinite appears to have become the finite. And as long as one remains in this field of time and space one cannot but see many and be deluded. This is a statement of fact and we see how beautifully Swamiji’s definition of Māyā, as a statement of facts, fits in here.

Again, for all practical purposes we see nature acting. It produces the day and the night, the greenery and the desert, the turmoils in man’s mind and the upheavals in the galaxies. This is a tremendous force and we feel the impact of it every day of our life. Yet, says the Vedantist, the way for liberation, freedom is not with nature but against it. Our very life is a fight against nature. Swamiji observes: ‘We are not born as helpers of nature, but competitors with nature. We are its bond-masters, but we bind ourselves down. Why is this house here? Nature did not build it.

Nature says go and live in the forest. Man says I will build a house and fight with nature, and he does so. The whole history of humanity is a continuous fight against the so-called laws of nature, and man gains in the end.' This is so even in the internal world. 'Man,' continues Swamiji, 'as it were, cuts his way out of nature to freedom.' This nature, which is a statement of facts has been described in Vedanta as Māyā. Now we see that it matters little by what name it is called, ignorance, nature or Māyā, the power is the same. We are in it; we do not know how we came into it but we live in it. All our thinking and all our action are in it.

### ***Nature of Māyā***

What is the nature of this Māyā which is so powerful a force? And what is the way out of it? Māyā, also called *avyakta* is the Lord's power. It is without beginning; is made up of the three *gunas* — *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, and is superior to the effects. It can be inferred by the wise only by the effect it produces. And it is this Māyā that projects the world, says Sri Sankara in his *Vivekachudamani*.<sup>6</sup> Continuing he describes its nature thus: 'It is neither existent nor non-existent nor of the characteristic of both.'<sup>7</sup> It is not existent as it can be destroyed by the Knowledge of Brahman, just as the rope in the snake seen in the dark is no more existent when light flashes upon it and the rope becomes known. It is not non-existent because it projects all the differences, and can be inferred from the effects it produces. It cannot be of both characteristics because such a thing is an incongruity. By the play of its *gunas* Māyā throws a veil, as it were, on the Real substance and apparently distorts It to look like divergent things. There is a beautiful parable of Sri Ramakrishna which explains the nature of Māyā: 'A priest was once going to the village of a disciple of his. He had no servant with him. Seeing a cobbler on the way, he asked him to accompany him. The cobbler hesitated thinking that he would be a misfit, but the priest assured him that no one will know about his identity if he but kept silent. The cobbler agreed. At twilight, while the priest was sitting at prayers in the house of his disciple, another brahmana came and asked the priest's servant, to bring his shoes. True to the behest of his master, he made no response though the brahmana repeated his orders. At last, getting annoyed, the brahmana angrily said: "Sirrah, why don't you speak? Are you indeed a cobbler?" The cobbler hearing this, began to tremble with fear, and looking piteously at the priest, said: "O, venerable sir, I am found out. I dare not stay here any longer." So saying he took to his heels. Just so, as soon as Māyā is recognized, she flies away.'

Māyā is powerful no doubt but it can be overcome, says the Vedantist, by those who take recourse to Brahman. Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā*, 'This My divine Māyā composed of the *gunas* is very difficult to be crossed. Those who take refuge in Me alone can go beyond it.'<sup>8</sup> Christ too said the same thing, 'Come unto Me, ye that labour and are heavy



laden and I will give you rest.' Māyā, therefore, can be transcended only by realizing the Lord, or Brahman, the true Reality. Until then whatever we may think or do we are still in Māyā and simple denying it would not help matters.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the Soviet Weekly, August 1, 1963. Published from 3, Rosary Gardens, London, S.W.7.

<sup>2</sup> Svetasvataropanihad, 4.10.

<sup>3</sup> Isa Up. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Chandogya, 6.1.4.

<sup>5</sup> Mandukyakarika, 1.17.

<sup>6</sup> Verse 108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>8</sup> B. Gita, 7.14.

## WHAT IS YOGA?

**By Swami Paratparananda\***

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – May 1962; Vol. 49; page 2

In the broadly acknowledged pathways to God, to Peace and Blessedness, yoga is one. But this word yoga has been so freely used that by usage and tradition it has come to carry a wide variety of meanings often quite contrary to what is implied by its use in the religious literature — so much so that today the utterance of the word projects in the minds of the common man pictures quite inconsistent with religious life. On the other hand to those minds that are acquainted with the philosophical lore of India the word yoga invariably brings to the fore the name of Patanjali. For it was he who collected the thoughts that were extant and arranged them into a science. He clearly defined what it meant; codified the instructions as to how to practise it; stressed on the successive stages in its practice and lastly the goal one reached by having recourse to it. But he was by no means the originator of this science or philosophy. He only systematized the thoughts. The thoughts and instructions were already there as far back as the age of the Upanishads. The first regular treatment of this system of philosophy and its practice we come across in the *Svetasvataropanisad*. Yet, in spite of clear indications, in spite of all philosophy and all the scriptures which declare in unambiguous terms as to what is meant by yoga, the human mind has been associating yoga with something that is not religion, that is not yoga. Why?

First of all it must be remembered that man usually tries to follow the path of least resistance. And what is more natural to man than the life of the senses, the life in the gross material world? What is so alluring, and captivating as the phenomena of nature; the beauty of the sunrise, the grandeur of the midday sun when he burns fiercely and makes everyone take shelter inside thatched huts or cool places? What is so refreshing as the cool breeze of the evening when the sun has no more of that power? What is more natural than the entertainments one so cheaply comes across? In short what is more natural than the life of the senses? Most of the human species is satisfied with these things and if at all they exert, it is only to heighten the tempo of these pleasures and extend their duration. All the external sciences deal only with this part of the problem. The scientist wants to get over anxiety by amassing wealth, by procuring food and clothing in ever increasing quantities by subjecting nature to disgorge its secrets to him. Man by his natural bent of mind thus tries to think of everything in terms of utility. If yoga can make him live a hundred years enjoying sound health it is welcome. If it can give him power to rule over others, help him to name, fame and wealth it is not to

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\* Swami Paratparananda, monk of the Ramakrishna Order, was an Editor of *Vedanta Kesari* magazine (1962-1967).

be discarded, otherwise he shall shun it. He has no use for the things which have no material utility.

But this science of yoga deals with the perfection of man, to enable him to commune with the Divine; to make him perfect as 'the Father in heaven is perfect'. Here the object of his experimentation is not outside. It is the mind, ever fleeting and never restrained that he has to deal with. Here the gigantic or microscopic instruments, that man uses in the physical sciences, cannot reach. Here the senses cannot help him, rather the more turbulent the senses, the more stupendous impediments they are in his path. Yoga is a going inward; diving deep into our own minds; finding out the loop-holes through which it seeks to suck in extraneous matter; plugging the loop-holes; throwing out, as it were, the putrefying matter, and cleansing the vessel of the mind to receive the nectar of Divine grace and enlightenment. It is a long process requiring immense patience of not one but several life-times and that is why people are afraid to take it up. Even a warrior like Arjuna cries out in despair that the mind is turbulent and uncontrollable. Hence it is not strange that a large part of the populace avoids the path.

The word yoga in Sanskrit has been used ordinarily in two senses one as concentration (*yuj samadhau*) and secondly as yoking, connecting or uniting (*yujir yoge*). Patanjali and the Upanishads preceding him mostly used it in the former sense. The Bhagavad Gita, however, makes use of it in both these senses.

Patanjali at the very outset defines what yoga is. He says: 'It is the restraining of the mind-stuff from undergoing modifications'. The question now is: Why should one restrain the workings of the mind? To attain peace, to go back to our original form which is Blessedness. What does one do, if one wants to retire to rest? Does one seek the market place or the quiet corner of one's humble cottage? Obviously the latter. Why? because the atmosphere in the market place is not conducive to rest. It seethes with activity and noise, no rest is possible there. Similarly if the mind stuff is seething like a cauldron taking in forms every second how can one have peace? Can a boat sail smoothly on a choppy sea? When a storm rages mountain-high breakers are raised in the ocean; chaos only prevails then. In a mind, disturbed by the storm of passions, disturbed by the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touch presented to it by the various senses can there be serenity, can there be peace? The Kathopanishad in a telling manner emphasizes this idea:

'One who has not ceased from wicked actions, one who is not calm and collected, and one whose mind is not tranquilised that one cannot attain this Atman by the mere knowledge of Brahman.<sup>1</sup>

Mind is like a wild horse unbroken, untamed. The rider on such a horse if he does not know how to break the horse and is not strong to control it, is sure to be thrown off with the consequent danger to his life and limbs. Swami Vivekananda gives, the mind the analogy of a monkey; 'How hard it is to control the mind! Well has it been compared to the

maddened monkey. There was a monkey, restless by his own nature, as all monkeys are. As if that were not enough some one made him drink freely of wine, so that he became still more restless. Then a scorpion stung him. When a man is stung by a scorpion he jumps about for a whole day; so the poor monkey found his condition worse than ever. To complete his misery a demon entered into him. What language can describe the uncontrollable restlessness of that monkey? The human mind is like that monkey, incessantly active by its own nature; then it becomes drunk with the wine of desire, thus increasing its turbulence. After desire takes possession, comes the sting of the scorpion of jealousy of the success of others, and last of all the demon of pride enters the mind, making it think itself of all importance.<sup>2</sup> Such a mind the yoga professes to control by a gradual process, rather, if we follow the process of yoga we will be able to control the mind, says the yogin.

What is the process? Patanjali says that *yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi* are like the eight limbs of yoga. Yama and niyama are as it were its legs. They are the first to be practised: the moral disciplines like non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-receiving which are called yama;<sup>3</sup> cultivation of internal and external purity; contentment, austerity, study and worship of God, which are termed niyama<sup>4</sup>. All these efforts are for subduing the mind which always runs riot. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'The upshot of the whole thing is that, no matter what path you follow, yoga is impossible unless the mind becomes quiet. The mind of a yogi is under his control; he is not under the control of the mind.' Sri Krishna exhorts: 'By constant practice and renunciation alone can the mind be controlled.'<sup>5</sup> Further, Sri Krishna is very definite that for a man of unbridled senses and of a dissipated mind yoga is an impossibility.<sup>6</sup>

We see from the above that the very foundation of spirituality is a moral and pure life in which there is no thought of self-aggrandisement, no thought of acquisition, no thought for one's own self. The efficacy of practising each one of the above mentioned disciplines has been described at great length by Patanjali in his *Yoga sutras* and they have been demonstrated in the life of very many saints and seers, but that is not in the purview of this essay. They only go to prove that yoga is a science which can be demonstrated. But the purpose of yoga is not to prove that it is a science but that it is a science that is to be utilized to reach the Highest, the Supreme.

Simultaneously with the practice of these moral disciplines, yama and niyama, one has to cultivate the other steps like pranayama and pratyahara. A person proceeding on this path meets with wonderful experiences after some time. Concentrating the mind on the nose he would smell wonderful fragrances, concentrating in between the eyebrows, he would see many beautiful sights. This says, Swami Vivekananda, is an indication that the aspirant has just commenced his journey. But he has to discard all these and proceed further. As he

becomes more and more competent to concentrate, his capacity for dharana and dhyana (meditation) develops. A complete metamorphosis, as it were, takes place in the constitution of the aspirant. He begins to see extraordinary visions, and hear voices super-natural. His whole organism becomes well tuned to receive the finer manifestations.

Further on he comes in possession of wonderful powers. But these latter are the pitfalls into which unguided or misguided aspirants fall. They get enamoured of these powers. They think that by obtaining super-human and supernatural powers they have attained the goal. They slip from the path. Their attention is diverted from their declination. But this portends no good. A mountain climber is warned to be watchful of his steps. It is a narrow path that he treads. The scenes that unfold before him are marvellous and enchanting but if he heeds not the warning and proceeds on his path with his eyes diverted towards those wonderful sights and mind absorbed in the contemplation of the beauty he is sure to slip from the path into the bottomless chasm that stands yawning on the sides of the rugged path. Even more careful should one be in this spiritual path, which is sharp like the razor's edge.

Aspirants enamoured of these powers forget the purpose for which they gave up every-thing, the purpose for which they made bonfire of their desires. Or was there some desire still lurking in some inconspicuous corner of the heart? Infatuated with these powers they forget God and crave for material enjoyments, name and fame, the very things which they had discarded as useless and slip from the path and waste their life.

But is he completely lost? Do all his efforts go in vain like a scattered cloud? What happens to such a one who falls from the path even after sincerely seeking it in the beginning? A similar question was asked by Arjuna of Sri Krishna. But Sri Krishna replies, 'Never, does a man of benevolent action come to eternal grief. He, merited by his good acts, lives in higher regions for a long time and then takes birth in a pure and prosperous family or a family of spiritually advanced souls. There coming in contact with the knowledge he had acquired in the previous birth strives harder than before for perfection.' Though no effort is lost, a fall from the path retards greatly one's progress towards the goal.

By making samyama or concentration on any object a yogi can know its secret. The whole nature is in the form of one open book before him. But Patanjali says this does not help the main purpose of the yogi. The temptations to test those powers come. They are the obstacles in his path. One who is able to resist and overcome temptations and persevere in his pursuit that one only can succeed, and none else.

Now in the Bhagavad Gita the word yoga is sometimes used in the sense of karma yoga also. The whole of the Gita is described as a treatise on Brahma Vidya and as a yoga shastra: a scripture that purports to unite the Jivatman with Paramatman or teaches the identity of Atman and Brahman; as such whatever path is described therein is a path towards God, is a yoga. There is nothing incongruous in calling these paths as

yoga. Moreover, though in theory we can create water-tight compartments between Jnana, Bhakti, Karma and Yoga, in practice a judicious blend of all these contributes to the healthy growth of the aspirant's nature and progress.

Having seen what Yoga is, we have to examine the credentials of what passes off for yoga in the world today. A physical culturist says he teaches yoga. What are the credentials of this yoga. It can make you strong; make you immune to diseases without a dose of drug. It can make you live long. It can make you really enjoy the material pleasures. In short it can make you concentrate all your energy on the body. But is that the purpose of real yoga? Health of course is imperative for the intensive spiritual sadhana but body is only an instrument and not an end in itself. One who gives all his attention and time to the body, when will he think of God? Therefore mere physical culture cannot be the yoga a religious aspirant desires to practise.

Next let us consider the claim that the possession of the miraculous powers — such as to travel through air, remain invisible, to walk on water and the like — is the criterion of yoga. If a yogi cannot or will not do these acrobatics, he does not impress the common run of men. A conversation some devotees had with Sri Ramakrishna expresses the typical attitude of the worldly-minded and the way they judge the eminence of a spiritual personality. One day the Master was talking with a person who had returned after a pilgrimage to Banaras. The person had met the great sadhu Trilinga Swami. Sri Ramakrishna who had also met him assigned him a very high place among the saints, but in the estimation of the worldly-minded he had lost his exalted state because he could not or would not perform miracles. The pertinent question of a true seeker at this stage should be: do the powers to perform miracles bring us nearer to God? Let us have the testimony of Sri Ramakrishna. Once Sri Ramakrishna asked Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda): 'My child as the result of practising austerities I have got all the supernatural powers, such as assuming the minute dimension of an atom etc. But I have no use for them. I am now thinking of asking the Mother to transfer all these to you. For She has told me that you will have to do much of Her work. If all these powers are imparted to you, you will be able to use them when necessary. What do you say?' Narendra put the counter question to the Master, 'Sir, will they help me in realizing God?' The Master replied, 'They might be of no help to you in that respect, but they stand you in good stead when you engage yourself in God's work after realizing Him.' Even then Narendra's reply was, 'Sir, I have no need of these things. Let me realize God first and then it will be decided whether to accept them or not.' The Master was testing Narendra by tempting him as it were but when the disciple stood the test, the Master was highly pleased. Here, in the categorical assertion of the Master there is no room left for any doubt as to the uselessness of these powers in realizing God. The natural tendency of power is to corrupt man, to degrade him, as such a real

seeker of God will not dabble in these supernatural powers. If at all he possesses them he will use them for the spiritual uplift of humanity and not for self-advertisement nor for personal gains. For him the highest gain is the realization of God, gaining which he considers not anything more covetable and established in which is not moved by the mightiest of calamities.<sup>7</sup>

Another misconception is that the power to communicate with the departed spirits is a highly advanced state in yoga. Apply the yardstick of progress towards God and what do we find? We will find ourselves miles away from the path of true spirituality in the darkest of woods without any path and without any light. It should therefore be, the duty of a true seeker of God to scrupulously and carefully avoid these so-called yogas and cultivate real love and longing for God without being enchanted by magic or mystery-mongering.

Now coming to the practice of Raja yoga there is the danger, says Swami Vivekananda, of a person being mentally deranged or becoming physically invalid if one plunges into it without the guidance of a competent Guru. The aspirant is to be practically under the observation and surveillance of the teacher until he reaches the goal or until the teacher thinks he can safely leave the aspirant to sail ahead under his own power. Such teachers are few and far between, the disciplines enjoined are rigorous and the period long and indefinite. Have we that enduring patience?

If not let us avoid such a path. For what is gained through this yoga can also be achieved with less danger by bhakti also. Sri Ramakrishna unequivocally assures us not from mere hearsay but by actual experience that: 'One may have the same kumbhaka through bhaktiyoga as well. The prana stops functioning through love of God too. In the Kirtan the musician sings, '*Nitai amar mata hati*'<sup>8</sup>. Repeating this, he goes into a spiritual mood and cannot sing the whole sentence. He simply sings, 'Hati! Hati!' When the mood deepens he sings only 'Ha! Ha!' Then his prana stops through ecstasy and kumbhaka follows.'

In reviewing we have: that yoga in the religious sense is not physical culture, is not in seances, is not manifesting of supernatural powers, is not mystery-mongering but the path which leads one to God. That none of these, take us anywhere near God has been testified by the scriptures, by saints, seers and Incarnations time and again. That which unites us with God that alone is yoga, all other things are of no value worth the mention. There are four paths which lead one to God, Jnana, Bhakti, Karma and Yoga and each one can choose that which is fitted to his disposition or which the teacher by his intuitive knowledge thinks apt and suited to the aspirant's temperament. The first and last test of yoga therefore is whether it leads us Godward. If not it is not yoga but *bhoga* (enjoyment), or even *roga* (disease) and is to be discarded.

<sup>1</sup> II.24.

<sup>2</sup> Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.1, p.174, Seventh Edition.

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<sup>3</sup> Yoga sutras.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Gita, VI.35.

<sup>6</sup> Gita, VI.36.

<sup>7</sup> Gita, VI.22.

<sup>8</sup> My Nitai dances like a mad elephant.



## WHERE TO SEEK COMFORT

Swami Paratparananda

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – December 1966; Vol. 53; page 339

### I

THAT this world is a conglomeration of good and evil, of happiness and misery, of concord and discord, of endearment and estrangement, of union and separation, of origination and destruction is a known fact. All human effort is to go beyond these pairs of opposites, to attain unalloyed bliss. Men try to reach that state in various ways; some by wealth, some by progeny, some by doing good, some by intellectual attainments, some by obtaining power, yet in the end none of these attain it. Instead of the peace that they seek, through these means, they attain only unrest, either provoked by a thirst for more and more of the things sought, or lost in the care and tending of the things obtained.

The world that we thus create absorbs all our mind and the more we get attached to things and begin to identify ourselves with them, the more acute becomes the anguish at separation or estrangement from them. Man knows this, yet he cannot get away from them, nay he does not even attempt to get away. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'the camel eats the thorny bushes and in doing so bleeds profusely, yet it will not stop eating the thorny plants'. Even so is man's life here. He knows that he has to undergo untold miseries in this world, once he gets entangled into it, yet he cannot help involving himself in it. What is it that compels him to do it? His desires and passions; his seeking happiness and comfort outside of himself.

Indian psychologists tell us that the creation is an imbalance of the three constituents, *gunas* of Prakrti or Nature. These *gunas* are to be found in every created being. '*Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are the three *gunas*, which have originated from Prakrti and bind the immutable Self dwelling in the body. *Sattva* because it is pure (like a crystal) reflects light, and is quiescent and binds through conjunction with happiness and knowledge. Know *rajas* to be of a pleasing nature, the source of all thirst and attachment. It binds the Self through association with activity. Know *tamas* which deludes all beings to be born of nescience. By error, laziness

and sleep it binds the Self,<sup>1</sup> says Sri Krishna in the *Gītā*. As already pointed out, all these *gunas* are existent in every being; only in some people some one of them is predominant and in others some other, and so on, and according to the dominating factor man becomes quiescent, active or idle. It is *rajas* or the active principle in man that makes him restless and run after pleasures. Goaded by desires man commits good and bad deeds, the fruits of which he alone has to reap. The fruits of good deeds taste sweet but of bad ones taste bitter. It is then that we feel miserable. We, however, try to foist the blame for our suffering on to someone else, forgetting that it is the fruits of our own action that we are reaping. It is at this time that man seeks solace and comfort. Where shall he seek it?

An agnostic or a sceptic has no belief in a higher being. He relies on matter, material comforts, to soothe him. Does he attain it? No. It is then that he takes to intoxicants and tranquillizers in order to forget his unhappiness. But the mind is such a mechanism that it remembers only those things which we want to forget and thus chases man, unceasingly from pillar to post, as it were. Man can escape even from the most vigilant hand of law but not from his own mind. Like a shadow it accompanies him everywhere.

Perhaps misery is placed in this world as a corrective to an erring humanity. 'Well,' you may ask, 'do not the believers suffer? We see that they suffer more than the unbelievers.' Pleasure and pain alternate in this world. As Swami Vivekananda says, 'Life is and must be accompanied by evil. A little evil is the source of life'. What does he mean by the latter statement? It is because there is a little evil in us that we are born. The *Praśna Upanisad* remarks: 'By meritorious deeds one attains the meritorious worlds and by sinful acts the sinful worlds and when there is a balance of good and evil the creature is born in the form of a human being'.<sup>2</sup>

## II

Now, dexterity is in getting beyond good and evil, for in that alone lies peace. How to do it? By reposing confidence in God and submitting to His will. How can we know what His will is? Whatever happens, happens by His will. In that case why shouldn't we think that what we attempt to do is also His will? True, there is no argument against that. But are you sure that it is His will that is working through you? If so you will not feel elated when success comes and depressed when your attempts result in failure. If on the other hand, there is the slightest elation or ego, that you have achieved something or you are the doer, then you do not believe in what you say. It is hypocrisy that makes you say that God's will is

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<sup>1</sup> Gita, XIV. 5 to 8.

<sup>2</sup> Prasna Upanisad, 3.7.

working through you. Should we then submit meekly to all calamities? No one advocates that. As long as you are aware that you are the agent of actions, you must resist all that you feel as wrong. The dictum 'Resist not evil' is meant for very highly evolved souls. It does not mean only physical non-resistance but mental also. No modifications should arise in the mind of one devoted to non-resistance against the evil doer. When such a state is reached you can speak of this dictum. For ordinary people the path is to resist evil by all means at their command.

How does solace come if we believe that it is God's will that is working? The misery that comes is not softened, the blow that falls is not padded because of that belief. No, we do not say that. Such a belief does not mean that we will not suffer calamities, will always be free from worry, but that the strength to bear the pain comes along with the tribulations. We will not be frantic when calamities occur, knowing that it is His will that is sending them.

Does an ordinary man who believes in God has this faith, this strength? Each one gets his desserts according as his faith is strong or weak. It is said that faith can move mountains but that faith itself must be like a mountain, unshakable. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell a story of a Guru and a disciple. The disciple was a milk-maid, who used to supply the Guru with milk. She lived across a river and had to wait for the ferry boat to cross the stream. One day when she was late the Guru asked her what made her come late. She explained that as she had to wait for the ferry boat she was delayed. The Guru said, 'What! Can you not take the name of the Lord — whose name ferries across people even from this vast ocean of transmigration — and cross this river?' The woman was a simple village lady having implicit faith in the words of her Guru. After some days the Guru observed that the woman was very regular, not even a day was she late. He then asked her 'My child, how is it that you are regular these days?' 'Why, revered Sir, did you not tell me that I could cross the river by taking the name of the Lord? I do it, and therefore I have not to wait for the ferry boat and am regular in my service to you,' replied the woman. The Guru could not believe that this was possible. He commanded her to demonstrate the phenomenon. The woman walked over the water taking the name of the Lord as if she was walking on solid ground whereas the Guru himself walked into the water, and was seen tucking his cloth lest it should get wet. The woman had faith whereas the Guru had not and each was rewarded according to his faith.

How does this faith develop? By being simple, by being guileless. When one is guileless he trusts in the person whom God has chosen to send to him as his teacher. He implicitly follows him, once he comes to know about the genuineness of the teacher.

### III

How about those who are not so straightforward or simple? They

have to struggle hard to overcome their crookedness. They have to pray with sincerity to the Lord that He may straighten all their angularities and crookednesses. What if the prayers are not answered? That doubt itself shows that we have not taken to the path seriously, with all earnestness. Swami Vivekananda says, 'How much of tempests and waves one has to weather, before one reaches the haven of Peace! The greater a man has become, the fiercer the ordeal he has had to pass through'. So we should not give up, if our prayers are not answered all at once. The struggle must continue whatever happens. For there is no comfort elsewhere. Where will you go? In what will you trust? In wealth, progeny, relations, friends? How far can they help and how can they dispel your miseries which are beyond all human help? Knowing that no one is our own except God we have to take shelter in Him. Seek comfort in Him. Swami Vivekananda says with authority, 'Give up all "me and mine". To him who has nothing in the universe the Lord comes'. If you read his letters you will find that these words came out of the fullness of the heart, out of his own experience; that is why even now his words thrill and infuse confidence in the readers. The words of those who have touched and felt the Infinity have a vigour of their own. These words, like fire, consume all doubts and vacillations of those who hear or read them.

Why then do believers too grumble and groan under the axe of misery? Because they have not accepted the Lord *in toto*. And it is not possible also to accept Him in such a way as long as there is the slightest desire for enjoyment, as long as there is the slightest imperfection. Sri Krishna assures Arjuna, 'I take the responsibility of supplying the needs and of protection of those who think of Me alone and serve and adore Me always and are ever devoted to Me'.<sup>3</sup>

The worldly-wise may then question whether the Lord is partial. If so, He is no better than a human being. To this Sri Krishna himself replies: 'I am equally manifest in all beings. No one is hateful or dear to Me. Yet those who worship Me with devotion I am in them and they are in Me'.<sup>4</sup> The Lord is present in every creature as the inner-controller, as the inmost Being. How then can He hate any one? The meaning is the devotee loses the differentiation and distance that an ordinary man feels from the Lord. To the devotee the Lord becomes his own and the things mundane are only of secondary importance, or of no importance at all. His life becomes God-centred. There is a song which describes this attitude of the *bhakta*.

*Thou art my All in All, O Lord! — The  
Life of my life, the Essence of essence; In the three worlds I have  
none else but  
Thee to call my own.*

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<sup>3</sup> Gita, IX, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., IX.29.

*Thou art my peace, my joy, my hope;  
 Thou my support, my wealth, my glory;  
 Thou my wisdom and my strength.  
 Thou art my home, my place of rest; my dearest friend, my next of kin;  
 My present and my future, Thou; my heaven and my salvation.  
 Thou art my scriptures, my commandments; Thou art my ever gracious  
 Guru;  
 Thou the Spring of my boundless bliss. Thou art the Way, and Thou the  
 Goal;  
 Thou the Adorable One, O Lord! Thou art the Mother tender-hearted;  
 Thou the chastising Father;  
 Thou the Creator and Protector; Thou the Helmsman who doth steer  
 My craft across the sea of life.<sup>5</sup>*

#### IV

What about the wicked who have indulged in evil deeds? Have they no way out? To them also Sri Krishna promises deliverance. 'Even though a man is most wicked if he worships Me with one-pointed devotion, he should be considered as a noble soul, for he is rightly engaged'.<sup>6</sup> The purport is that a man once wicked is not always wicked. There are chances for him to reform. If he takes shelter in the Lord all his evil tendencies will drop off by themselves as the leaves from a tree in winter. The sinner may be turned into a saint if he constantly remembers and worships Him. 'Anon, he (the wicked one) becomes a saint and attains ever-lasting peace. O son of Kunti, know firmly that My devotee never comes to grief'.<sup>7</sup> This is the unequivocal assurance of the Lord to Arjuna. Sri Ramakrishna speaks of the dependence of the kitten on its mother. 'The kitten knows only how to call its mother, crying, "Mew, mew!" It remains satisfied wherever its mother puts it. And the mother cat puts the kitten sometimes in the kitchen, sometimes on the floor, and sometimes on the bed. When it suffers it cries only, "Mew, mew!" That's all it knows. But as soon as the mother hears this cry, wherever she may be, she comes to the kitten.' The mother cat carries the kitten in its mouth and therefore there is no fear of fall for it. A man's trust in God and yearning for him should be so intense, then and then alone will he feel the response.

Here again, the doubt, already answered, may be raised in another form: Why does not the Lord give faith in Him to all? Why to some and not to others? And to those some again why in various degrees? 'Neither agency nor works does the Lord create for the creatures, nor does he create for them any association with fruits of deeds. Their nature alone

<sup>5</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, PP. 776-7, second edition, 1947. Pub.: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4.

<sup>6</sup> Gita, IX, 30.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., IX.31.

engages them in work,' <sup>8</sup> declares Sri Krishna. Here nature is identified with *avidyā*, nescience. 'The Lord does not receive the sins of some nor does He accept their merits. Knowledge is covered by ignorance and therefore creatures become deluded.' <sup>9</sup> All the conceit in respect of agency, works and enjoyment of the non-discriminative is due to nescience, *avidyā*. 'To them who have their ignorance destroyed by the knowledge of the Self the Supreme Reality is evident like the sun.' <sup>10</sup> It is attributing of agency of actions to oneself, due to ignorance, that brings in all this difference. Otherwise how can the Self which is pure and associationless can be said to be miserable. There will not be any sorrow when this identification of our Self with the body, senses and mind is transcended. Misery, fear, jealousy and the like arise because of seeing duality. 'When one sees that all that exists is only the manifestation of the Ātman, the Self, then where is grief, and where is delusion, for him who sees everything as one,' <sup>11</sup> says the *īśāvāsyopaniṣad*. Another Upaniṣad says 'from (seeing) duality alone fear arises'.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as the layers of ignorance are peeled off from our vision more and more light of knowledge shines within us and the wrong concepts that we had regarding the world, drop away yielding place to the true ones. When true knowledge dawns the vale of misery turns into a mart of mirth. All things remain as before; their contents do not change, but the attitude, of one who witnesses, changes. It is the Lord's world that the devotee sees and he can have no fear from it. The Advaitin sees not duality but the nondual Brahman pervading everything and therefore is at peace with himself and the world.

## V

Now, what about those who are entangled in the world already? To them, Sri Ramakrishna says: "Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all — with wife and children, father and mother — and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.

"A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'my Rama', or 'my Hari'. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all."

One should live in the world like the maidservant of this example.

Thus we see that in God, Brahman or the Supreme Being alone is our comfort and not anywhere else.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., V.14.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., V.15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., V.16.

<sup>11</sup> Isa Up., 7.

<sup>12</sup> Br. Up., I.iv.2.

## WHY WE FAIL TO RECOGNIZE SPIRITUAL PERSONALITIES

**Swami Paratparananda**

Editorial of The Vedanta Kesari Magazine – January 1967; Vol. 53; page 379

It is our great misfortune that we are unable to recognize spiritual personalities when they are still in the mortal frame and utilize their presence amidst us for our onward progress in the path. Why is it so? What prevents or veils our vision to perceive the divine? First of all, there are no outward indications by which we could know the highly evolved souls; to borrow a phrase from the Holy Mother 'they do not grow horns' by which they could be recognized. Secondly, they do not go about broadcasting their spiritual stature; they behave as though they are the lowest amongst the lowly. Thirdly, they live and move with us as if they are ordinary human beings suffering bodily ailments as any others, and sorrowing for the death of the near ones or worried over the illness of others. Thus veiled they escape attention of the common run of men. These divine personalities can be recognized only by a few advanced souls to whom they reveal their true being.

Now the question will be: Do these advanced souls require any help? They could have somehow reached the goal. A healthy man does not need tending. It is the ailing alone that needs the physician. Why then do not the Incarnations announce their arrival and minister to the vast multitudes which grovel in darkness? For many reasons they abstain from doing so. First of all, having taken a human form, they have to respect its limitations. Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother to send him Her pure-souled devotees, when he found that those who came to him were steeped in worldliness. He said to the Divine Mother, "Why dost Thou bring such worthless wayward people here? I cannot do so much. Let there be at most one-fourth or so of a measure of water to one measure of milk; but now it is not so; there are five measures water to one measure of milk; my eyes are burning with smoke as I continue pushing the fuel into the fire. If thou likest, go and give personally; I cannot do so much feeding of the fuel into the fire; don't bring such people any more".<sup>1</sup>

The question is why did he pray so? Though he had come for the rejuvenation of mankind in the religious path, their redemption, it was

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<sup>1</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master, Pub: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4. P.605, III Edition, 1963.

physically impossible for one human frame to meet the needs of all and sundry. For that purpose he had to train up persons who would do it for him. If he wasted his time which was ebbing away from his life-span how could he accomplish his task? That was why he prayed and even fought with the Divine Mother to send him Her pure-souled devotees so that he could train them and work through them.

Further, human estimation of spirituality is warped by desires and hankerings. Men judge spirituality by the grandeur, splendour and occult powers a person possesses. But what does this all lead to but wealth, honour, fame and creature comforts? People will flock to such persons for getting cured of their maladies, obtaining wealth, progeny and the like. What do we find in the life of Sri Ramakrishna? Quite the opposite. Let us quote his own words. "When I first had my exalted state of mind, my body would radiate light. My chest was always flushed. Then I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother do not reveal Thyself outwardly. Please go inside'. That is why my complexion is so dull now. If my body were still luminous, people would have tormented me; a crowd would always have thronged here. Now there is no outer manifestation. That keeps weeds away. Only genuine devotees will remain with me now."<sup>2</sup>

People do not always want to know God or realize Him, but to use Him. What can I get out of Him? That is the attitude of most people. With this same end in view people approach spiritual persons also; their motive is selfish and not enlightenment.

It may now be objected that the original question still remains unanswered; that this is only a by-passing of the issue, an evasion of the problem. To this we reply: There is no need to side-track the issue. The answer is there in the question itself. Does the patient want to be cured? That is the point. If so the physician is always ready; at least in the religious path it has been so, and therefore there is no room to doubt that it will not be so in the future. Take for instance the life of any great saviour and you will find that wherever anyone repented of his deeds and wanted to be reformed there succour was not denied, nay it went seeking the fallen. In the life of Jesus we have the example of the woman who was taken in adultery. She was not merely saved from physical torture but better still was retrieved from her misguided life.

What was Girish Chandra Ghosh when he came to Sri Ramakrishna? Did he not in one of his drunken states abuse the Master in the vilest language? Yet, was he not saved, was he not reformed? The chief thing is the desire to become better. If that is lacking no amount of force would reform anyone. Swami Vivekananda told a story about a person who was

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<sup>2</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master, Pub: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4. P.816, III Edition, 1957.



confined to a dark dungeon for years. When he was at last released and was brought into the world of free air and light he felt the light too much for his unaccustomed eyes. His prayer for mercy was that he be confined to the dungeon again. Such is the pathetic condition of most of the people. They do not want to see light but prefer to live in the dark. Will such people understand even if the Incarnation announces himself as the son of God or Man and stands before them? They will not. Sri Krishna says in the Gita, "Fools despise Me who have taken a human form without knowing My divine nature, as the great Lord of all creatures. Such persons are befooled into vain hopes, into devotion to vain deeds and fruitless knowledge and thus are deluded to take recourse to demoniacal and cruel natures".<sup>3</sup> Should Godmen then "cast pearls before swine", and allow them to "trample them under their feet and turn again and rend them"?

Not only do these Godmen not cast away the pearls but treasure them into caskets which will be able to hold them and be of much value to humanity. Many people came to Sri Ramakrishna but few stuck to him till the last; they were the chosen few, reminding us of Christ's famous saying, 'Many are called but few are chosen'.

Why does this happen? Because, of those who swell the crowd many come out of curiosity, many more out of greed and selfish motives and they are sifted when the real test is applied. Sri Ramakrishna tells those who were near him in his last illness: "Do you know why I have this illness? It has the same significance. Those whose devotion to me has a selfish motive behind it will run away at the sight of my illness".<sup>4</sup> That is what people ask: "If you are a holy man why should you suffer from bodily ailments?" One who cannot cure his own ills how will he help others — that is the idea of people who approach with selfish motives.

But we have to know that outward grandeur is an impediment and a danger even for a highly evolved person. Only those who have gone beyond praise and blame, who have conquered lust, greed, and anger and who have a message to deliver can be safe even with splendour. For they are in the keeping of God. He does not allow them to stumble. The greatest of praise is to them like filth and worldly attractions are disdainful like the ashes of the cremation ground. Let us remember here what we have already seen in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, that the Incarnations want to remain as unknown as possible, lest people of low minds pester them for the fulfilment of their desires.

All this lead us to the inevitable conclusion that with a mind full of desires we cannot know a divine personality even if we live with him for

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<sup>3</sup> Gita, IX. 11 & 12.

<sup>4</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 816. op. cit.

years. That was what happened to Hridayaram, the nephew and a long time devout attendant of Sri Ramakrishna. How unstintedly did he not serve the Master? But could he understand him? If he had, would he have teased and tortured him towards the end? That is the enigma, that is the paradox of life. This shows that not only service, but the attitude and motive with which we serve is also important. On the one hand is Hridayaram's example, on the other is Lātu Maharaj's. What a vast difference? How poles apart? One wanted to utilize Sri Ramakrishna for his selfish ends and the other knew nothing, wanted nothing except service to him. But how can the poor human being who is accustomed to the glamour of the world know the soothing sweetness of coming in contact with divine personalities, unless they themselves reveal it through their grace?

Sri Ramakrishna points out: 'How many did know Sri Rama as an Incarnation? Only a handful of Rishis. Others knew him only as the son of Daśaratha'. How many knew Sri Ramakrishna himself as an Incarnation? Very few indeed. Many thought of him as a great *sādhaka*, a great *sādhu* and so on. How much less possibility was there of knowing the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna as the Divine Mother? In the case of the Master at least there was the phenomenon of his ecstasies and *samādhi*, which everyone could witness. But in the instance of the Holy Mother that too was a hidden chapter. None, except, one or two of her women devotees knew about the exalted states into which she entered and re-entered time and again. Perhaps they too must have been allowed the privilege of being a witness to these, her states, not more than once or twice during their long association with her. For others to know her truly was therefore an impossibility.

Hers was outwardly an uneventful life. There were no spectacular happenings to attract attention of the worldly — no miracles, no pomp, no manifestation of occult powers. A few incidents of her life will make this clear, and explain why we fail to find out spiritually exalted beings. Only those who can read in between the lines of their life histories, will find much material to mould their own lives and make them blessed.

Sri Sarada Devi was born in an obscure village, of unsophisticated but pious parents and brought up in the confines of the village home. She was married at the age of five to Sri Ramakrishna, a person who had completely forgotten the world and given his mind to God. After marriage he seems to have entirely forgotten her — except for a brief period of a few months when on a visit to his native village, during which period he had taken ample care to teach her every art of housekeeping — until she went to Dakshineswar, thirteen years after their marriage. There she served Sri Ramakrishna, as is expected of a Hindu woman, with devotion. Nothing, at first sight, in her life appears extraordinary. Birth, bringing up and marriage all were of the ordinary kind. Of course, we are not alluding

here to the visions of her parents before her birth as they are not outward manifestations. We are also not recounting the experience of the Holy Mother herself on different occasions, as these also are subjective. These are matters that do not appeal to the modern mind until they themselves get a taste for the spiritual life. But we shall find enough and more material in her life by way of concrete help she has rendered in the uplift of many a soul.

Now, her devotion to the Master was not an ordinary one. It was not due to the earthly relationship between them. It was based on a higher consciousness. The Holy Mother seems to have been conscious of the purport for which Sri Ramakrishna had incarnated. This is evident from the dialogue which took place between them on her very first visit to Dakshineswar. Let us recall it here. Once Sri Ramakrishna asked the Holy Mother: 'Do you want to drag me down into Maya?' Prompt came the reply from her, 'Why should I do that? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life'. Here we should remember that the Holy Mother was then in the prime of her youth and if she was not aware of the purpose of Sri Ramakrishna's advent as well as of her own, if she was an ordinary woman, it would have been impossible for her even to understand what the Master was talking about. Think, for instance, how many of her age at the present time can understand this question set by the Master? Few indeed. And even among those who can understand how many can boldly say what she said? We are sure there will not be one. By this we do not mean that there are no renouncers at present but theirs is the path while the Holy Mother had reached the goal, from whose empyrean heights she had spoken those words. Her life after this is a demonstration of this statement of hers.

Consider also how Sri Ramakrishna was looked upon at that time. Most of the people knew him as the mad brahmin of Dakshineswar. The Holy Mother too had heard these strong and persistent rumours and had therefore personally come to Dakshineswar to verify it for herself, and be of service to him in any capacity. But, when more than half the world who had come in touch with him or heard of him, so to say, had considered him mad, she *knew* it from her personal experience to be otherwise. Note the word 'knew' here, it was not a fond hope or mere belief of hers, but personal knowledge. How could she know it if she were not herself a divine being? These things do not have any importance for a superficial observer, clouded as his intellect is with passions, prejudices, pre-conceived notions and the like. Spirituality cannot be judged from outward appearances. It is a matter of inner transmutation and, as Sri Ramakrishna said, only a jeweller can appraise a diamond. Unless we progress ourselves in the spiritual path how can we know about the state reached by others? And it is also true that the same persons whom we at the outset consider as mere aspirants, receive higher and higher estimation and reverence from us, as we proceed in the religious path. When even after much effort we cannot gauge the depth of their being we

are simply wonderstruck at their eminence. That is what took place in the case of the Holy Mother also. Even some of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, at the beginning, could not understand her spiritual greatness. What then to speak of ordinary mortals! They only saw her engaged in household chores, serving devotees, looking after the household as any other woman. They did not have the penetrative acumen to see through these veils. And all through her life, the Holy Mother lived in this way; unknowable to many and unknown to many more even amongst those who came in contact with her.

We can only have a glimpse of her greatness by the respect and reverence the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna paid to her; by the way in which she guided the Ramakrishna Order unobtrusively and silently. The greatest problems of the organization were placed before her for advice and her opinion was accepted as the supreme judgment, as the correct interpretation of the message of Sri Ramakrishna. We shall cite here an instance: When some one raised a doubt regarding the programme of work chalked out by Swami Vivekananda for the monastic Order, the Holy Mother put this doubt to rest by this reply: 'How many are there who can meditate and practise Japa all the time? At first they earnestly practise these disciplines, but their brains become heated in the long run by sitting constantly on their prayer rugs. They become very vain. They also suffer from mental worries by reflecting on different things. It is much better to work than to allow the mind to roam at large. For when the mind gets a free scope to wander, it creates much confusion. My Naren (Swami Vivekananda) thought of these things and wisely founded institutions where people would do disinterested work'.<sup>5</sup>

On another occasion when a disciple was passing through a difficult time in his spiritual endeavour and was finding it impossible to continue his meditation, it was she who prescribed the right remedy and cured him of the tension he was experiencing. Instances can be multiplied to show how simple and effective were her ways of dealing with spiritual problems. Could one who is not oneself a knower of God direct another correctly to his goal? It is an impossibility. Even in the mundane world one cannot teach a subject of which he has himself no knowledge. What then to speak of the knowledge of the inner life!

Thus we see that we fail to recognize, an incarnation, a divine being, due to a want in our own perspectives. We have a tendency to overlook whatever is easily accessible. And this has arisen from the fact that we look for gorgeous and glorious things that are perceived by our senses. In other words we are bound by our senses and inhibitions. But spirituality is what transcends the senses; how then is it possible for man to know it through them? Then what is the way? The way is to go beyond the senses i.e., to acquire purity of mind, to empty the mind of all desires and passions. How can it be done? To say it briefly, it can be done only

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<sup>5</sup> Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother. Pub. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4. p.526. Third Edition, 1958.

through filling the mind with God, by the thought of God, His contemplation. The more we fill our mind with God the more empty it becomes of the other impressions, and the more we are able to do this the better will we be able to contact the divine beings, even though they may not be present in the physical frame.

## **WHY DO WE NOT MAKE PROGRESS IN RELIGIOUS LIFE?**

**Swami Paratparananda**

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THIS is a question that persistently crops up or should do so in the mind of a genuine spiritual aspirant. For it is the way by which one can evaluate one's progress — not for elation —, find out the impediments that obstruct one's path and search out the requisite means to overcome these hurdles; in short, it is a pointer to self-analysis. And self-analysis for a religious is as essential as breathing to a living being. Devoid of self-analysis one is apt to sink into self-complacency from where the way is not far off to ego-centrism.

Let us examine where man is plausible to flounder in the present set-up. First of all it is important to note that we have to begin with whatever equipment we possess viz., with our wandering, wavering, unruly mind. In the ancient context, we perceive, the situation was quite different, people had a different lay out, plan of life, as far as religious life was concerned. There was the system of living with the preceptor, who was a man of advanced spiritual attainments. The teacher was there to test the disciples and regulate their life so that it did not stagnate; that it flowed towards its goal smoothly. Moreover, under the ancient system the knowledge of the scriptures was imparted very early in life. The whole atmosphere was rendered conducive to the healthy growth of the body, mind and spirit. We do not have today many of these fundamental advantages, instead we are overwhelmed by an antagonistic, atheistic environment. Our education has become academically oriented and money-motivated. Religion has become a taboo for many. Hampered and oppressed as we are by this heavy weather, most uncongenial to the growth of religion, we still have to make headway.

What do we mean by progress in spiritual life? How can we know about it? We cannot know about another man's spiritual growth, for it is not like his physical growth noticeable from outside. Nor is it something which the present scientific and technological appliances can reveal. It is not concerned with the body or its inner organs superficially. It is the mind that grows and changes, that expands and is illuminated, that sheds its weeds of selfishness and puts forth blossoms of a myriad hues of

selflessness. And who can judge it except oneself? How are we sure that we do not make a mistake in such judgments? Well, there are several codes by which we can safeguard ourselves from overestimating our progress and being a prey to conceit. One of these is absence of conceit itself. The pride of holiness is perhaps the worst type of vanity which attaches itself to man and leaves with great reluctance. 'Holier than thou' attitude is not a good ground for the germination of other helpful tendencies on the spiritual path. Was such an attitude to spring up in our minds we may be certain that our progress is barred. For who can know what instrument the Lord will like to use to manifest holiness and knowledge? Are there not instances when pupils who prided themselves of their learning were humbled by the teacher, by making one among them whom they despised take the role of the teacher? There is the story of Totaka, a disciple of Sri Śankara who appeared like a dunce in his studies but who excelled in the personal service to his Guru. The story goes that Śankara's other disciples looked almost with condescension on him. One day when all of them, except Totaka, had assembled for their daily lesson, the disciples asked Śankara, why the lesson was not being begun. Sri Śankara saw contempt for the absent disciple, as it were, seeping out of those words. Without a word the teacher waited for the absent disciple to come. And when he came Sri Śankara asked him to take the seat of the preceptor and hold the class for the day. There was no protest from Totaka and no objection from the others. Sri Śankara had along with his command infused into the disciple the knowledge that was necessary to explain the abstruse truths of philosophy. Thus we see how little we know about the will of God. So, there should be no room for any type of vanity in a holy man, and those who want to follow in his footsteps have also to eschew all of it.

We may remember here that prefatorial prayer, sung prior to the chanting of the *Gītā*: 'He whose grace makes the dumb speak volubly, and the lame cross the mountains, to Him, Mādhava, who is supreme Bliss, I bow down.' If a Swami Vivekananda could say, 'thousands of Vivekanandas may spring forth through one gracious glance of Sri Ramakrishna's eye', is it not preposterous on our part to presume the attitude of superiority? Whenever that attitude creeps into our mind let us ask this question: What have I achieved that I want to dictate to others, as if from a pedestal of judgment, of what they shall do or not do? Have I realized that Highest that I preen myself and strut about? We know that parents who are really solicitous for the welfare of their children never praise them in their presence, though they feel elated at the progress they make in their studies or in life. For there is the likelihood of the children getting conceited, and if we can remember that 'pride goeth before a fall' we would be cautious. Here for instance is the story of Śvetaketu. Śvetaketu was sent by his father to learn under a preceptor and on his return after the completion of the required period of stay with

the Guru, the father noticed that the son moved about with pride and aloofness. The father was disturbed, but he was himself a teacher par excellence and he knew how to wean away his son from his possible fall. One day he addressed him, 'My son, how is it that you move about like a man of high attainments? Have you by any chance known that *One by hearing which all things unheard become heard, by knowing which everything else becomes known?*' The son was startled out of his smugness. He was puzzled. He stammered and stuttered. 'How could that be, father, I have not heard of it. Perhaps, my preceptor did not know about it. Please deign to instruct me yourself.'<sup>1</sup> From the question that was asked by the father it seems that a man of knowledge, a man of realization, alone has the right to become proud and stand off from the world. No doubt only such a man has the right to do so, if any one had. But it is those very persons who have realized the oneness of everything, of God in all and all in God, who are the most humble. There is no pretence of humility in them; neither is it a cultivated one. Theirs happens to be the spontaneous humility. Therefore what the teacher means is that vanity in others is unforgivable when there is no vanity in the knowers of God. And if on any account they are seen to be indifferent to the world it is because in that state they are neglectful of even their own bodies. It is a state where they see nothing and hear nothing except God. The creation to them, their own bodies too, look like pillow cases without substance. The Substance, the Consciousness they perceive is without destruction. Elsewhere than this you will find God-men most sympathetic and most human to the problems of life, otherwise why should people flock to them for succour? When the mother who had lost her only child ran with the dead body to the Buddha and prayed for its restoration to life, was not Buddha most sympathetic? Did he not feel for the bereaved woman? But he was wise, he had come to teach the world the transience of all creation and could not fool them any more than they already were. Yet he did not give then a discourse on philosophy to the mother. Instead he told her to bring some mustard seeds from a house that had known no bereavement so that he could revive the child. Was not the truth told and yet without wounding the sensibility of the bereaved mother? To Sri Ramakrishna also many a bereaved soul came and were solaced. To one of them he said, 'Is it not natural that one should feel depressed and forlorn if a son who is as one's own part passes off?' Then he cited his own case. 'When Akshaya (Sri Ramakrishna's nephew) passed away I was near him and I saw the soul passing out of the body, as if the sword was being taken out of its scabbard and I laughed. But later on, for three days I felt as if my heart was being wrung like a wet towel. If that happens to me how much more should you not feel? But death pursues man every where, so be prepared'. He then sang a song in his soul-stirring voice and with great pathos which soothed the heart of the

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<sup>1</sup> Chandogya, VI.i.3&7.



bereaved man as with a balm. So if any one carries an impression that God-men are unfeeling, he is most unfortunately mistaken. Their sympathy on the other hand is genuine and not in any way formal, lip sympathy.

Now, we find that all great teachers were of the opinion that humility is the ground where other virtues could sprout and prosper. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Rain water does not collect on a mound. It runs down and collects in lowly places'. Likewise, we could surmise that all virtues accumulate in the humble alone.

## II

We do some austerities, practise *sādhana* of some kind, get some dreams and visions of gods and goddesses and think that we have attained a great deal and that there is nothing further to be achieved. While all these are very good and not to be decried in any way, the conclusion drawn, that one has become holier than another, who has not had the good fortune to experience any of those things, is an attitude quite out of tune with religious life. Sri Krishna gives us an inkling into the way devotees behave when they happen to meet: 'Those who have given their minds to Me, whose sense organs are dedicated to Me, they, explaining and talking about Me to one another, are always pleased and happy'.<sup>2</sup> This is the meeting ground of devotees where it augurs well for everyone. Speaking about the Lord makes us forget our narrow personalities. We are lifted to a higher sphere from whence, for the time being at least, all mundane things appear as paltry, frivolous and flimsy, not worth any attention. Under such circumstances, how can one having some *sādhana* to his credit look down upon any one? How can arrogance dominate his mind? None of these should be able to capture or influence the minds of devotees if their struggle had been sincere, if their practices were properly directed. The very fact that we are unable to overcome these drawbacks in us must make us aware that our efforts are insufficient, or our inner urges are stronger and contrary. If in these circumstances one does a little more austerity and the like, how can he claim any preferential or exceptional treatment from others? On the other hand, if one does any religious act with a view to gain name and fame or recognition, one defeats the very purpose for which they are done. Religion is for realization, for emancipation and not for getting bound in this *samsara*. As it is, we have enough impediments to tie us down here without adding any more to their legion. Sri Krishna tells us about some of these qualities which make us return to this round of births and deaths again and again. 'Ostentation, arrogance, self-conceit, anger, harshness and ignorance,'<sup>3</sup> are some of the qualities that are termed demoniacal

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<sup>2</sup> Gita, X.9.

<sup>3</sup> IBID., XVI.4.

and which require to be exterminated from our minds. Actually it is these, along with those of a like nature, that weigh us down, not allow us to rise higher. They are like the ballast to the balloon. But unlike the ballast, which we are free to cast away at our will or pleasure, these qualities stick on to us tenaciously once they are given room to dwell in. Even to turn out any one of them is a lifetime's work. Should we then allow them to get hold of us? Knowingly we should not, and caution must be taken to see that they do not sneak in unawares. Last but not the least aggressive of these passions are lust and greed. We find the whole world is moved by these two passions. Analyse the motives of all actions the world over, either of individuals or nations, and you will come to know about the truth of this statement. That is why Sri Ramakrishna once said that 'lust and greed' alone constituted Māyā. They cover man's intelligence and lead him away from his goal. It is not necessary for us to go into the working of every wicked tendency. We have traced the workings of one of them and the depredations and havoc it is able to do; others are equally if not more depredatory.

### III

We must know that the mind cannot be made a vacuum. It has need of something to contain in itself. So, a good method of driving out the evil tendencies is to infuse, inject good tendencies into it. Sri Krishna lists them in the *Gītā* as follows: 'Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in the yoga of knowledge, charity, self-control, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity, straightforwardness, non-injury, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, peace, freedom from slander, kindness to beings, non-covetousness, gentleness, modesty, and non-fickleness, courage, forgiveness, fortitude, purity of body, absence of hatred and pride — these, O Arjuna are the possessions of those born with divine endowments'.<sup>4</sup> Therefore along with our spiritual practices we should absorb some of these divine attributes little by little. It may not be possible for us to command them all at once. But if we try and pray to God sincerely we shall be able to fill ourselves with most of these good tendencies which in their turn will render us immense service. Even the possession of one of these qualities is an asset in spiritual life.

The common trait that is difficult to get rid of is jealousy. Sri Ramakrishna's remedy for all passions is to turn them Godward. 'Be jealous of God that He favours others with divine visions and blessedness and not you.' What is the meaning of the above statement? At first it seems there is little more than what meets the eye; but if you ponder deeply over it you will realize that it is not jealousy that is stressed there but turning it towards God — a process which makes you naturally think

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., XVI.1-3.

of God, pray to Him earnestly to reveal Himself to you. In the process you forget jealousy and remember God alone. If we go through the hymns and songs composed by poet-saints, we shall be moved to see how constantly and closely they fought to communicate with God. Sings a poet:

*What a delirious fever is this that I suffer from!  
O Mother, Thy grace is my only cure.  
False pride is the fever that racks my wasted form;  
"I" and "mine" are my cry. O, what a wicked delusion!  
My quenchless thirst for wealth and friends is never ceasing;  
How, then, shall I sustain my life?  
Talk about things unreal, this is my wretched delirium,  
And I indulge in it always, O Giver of all good fortune!  
My eyes in seeming sleep are closed, my stomach is filled  
With the vile-worms of cruelty.  
Alas! I wander about absorbed in unmeaning deeds;  
Even for Thy holy name I have no taste, O Mother!  
I doubt that I shall ever be cured of this malady.<sup>5</sup>*

Only an aspirant who spends his time in singing to God is aware of his littleness and even while he prays can sing 'Even for Thy holy name I have no taste'. That will be our attitude when we shall be progressing in the spiritual path. Whatever we do we will feel it as insufficient an effort, compared with the bliss that is awaiting us in the end. Why then care for some empty name, fame and recognition here? Let us ask ourselves whenever this thought of name assails us: Of what use are this name and fame while living? Who remembers you after you have passed away? And what is the benefit that you derive by remembrance, if any? To all these questions you will get some hazy unsatisfying answers; all is vanity, that will be your conclusion. But think what an amount of good you will be doing to yourself and others around you if you live a life of unostentatiousness, purity and bereft of hatred and jealousy! Moreover, who can say that you may not one day attain the coveted goal if you but persist in your *sādhana* unmoved by any other motive than the love of God?

We think that we are pestered and persecuted by others. But it is not so. Listen to a song:

*O Mother, I have no one else to blame:  
Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.  
With the six passions for my spade,  
I dug a pit in the sacred land of earth;*

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<sup>5</sup> The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 1947 Edn. P.138.

*And now the dark water of death gushes forth!  
 How can I save myself, O my Redeemer?  
 Surely I have been my own enemy;  
 How can I now ward off this dark water of death?  
 Behold, the waters rise to my chest!  
 How can I save myself? O Mother, save me!  
 Thou art my only Refuge; with Thy protecting glance  
 Take me across to the other shore of the world.<sup>6</sup>*

'I have been my own enemy' that is the perfect idea. Sri Krishna too asserts it in the *Gītā*: 'Raise yourself by the Self; do not let the self sink. For the self alone is one's friend and the self alone is one's enemy. The self is the friend of one who has conquered the (lower) self by the Self and for the uncontrolled the (lower) self acts as its enemy'.<sup>7</sup> No one can harm us spiritually unless we allow ourselves to be harmed. When this is so why hate others; and create some more complexities to bar our progress? Search out your own mind every time when you want to be angry with any one for the supposed wrong that has been done to you, and you will find that there was some desire, some want in you which was frustrated, Desires do no good to one who wants to escape from them; knowing this how can one feel inimical to those who prevent the desires from being fulfilled? All this indicate that it is not any one else that is responsible for our being caught up and stranded but our own minds. If this fact is firmly grasped then many of the unhelpful tendencies on our path can be got over, much of the energy frittered away in fretting and fuming can be saved. Have we that courage to take upon ourselves the blame? If so we have indeed gained a great deal and known what is preventing our progress.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Gita, VI.5&6.