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Divine Wisdom

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (April 9 / August 5, 1882)

Question: (asked by a devotee)

"What is the good of holy company?"

Answer: (Sri Ramakrishna)

"It begets yearning for God. It begets love of God. Nothing whatsoever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning. By constantly living in the company of holy men, the soul becomes restless for God. This yearning is like the state of mind of a man who has someone ill in the family. His mind is in a state of perpetual restlessness, thinking how the sick person may be cured. Or again, one should feel yearning for God like the yearning of a man who has lost his job and is wandering from one office to another in search of work. If he is rejected at a certain place which has no vacancy, he goes there again the next day and inquires, "Is there any vacancy today?"

"There is another benefit from holy company. It helps one cultivate discrimination between the Real and the unreal. God alone is Real, that is to say, the Eternal Substance, and the world is unreal, that is to say, transitory. As soon as a man finds his mind wandering away to the unreal, he should apply discrimination. The moment an elephant stretches out its trunk to eat a plantain-tree in a neighbour's garden, it gets a

blow from the iron goad of the driver."

Question:

"Suppose a man has obtained the knowledge of Brahman in Samadhi. Doesn't he speak any more?"

Answer:

Sankaracharya retained the 'ego of knowledge' in order to teach others. After the vision of Brahman a man becomes silent. He reasons about It as long as he has not realised It. If you heat butter in a pan on the stove, it makes a sizzling sound as long as the water it contains has not dried up. But when no trace of water is left, the clarified butter makes no sound. If you put an uncooked cake of flour in that butter, it sizzles again. But after the cake is cooked, all sound stops. Just so, a man established in samadhi comes down to the relative plane of consciousness in order to teach others, and then he talks about God.

"The bee buzzes as long as it is not sitting on a flower. It becomes silent when it begins to sip the honey. But sometimes, intoxicated with the honey, it buzzes again.

"An empty pitcher makes a gurgling sound when it is dipped in water. When it fills up it becomes silent. But if the water is poured from it into another pitcher, then you will hear the sound again."

Satyam or Truthfulness

Editorial

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "The virtue of truthfulness is most important. If a man always speaks the truth and holds to the truth tenaciously, he will realize God; for God is Truth. God wants sincerity, truthfulness and love. Outward verbal effusions do not touch Him."

Practice of truthfulness is one of the most fundamental qualities a spiritual aspirant has to cultivate. One who is truthful will realise God who is Truth.

Mahatma Gandhiji used to say: "I often de-cribe religion, my religion, as Religion of Truth. Of late, instead of saying God is Truth, I have been saying Truth is God, in order more fully to define my Religion. ... nothing so completely describes my God as Truth. Denial of God we have known. Denial of Truth we have not known."

The word 'Satya' has many meanings such as existence, goodness, purity, truth, righteousness, and holiness. It is another name for God. Satya means that which never changes. Everything in the world is changing constantly. The only thing that does not

change is Brahman or God.

Therefore truthfulness is that practice which makes us good, pure, holy and gradually leads us to the unchanging Reality, God. The practice of truthfulness is both the means and the goal.

For most of us truthfulness means the verbal expression of an incident as it occurred or of a fact as it is, and also that of adhering to a given word; to act as we say and to think as we speak. As Sri Ramakrishna says, to make thought, word and deed one, is truthfulness. But it does not stop there.

Practice of truthfulness in thought, word, and action makes the mind pure, holy and one-pointed. And it makes us truth-seekers; turns the mind away from the ephemeral to the Eternal; produces intense longing for God-realization. Spiritual practice, truly, starts at this stage only. To lead a spiritual life, this is the real meaning of truthfulness.

There is an idea that speaking of truth is dangerous and unfavourable for one's material and social advantage. Nothing can be further from truth!

Truthfulness is not merely admitting of one's failings; it is also to recognize one's virtues, merits and moral and spiritual assets. Truth is not merely the recognizing of facts and realities of the outer world. It also extends to the vast inner world of man's higher nature, his unlimited potentialities. Truth is fundamental to man, to his survival, stability and progress. Unless we understand things and persons in their true nature our plans and aspirations may fail. As the saying goes 'Truth alone Triumphs.'

Again, it is said truth hurts. No doubt, some times it does! But truth helps always even if it seems to hurt temporarily. Pain and suffering are the greatest teachers.

Truth is auspicious and beautiful (Satyam-Shivam- Sundaram), it is the source of all real beauty. As poets declare 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty.'

The advice 'Be true to yourself' not only applies to our physical and psychological well-being, it applies even more to our spiritual nature.

However, the practice of truthfulness needs caution. As the saying goes: 'Speak the truth; speak it sweetly and not harshly, but never tell untruth for the sake of pleasing'.

The test of truthfulness is not merely speaking out what is true but what proves to be beneficial to all concerned. If it harms any one in any way, whatever else it may be, it certainly is not truthfulness.

Truthfulness cannot be practised in isolation; it requires cultivation of other moral qualities such as fearlessness, simplicity, dispassion, poverty, non-violence, continence, and self-surrender to God. Without these the practice of truthfulness is impossible.

Also there is a close connection between righteousness and truth. The Upanishads

emphatically declare that truth and righteousness are one and the same. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says: "What is righteousness is indeed Truth. Truth is the Lord of the world, prosperity depends on Truth. Everything originates from Truth, there is nothing greater than Truth." One who is not righteous cannot be truthful.

The Mundaka Upanishad proclaims that, "Truth alone triumphs, not untruth; the way to the divine is paved with Truth". The same Upanishad explicitly declares: "The Atman can be realized only through Truth and austerity". Indeed the practice of truthfulness is the greatest austerity.

Sri Ramakrishna is an embodiment of truthfulness. He says, "The best name that we can give to God is Truth. Under no circumstance should one give up truth. Even those who are engaged in worldly activities such as office work or businesses should hold to truth. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in Kaliyuga."

He especially instructs householders: "If a man leads a householder's life, he must have unflagging devotion to truth. God can be realized through truth alone."

Very often Sri Ramakrishna used to show his displeasure to those who did not observe truth in their words and deeds. Once he said to Shivanath, one of his devotees: "It is said that truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kaliyuga. If a man clings tenaciously to truth, he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for truth, one gradually loses everything."

Sri Ramakrishna did not preach anything that he did not practise in his life. He could give up everything, but could not give up truth. Sri Ramakrishna himself revealed this nature of his when he was talking to devotees: "If by chance I say that I will go to the pine grove, I must go there even if there is no immediate need for it; otherwise I lose my hold on truth. 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, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thy evil, take them both 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 every thing at Her feet, but could not bring myself to a position of giving up truth."

Such was Master's love for truth. He was an incarnation of Eternal truth and he demonstrated how to practise truth in day-to-day life.

Hence it is that Swami Vivekananda says that, with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna the Satya Yuga, the age of Truth, has begun.

Swami Dayatmananda

New Insights on J.J. Goodwin

Margaret Marklew

(I am an English graduate, married to David for 36 years, with two grown up children. Being dogged by several serious illnesses between the years 1996 and 2001 I was forced to give up teaching and took up the role of family historian. At first I was content to record the stories that my mother handed down to me, but eventually I became curious about my father's family, especially as I had never met any of my grandparents, and did not even know their names. My brother raided a tin trunk in his attic and sent a rich treasure trove of documents about the Goodwins, which led me back to John Goodwin, a Methodist preacher in the time of Wesley. When fully recovered in health I became a volunteer at the Oxfam bookshop in Winchester, and it was there on a memorably wet day in November 2003 that I rescued a copy of "In Search of God and other poems" from under a leaking roof. From that I learnt that the fragments that my grandmother, ETTY, had kept about her brother were of more than just family interest. I have been researching the life of J.J. Goodwin ever since and have given several talks on the subject.)

When Vivekananda's English disciple, J.J. Goodwin, died in 1898 an obituary was published in the Tribune of Lahore, which was in turn printed in the Indian Mirror. A copy of this was sent to Goodwin's mother who was destined to live to the astonishing age of 102. Mrs Goodwin's death in Ewell, Surrey in the dark days of the second world war was closely followed by that of her daughter, (my grandmother). Surprisingly a few small mementoes survived, of which this obituary is one of the most significant.

The Tribune of Lahore says: "We are deeply grieved to learn of the death, from enteric fever, of Mr J.J. Goodwin who came out to India as a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, and whom many people will remember in Lahore. Mr Goodwin was quite a young man, and we mourn his early death as that of a personal friend for whom we had a high regard. In Lahore, Mr Goodwin became a particular favourite with children, and hundreds of them were to be found always following him and asking him to share their simple games. Of all Swami Vivekananda's disciples that we saw here he was undoubtedly the most devoted, single-minded and capable. He was a journalist of considerable ability, and as a shorthand reporter we doubt whether he had any equal in

India. Swami Vivekananda's speeches were mostly reported by him, Sanskrit and all. For some time Mr Goodwin joined the staff of the Madras Mail, where he was soon appreciated and was sent to Utacamund as its special correspondent. His pure life and gentle ways soon made him a general favourite. One of the truest and gentlest of natures we have known has been cut off in the early dawn of manhood, furnishing one more example of the saying that those whom the gods love die young."

"J.J." was 27 years old when he joined Vivekananda in Jammu and Lahore in November 1897. There are many testimonies to his playfulness and love of fun, but few more vivid accounts than that of this slightly built young Englishman enjoying the company of the hoards of children who swarmed around him.

We do not know who wrote this piece, but J.J. evidently impressed him with his devotion to Swami Vivekananda: the implication is that in this respect he excelled over all others. That he was also single-minded and capable must have made a great difference to the success of the tour as did his careful records of the Swami's words in Sanskrit as well as in English.

It is a comfort to read of his popularity in Utacamund. Swami Saradananda wrote to Sarah Bull of his distress to hear of his lonely death far away from the friends "for whom he came to this land", but it seems that J.J. was destined to make friends wherever he roamed. Obituaries tend by their very nature to dwell on their subject's better characteristics, but in this case J.J. seems to have endeared himself not only to Swami Vivekananda but to many others besides.

The Yoga of Tranquillity

Swami Swahananda

According to the Upanishads, the nature of the Atman, the ultimate condition of ourselves, is peacefulness - santo ayam hi atma. This Atman, the undying persistent Self of man, is of the nature of santa - calm, serene, tranquil. Whenever man is disturbed, that means he has lost his tranquillity. He has lost his real nature and has acquired something assumed. Until he recognizes this and recaptures his true nature, he will remain restless. Thus in the Chandogya Upanishad it has been advocated that meditation is the way to quietness; but that same meditation is to be done after becoming tranquil - santo upasita. To know the secrets of the universe, of oneself, or of God, meditation is necessary. But meditation can only be properly done when a person is, to a great extent, tranquil. Meditation itself is also a method to bring tranquillity, but tranquillity

is also necessary in the beginning; so mutually they interact.

The spiritual seekers in the Upanishadic Age discovered that they must get help from all possible directions in order to receive this peace of mind. In this connection, there is the custom that after every Vedic chant recited, one must end with "Om, santi, santi, santi, peace, peace, peace." Why is this repeated three times? The ancient Hindus thought that the major source of trouble for man is threefold.

The first trouble comes from man himself, either from his body or from his mind. The body doesn't always function smoothly; it becomes diseased, disfigured, etc. But more important than the body is the mind. The mind has its own vagaries, its ups and downs. When somebody says something good, it is happy; and when somebody says something bad, it is unhappy. So the mind and the body are the two immediate sources of one's troubles. In other words, we are the major source of all our trouble.

The second source of trouble is other beings - friends, relations and enemies. Children are a source of joy, but also a source of trouble; so also with husband and wife. All human beings and creatures bring joy as well as suffering.

The third source is terrestrial - volcanoes, storms, etc. So these are the three major sources of dukkha, suffering, and to ward off these three major afflictions, the ancient Hindus prescribe chanting the mantra, "Om, santi, santi, santi". The purpose is to soak the mind with peace.

If we analyse, we will find why peace and tranquillity are not present in our lives. We have tutored ourselves, as it were, to remain unhappy. Eighty per cent of our unhappiness is our own creation. That does not mean that we are not justified in being unhappy. For example, if somebody ill-treats us, why should we not be unhappy. But if unhappiness is too much with us, then we begin to think that somehow or other we must be free from this misery, even if we cannot be totally happy. Thus, we have to make up our minds that we want to be free from restlessness and peacelessness. Then cultivation of serenity, tranquillity, and peace of mind become the goal as well as the means to attain it.

Psychological systems give a variety of techniques - hints that are directly useful. But philosophy and religion solve the problem at the roots - they try to bring out the basic cause of our restlessness and its cure. Why do we want serenity, calmness, or peace? Because that is our condition when we are happy. For example, if we are hungry, we feel restless. When we have eaten enough, we then feel satisfied. The mind has become calm and serene. The feeling of want has gone; the feeling of pain has gone; the feeling of lack has gone. So with the fulfilment of every desire, some measure of peacefulness

comes.

However, when a desire persists, restlessness will remain until we find the ways and means of satisfying that desire. There are some human situations where we can do something about our wants, but there are many emotional moments which can only be worked out by changing our mind. Therefore, the only alternative is to try to cultivate peace.

The ancient Hindus perfected two methods of cultivating tranquillity. First, we recognize that desires bring the feeling of want. When the desire is unfulfilled, we feel unhappy. So if we stop desiring, then there will be no suffering. Perhaps we expect our friend to behave well because we have been very nice to him. But if he doesn't behave well, what are we going to do? The yogis say, don't have that desire, that expectation, to begin with. Don't expect any return. In youth you have vitality. Even if you have a few heartbreaking experiences, you can recover. But as you grow older, that resiliency is not there, so some sort of philosophy must be developed.

One of the charges against this remedy is that if we cut out all desire, the enjoyment also goes. But the Hindus say, it's all right, cut out the desire. If you completely root out all desire, you are absolutely free; you are then of the nature and condition of the Atman. However, the ability to do this is rare. Otherwise, root out only the inordinate desires. A few people may get what they want, but at what price? So the Buddhists and others analysed and found that the major source of all suffering is expectation, or desire.

One of the signs of a strong character is the absence of too many desires. Psychologists say, what is a strong character? It is the character of a person whose emotions are centred around just a few desires. When we are young, we want to become whatever we see, whether it is a scholar, a scientist, a swimmer, or a movie actor. But after ten or fifteen years, gradually our emotions become settled around several choices.

Ultimately, those who have centred their lives around one or two desires achieve those desires, as far as possible. That is the sign of a strong character. Of course, along with a strong character we also want good character, as even a robber has a strong character. Strong desire, when it is illumined by higher considerations - considerations for others or for a higher goal of life - is the covetable thing for society and also for the individual. So whenever there is a conflict, we should analyse why we are suffering. In day-to-day life, expectation is the source of all trouble. This does not apply to normal expectations. However, if we experience a pain for only fifteen minutes, yet go on reliving the pain for three days, or, perhaps, three years, then it is time to consider the second method:

either we must try to change the world or change ourselves. If we can remedy the situation, we must, of course, try. However, if nothing can be done, the whole reaction is only within our own mind anyway. We may think, "But why should I change?" On the other hand, if the objective of life is happiness, why should we be unhappy? Therefore, if a situation makes us unhappy, we must decide that we will not have that unhappiness. Ultimately we come to realize that the only person at our disposal is ourself. We must, therefore, try to gain some control over ourselves. Thus, the yogic idea is that, instead of always trying to change the other person, we must try to change ourselves, so that we will be able to lessen our own reaction.

The basic idea is to decide that we shall remain calm. Often we feel justified: "I am angry today! And I am justified in being angry!" But ultimately it doesn't pay. A little anger may pay for a short time. If it is necessary, we may go ahead and be angry knowingly - to show our anger when sweetness and cajoling fail; but why should we really be angry? That is the yogic position.

When we lose our tempers, there are two harmful results. First, we lose our own peace of mind and we ourselves suffer. All the reactions of the anger will come to us, and if we are older, our blood pressure will shoot up. The second harmful result is from the spiritual standpoint - we have lost our grip over ourselves. We have succumbed to the passions of the moment, however justified. But an aspirant considers this to be a fall from his own spiritual nature.

Behind this idea of lessening the reaction, there is a philosophy. What does a religious philosophy like Vedanta say in this connection? Vedanta analyses man's real nature. It comes to the conclusion that our real nature cannot be restlessness, but rather calmness and serenity. First comes the body, which dies after a hundred years. So the body is not our real nature. The mind is all the time changing, so the mind is not our real nature. Thus, if pain comes to the mind, Vedanta's strict philosophical method is to disassociate: "I am not the mind. Let there be pain, but it is not my pain." In this connection, suppose I have a nice garment. If I am wearing it, and it catches on fire, I also catch on fire. But if I remove the garment and put it on a hanger, and it catches on fire there, I won't catch on fire. Similarly, I can disassociate myself from my own mind, because I have found, through philosophical speculation and understanding, that I am not the mind. The mind is only an instrument for me, like a garment. If the garment causes discomfort, I can remove it. So also, if the mind is troubling, stop it for the time being by the philosophical assertion that "I am not the body, nor the mind, but the Spirit." My real nature is spiritual, which cannot be disturbed by any external experiences. A convincing

philosophy is one method that lessens the reaction.

Another method is assertion every day by meditation. What is meditation? Meditation means disassociating oneself from the surroundings and trying to focus the mind on one goal. If the goal is God, it is religion. But the major technique is to withdraw from the mind. Instead of thinking of many things, think of only one thing - God, God, God. That is how to learn the technique of withdrawing the mind. Thus the second technique is to develop the capacity for withdrawing the mind at will. For example, if something has brought suffering, loss of peace or calmness, learn how to withdraw the mind from that thought. When the thought comes round and round and pierces you, try to forget about it. Daily cultivation of calmness by deliberate effort is what is initially meant by meditation.

To inspire us with this idea, several ideals have been put before us. It is good to keep some holy pictures in one's own room, in one's own shrine, or wherever they can be seen. In this way, we feel inspired by these holy pictures and feel that life is not all activity; it is also calmness, serenity and tranquillity. In Ramakrishna's picture, he is meditating, absorbed in samadhi. Thus, whenever you look at his picture you will see a state of peace, and, in turn, your mind will think of calmness.

Buddha is also represented as calm and serene. In this connection, there is a story. A man who was Buddha's adversary came and started to revile Buddha. But Buddha remained calm and serene. As a one-sided quarrel cannot go on for very long, the man got up and started to go away. Then Buddha called after him: "My friend, I have a question to ask." "What is that?" the man replied. "Suppose," Buddha said, "a man was going on a journey and brought some jewellery to his neighbour to keep for him during his absence, but the neighbour said, 'Oh, I cannot keep it. It is too costly.' Now where will the jewellery go?" "It is very simple," said the man. "The one who brought the jewellery will take it back." "Then," said Buddha, "I have not accepted your insults. The jewellery that you brought me I did not accept. You must take it back."

Now who is the master of the situation? The man who frets and fumes at the slightest irregularity of someone else's behaviour, or a man like Buddha who can hold his own in spite of all the provocations of the world? So that is another ideal that is held before us. If you remember some of the incidents of his life, that will inspire you to imitate his example.

In the Hindu tradition, there is the ideal of Shiva, who is capable of creation and destruction, but who, by and large, is calm and serene. Many different ideals are put before us so that we can remember, in our moments of desperation and restlessness,

that calmness and serenity is another condition of one's life, and that we must try to imbibe this idea. Daily meditation - remembering this calm nature of ourselves - will gradually bring that condition.

The third method of lessening the reaction is creating a faith in a personal God or a Great Teacher. When pain comes, it makes us feel restless, helpless, and disturbed. At that time, devotees try to cultivate a little faith and devotion and surrender to the Divine. They try to believe that if I don't get this or that, God must have His own reason for denying it. For example, though a child with an upset stomach may complain because he is receiving a bland diet, instead of getting the special dishes that his brothers and sisters are receiving, the mother knows best. Likewise, devotees try to understand that whatever may come - good or bad - it is the Lord's will. In other words, God does what is best for His devotees.

But suppose good experiences don't come in spite of one's efforts and will. How can one adjust to that? We will have to return to our philosophy and consider the real condition of man - that all sacrifices are pushing us to the higher realization of our spiritual nature. In life there are many sacrifices that we undergo in order to make life sweeter and more comfortable. And there are always some people who will have to make more sacrifices. In Swami Vivekananda's famous lecture, "Work and Its Secret," he said, "Nature will compel you to give up. Why not give up voluntarily?" The moment sacrifice becomes voluntary, it loses its sting. It is no longer a source of suffering. Suppose you are pickpocketed. Naturally you suffer. But if you pity somebody who is starving and give them money, then you are happy. Our reactions differ according to the nature of the sacrifice - whether it is involuntary or voluntary.

Once in a while the thought may come, "By becoming religious am I losing more than I am gaining?" In this connection, Swami Vivekananda said, "If there is a God, no amount of sacrifice matters." Then he added, "If there is no God, what do our lives matter?" In other words, spiritual life means sacrifice - willing sacrifice. Moreover, if there is no God, then there is nothing permanent and abiding; so what does it matter whether or not I have enjoyed a little more or less?

The whole life experience is that we really live in our minds. The yogis say that one hundred per cent of the time we live in our minds. An external situation - good or bad - only brings the feeling to the mind. Suppose a child is in a good mood; even if he is slapped, he will laugh. Likewise, if he's in a bad mood, even if he is given sweets, he will cry. That means the objective situation - the slap or the good food - doesn't matter. Our mood is the important thing. So before blaming everybody else, remember that the

major cause of your pain is yourself - how you respond to the situation.

Normally, a little reaction is all right. Side by side with that is the idea of self-expression - to let off steam. Due to the last five or six decades of psychology, everyone is letting off steam, because they are told that if they bottle it up, it will become repression, which will create more problems. But then if you are always angry, life becomes a source of trouble, because nobody wants to be around you. That will ultimately cause you much more pain. Later psychological systems gradually evolved the idea that letting off steam means diverting the mind from the source of anger. In other words, if you are in a mood to quarrel, go and run around the block or work in the garden.

The Gita also tells us that whenever any cause for unhappiness comes, a yogi or a man of wisdom always remains calm and serene. As one cultivates higher moral virtues for spiritual realization, suffering does not bring apprehension; one remains calm and serene. According to some psychological studies, forty per cent of man's troubles are focused on the past. Fifty per cent of his worries are for the future. Only ten per cent of man's troubles are for the present and are, therefore, legitimate. We cannot do anything about the past, unless we thereby learn a lesson; the future has not yet come, and half the time it will not come as we think; so only ten per cent of our worries require a remedy.

Another Gita application of this spiritual principle in day-to-day life is: do your duty, but don't be worried about the result. "But," you may say, "without fruits, who will work?" If we want peace of mind, we must remember that the fruits of our actions are not always under our control. So the best way to be free from anxiety is not to expect the result. That is one method of remaining calm.

A third Gita application of this spiritual principle is the verse, Sukhesu vigatasprahah. When enjoyment comes, we jump for joy. The problem with elation is that it brings in its wake agitation. When the mind goes up, it will also come down. So if we do not want peacelessness, then we will have to give up both ups and downs. Yogic enjoyment is a serene enjoyment - not the exuberant type. That comes from vairagya. Perfect peace only comes to a person who does not strongly desire anything. So ups and downs will come to an average person, but the spiritual aspirant learns how to lessen them.

Holy Mother once said very excitedly, "Why do people say they are unhappy? I have never felt unhappiness," though she did not live an ordinary married life. Then she prescribed happiness: "Why don't you sit and repeat the mantra twenty thousand times a day? Let me see if this peace of mind does not come back!" Trouble can only come when

the mind is left alone and when there is nothing to do; then there is loneliness. So Holy Mother's prescription was "be alone, but don't be lonely". If we repeat the name of the Lord, the Lord is always with us. The Lord is not a physical substance, but emotionally and mentally we can imagine and think of Him. Through the repetition of His name, His presence is invoked. Japa is also one type of occupation. It is considered to be the easiest spiritual practice, because we can do it anywhere and at any time. With this recollection, a type of companionship comes, as if we are always accompanied by the Lord.

In conclusion, the main idea is that man's ultimate nature is spiritual. We are not the body, nor the mind, but the spirit; and spirit is of the nature of calmness and serenity because it has no desire. Because of the feeling of want, restlessness comes. One root method of eradicating peacelessness is to cut out the desire itself. If we don't expect anything, then we will not be disheartened. Because life is based on expectation and desire, the average man will continue to desire. But knowing the philosophy and rationale behind life, we must try to lessen the impact on ourselves by cultivating this resolve: whenever any inordinate desire comes and is not fulfilled, we must acquire the capacity of throwing off the reaction in our minds.

Throwing off the reaction can be done in three major ways. One is through philosophical understanding and the conviction that calmness is better than restlessness. The second way is to bring in the idea of the personal God, and, with His help, try to surrender to the Divine in spite of all failures. "It is the Lord's will" - so saying, surrender to the will of the Divine. The third most potent and direct method is to get a grip over oneself.

All these methods are good. All three must be combined and cultivated in our day-to-day lives. But the yogi's idea is: "I won't feel disturbed." Calmness and even-mindedness - that is yoga. So cultivate that calmness and serenity in spite of all provocation. Convince yourself that it is better to be calm than to be angry - both for oneself and for society.

Then gradually try to get a grip over oneself with the help of a philosophy, by cultivating devotion, and by a daily technique of mind control and mind mastery. That is the special training of the yogis.

Either through mastery of the mind, calmness and serenity will naturally come, or by the daily practice of serenity, mastery of the mind will come. Stage by stage, you will then become established in your calmness and serenity, which, according to the yogis, is the condition wherein the bliss of the Self manifests itself. That is the ultimate objective.

The Miracle of the Wine

John Phillips

Anyone who has read the New Testament will be familiar with Christ's first miracle - the turning of water into wine at Cana.

This story told by a Persian poet is a colourful variant on this theme. The following is freely rendered from the Persian verse of the "Masnavi" of Jalal al-Din Rumi.

A certain man began accusing a Sufi saint or Sheikh, saying, "He is wicked, he is not on the path of righteousness. He is a winebibber, a hypocrite and a profligate; what sort of help can he give to his disciples?"

"Show a little respect!" said one of the Sheikh's disciples. "It is no small matter to harbour such thoughts about the great. Far be it from him, and far from his saintly qualities, for his pure soul to be darkened by any evil. Lay not such slander upon the people of God! This is pure imagination on your part. Turn over a new page. What you say is quite untrue; and even if it were true, land-bird that you are, what has the Red Sea to fear from one corpse? The Sheikh is not less in magnitude than two jugs full, or a small cistern, so how can just one drop of impurity defile him?"

The evil-minded slanderer still went on spouting rubbish about the Sheikh: a squint-eyed man always has a twisted mind.

"I saw him at a party", he babbled. "He is bereft of all piety. If you do not believe it, get up and go tonight and you will see your Sheikh's dissoluteness with your own eyes."

That night he took the disciple to a window.

"Look at the debauchery and merry-making!" he cried, "Look at the hypocrisy by day and the debauchery by night! By day a Mohammedan, by night a Bu Lahab; by day called God's servant, by night - God preserve us! And a wine-cup in his hand!"

The disciple saw a full beaker in the Elder's hand.

"Master," he asked, "is there a fault even in you? Did you not always say that in a cup of wine the Devil micturates hurriedly and deliberately!"

"They have made my cup so full," said the Sheikh, "that there is no room in it for even so much as one drop of bitterness. Look, is there room here for a single mote? Some misguided fellow has got the matter all wrong. This is not a cup," he went on, "and this is not wine. Come down, unbeliever, and look at it for yourself!"

He came and saw that it was purest honey. That wretched enemy of God was covered with confusion.

Thereupon the Elder said to his disciple, "Go and fetch me some wine, good sir. I am in

pain; I am constrained; I am past starvation because of the pain. In time of constraint any nourishment is ritually pure - a curse on the head of the unbeliever!"

The disciple went round the wine-cellars, tasting of every jar for the sake of the Sheikh; but in all the wine-cellars he found no wine at all; the jars of wine had become full of honey.

"Drinkers!" he cried. "What state of affairs is this? What has happened? I cannot find wine in any jar."

All the drinkers came to the Sheikh, weeping and beating their heads with their hands.

"Most noble Sheikh," they cried, "you entered the tavern and because of your advent all the wine has turned to honey. You have changed the wine and cleansed it of defilement; change our souls also and cleanse our impurity!"

In the Society of the Holy

Swami Omkareswarananda

It was the evening of March 14, 1916, the day following the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. Swami Premananda and Swami Akhandananda, disciples of the Master, were seated on a bench on the eastern verandah of the Belur Monastery, overlooking the Ganges. Several other Swamis and young Brahmacharis were seated on a bench nearby. Presently Swami Achalananda, who was one of the group, addressed Swami Premananda;

"Revered Sir, please tell us something about Sri Ramakrishna. To hear of him directly from you is far more inspiring and uplifting than to read of him and his teachings in the Gospel."

"Very little of the Master's teachings is recorded in the Gospel," replied the Swami.

"There is too much repetition. M. used to visit the Master occasionally and would note down his teachings as he heard them. But Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples differently, according to their different temperaments and their capacity of understanding. His teachings to the monastic disciples were given in private. As soon as the householder disciples would leave the room he would get up and lock the door and then speak to us living words of renunciation. He would try to impress upon our young minds the emptiness and vanity of worldly enjoyments. In his great mercy he would point out to us how dry and hot the world is - like a desert, and how, like a mirage, it burns the heart but never slakes the thirst. He taught us how to discriminate and analyze the body of man, made up of flesh, blood and bones, etc., so that our minds

would not run after the enjoyments of the flesh. He would tell us of the great power of the all-bewitching maya, and how man, forgetting his divine heritage, fell repeatedly into her clutches. Deep down within his heart man knows full well that he can't find lasting happiness in the mad pursuit of worldly enjoyments, and yet, like the camel who chews thorny bushes even while his mouth bleeds, man still stirs up his lust for enjoyment even while he suffers. To satisfy his lust man needs gold. Lust and gold! These are the chains that drag a man down to the pit of worldliness. He alone soars high who shakes himself free of these chains. He who renounces sexual appetites - not only outwardly, but also the cravings of the mind - has renounced all worldly pleasures. He alone is a man of true renunciation. Renunciation is not in the garb of a monk, nor in the renunciation of fish and meat.

"Spiritual aspirants of many different sects would come to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, and all of them found great satisfaction in talking to him. To each he was able to show the way to further progress along his own particular path, so that each thought that the Master was a perfected soul of his own particular sect. They could not know that Sri Ramakrishna was as broad as the sky and as deep as the ocean, and thoroughly acquainted with all the different sects and paths. For he had followed them each in turn, and by each path he had reached the one and the same goal.

"Never forget that the ideal of life is to realize God, to gain his vision. You have renounced the world to reach that goal. Struggle hard to grow love and devotion for Him and attain Him. He is the very life of our life, the soul of our soul. He is the Lord of our heart, He is our very own. Yearn for Him with a longing heart. How blessed you are that you have the privilege of serving and associating with such ever-free souls as Swami Brahmananda and others who were the associates of God incarnate! Do not neglect this opportunity. You are men! Be gods! Teach others by the examples of your own lives."

Swami Premananda remained silent for a while, then continued:

"I see very clearly that, after we are gone, multitudes will come to learn from you young men."

A young Swami: "But, revered Sir, how can that be? If multitudes are to come, they should come while you are still living."

Swami Premananda replied: "Do not think that you are any less great than us! You have received the grace of the Holy Mother. Do you think we have become great just because people have come to take the dust of our feet? No! We first saw Sri Ramakrishna and then renounced the world; you are great indeed because you have renounced the world without seeing him!"

Young Swami: "But revered Sir, Sri Ramakrishna made you great."

Swami Premananda: "No! Sri Ramakrishna did not make us great; he made us 'nobodies'. You also have to become 'nobodies'. Wipe out all vanity and all ego sense. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'When the ego dies, all troubles cease.' 'Not I, not I, but Thou, O Lord.' Look at the life of Nag Mahasay! There was not the least trace of ego in him. G.C. Ghosh used to say, 'Maya tried to bind Nag Mahasay and Vivekananda in her net, but Nag Mahasay became smaller than the smallest, so that maya's net could not hold him, and Vivekananda grew bigger and bigger; he became one with the Infinite, and the net was too small to bind him.'

"Do you know of what this net of maya is comprised? Sense objects, lust, gold, name, fame, ego, vanity, selfishness and so on. With all these maya binds the mind of man. Come out of this net, and the mind will run straight to God. All bondage is in the mind. All freedom is in the mind.

"The worldly man is drunk with sensory objects, with name, with fame, with lust, with gold. Be you also drunk, but be drunk with selfless works, with love of God, with ecstasy, with samadhi!"

Swami Brahmananda now came and sat silently beside Swami Premananda. Swami Shivananda followed and sat on a bench facing them. Many young Swamis and Brahmacharis, about sixty altogether, came and sat around the Swamis. In the presence of Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son and most beloved disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the minds of all were filled with joy; they became lost in contemplation. Stillness reigned within their hearts; all nature seemed to stand still, while the Ganges flowed silently by.

Some time passed in that great silence, until, after a while, it was broken by a remark about the well-known Shankara Monastery at Puri, and the abbots connected with it. Then, as the conversation drifted from one subject to another, Swami Brahmananda said: "Once, when I was at Puri I met a holy man whose name was Ranga Swami. He was about ninety-five years old, and a man of great renunciation. He was always drunk with the love of God. He would eat only what had first been offered in the temple. At one time he was very ill, and I wanted to give him some medicine, but he refused to take it. Knowing his habit I arranged with the priest of the temple to offer some milk to the Deity, and with that I mixed the medicine which the Swami took as sacramental food." Swami Shivananda broke in: "I also knew that man! He went to Puri when he was fifteen years old, and lived continually in the temple for eighty years!"

In the course of conversation a well-known writer and preacher was mentioned.

Swami Shivananda: "But what can he know about religion? He is steeped in worldliness. He who does not live the life of renunciation cannot be a teacher. Dispassion is the first principle of spiritual life. A man of learning may write books or give lectures, but if he has no dispassion in his heart, and if he does not practise what he teaches, his words cannot be effective, for they have no power behind them. They merely create a momentary sensation.

"The other day I learned that a certain preacher of the Brahmo Samaj was complaining that more people were coming to the Belur Math and fewer to the Brahmo Samaj, and that someone had suggested that they introduce a girls' choir to attract the people. When the revered Shivanath Shastri heard this he remarked that if the Brahmos would incorporate into their lives more of the dispassion and renunciation of the monks of the Belur Math, they too would attract people."

Swami Brahmananda: "Shivanath Shastri is a sincere soul, and has a great regard for truth. He is earnest in his desire to realize God. He is living now at Bhubaneswar and is practising spiritual disciplines. He already has some inner awakening. After all, he had the blessed good fortune to associate with our Master. Bijay Goswami was another great spiritual leader in the Brahmo Samaj, and it was a great loss to them when he left it."

Swami Shivananda: "One day Swamiji, Swami Akhandananda and I were travelling on the river Ganges. Swamiji was speaking very highly of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, when all at once we noticed the Maharshi's yacht at some distance from us. We approached nearer to pay our respects to the Maharshi, who, when he learned that we were disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, seemed very happy to meet us, and repeatedly remarked: 'Ah! how great is the love of Sri Ramakrishna! How great is his devotion!' The Maharshi then asked Swamiji to recite some passages from the Upanishads, which he did. After listening for some time he said, 'I understand and appreciate the devotional passages in the Upanishads; I do not care for the non-dualistic ideas'."

After listening to the discussions for some time, Swami Premananda remarked: "When Shivanath Shastri or some other of the learned members of the Brahmo Samaj would visit Sri Ramakrishna, he would sometimes become just like a little child and ask them: 'Is my condition really like that of a madman? Tell me, have I gone crazy thinking of God?' And indeed, there were some who really did think that our Master was a madman!"

Swami Brahmananda: "Only a jeweller can know the value of a jewel. There was once a poor man who found a diamond. He had no idea of its value, so he took it to the vegetable market to have it appraised. The greengrocer looked at it, and then offered him five cents worth of vegetables for it, but the poor man thought it was worth twenty

cents worth of vegetables. Upon being refused, he took it to a rice merchant who offered him one bag of rice, but he wanted four bags. Next he went to a goldsmith, and he was offered one hundred rupees. This offer aroused the greed in the poor man, and he began to realize that the diamond was really valuable, so he took it to a jeweller who offered him twenty thousand rupees. Even this did not satisfy him, so he took it to the finest jeweller in the city. As soon as the jeweller saw it he realized its real worth and immediately offered him a million rupees. And that is how it goes. A holy man is judged according to the worth and capacity of the appraiser. By some Sri Ramakrishna was regarded as a holy man, by others as a perfected soul or as a great devotee of God. Some regarded him as a madman, while still others as an Incarnation of God." (Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, March-April 1947)

The Mind in all its Modes

Clement James Knott

The mind is a marvellous part of our being, and it is always with us, but how many of us could truthfully say that he has his mind under his own control? Is your mind controlling you or are you controlling it? Are you directing your evolution in the direction of your ideal or are some other influences responsible for the changes that are taking place in you?

If one has identified oneself with the mind, it is not easy to think objectively about it. Once one has been drawn into the maelstrom of modern life, with its ever increasing emotional and intellectual demands, it becomes more and more difficult to withdraw sufficiently to observe what the mind is doing and how it is doing it. But the primary need still remains: to familiarise oneself with the various modes of one's mind by means of detailed observation and self-assessment.

The realised being knows that he is not the mind and he is not the body; he is the soul, the Atman, the Self, part of the One True Spirit that pervades all. The mind that is able to function freely within this context is a realised mind. The realised mind is capable of witnessing itself, observing how it is functioning, and it is capable of exerting its will by moving in the direction of its ideal.

But in an increasingly polarised world, how can the person who is seeking the truth that is himself get started in the right direction and so avoid making the error of climbing up the wrong mountain? He can start by observing what his mind is doing and how it is functioning right now. He does not need to examine the past subject matter and images.

The incidents, memories, thoughts, etc., are less important for this purpose than discovering in what mode the mind is functioning at this moment in time.

We often find ourselves looking for something to occupy the mind when it has nothing else to do, but the mind is quite able to occupy itself constructively by being the watcher and the witness of its own modes of functioning.

An objective guide would therefore be useful to help us in our self-assessment. Such a guide would help us to bridge the gulf that exists between the non-secular mind and the secular culture in which it exists. This approach is experiential; it is not a mental exercise.

When the feelings, emotions and reason have become harmonised, then the will increases in stature and becomes more confident in itself. One may then acquire the quality of discernment in order to choose the appropriate objectives for one's life energy and efforts. The will is a manifestation of the predominant desires of the being which we can learn to direct towards the achievement of our ideal.

The mind is capable of functioning in various different modes. These modes may be inherent, potentially lasting for a lifetime, or they may be ephemeral, arising from present circumstances and of brief duration. One mode may function predominantly or several modes may function in conjunction and the mind that is not self-directed may switch from one mode to another without one realising what is happening.

The following is a list of some of the modes of the mind that can insinuate themselves into our being, with or without our consent or control. They are modes of partial consciousness and of limited perception. Some of them are inherent and some are acquired through life experience, when the being is obliged to adapt to changing circumstances.

Modes of the Mind:

- 1) Externalizing the mind at will on to whatever is out there, through the senses, especially seeing, hearing and touching.
- 2) Internalizing the mind at will into ideas, feelings and mental images.
- 3) Internalizing at will into the body or any part of it, through the senses.
- 4) Reacting at will to natural desires and instincts and observing whether one's actions are spontaneous or compulsive.
- 5) The mind harmonizing the available senses to enable the being to initiate action and creativity, materially.
- 6) The mind not having faith in itself to resolve the problem of the mind, due to a lack of knowledge of how it functions. This is usually a reflection of shortcomings in

upbringing, training, work patterns or cultural bias.

7) The mind that has been cut off from its source of personal power, either deliberately by means of falsely imposed unrealities or by negligence and ignorance of how the mind functions.

8) The mind that reacts to any stimuli that impinge on the ego because it believes that the self-created ego is real.

9) The ego which believes that the mind is part of the self-created ego and seeks to misuse the mind to boost itself. The ego has induced the mind to accept whatever is advantageous to the individual ego.

10) The mind, body and spirit that are not sufficiently harmonized to enable the person to act in a truly spontaneous manner. Thoughts, feelings and actions can become disconnected, even contradictory.

11) The person who suppresses or ignores his inner feelings so that his responses to his sensations or thoughts become automatic or compulsive. Thus his awareness of his own senses and his thinking becomes diminished and he is less able to direct his senses or his attention clearly without having personal reactions.

12) The mind that believes it can only exist by means of the bodily senses and personal feelings because it cannot perceive beyond them.

13) The mind that deems itself to be self-sufficient in its own area. It is sensitive to what is happening immediately around it, and is able to respond appropriately but is at the same time sufficiently detached to refrain from reacting in an emotional or prejudiced manner.

14) The mind that has been concentrating for too long on one sort of thing or one kind of idea. The mind has been stopped from flowing freely.

15) The mind that has not been able to distinguish clearly as to when it is inflowing or when it is outflowing. The inflows and the outflows have become confused. Apart from other effects, this makes it more difficult to relax, both physically and mentally.

16) The repressed self, wanting to hide in the mind because it believes that it is the safest place for him to be, and withholding from expressing himself as a human being and as a personality.

17) Having a "stuck picture" in the memory, sometimes only of imaginary origin, which reappears unexpectedly and which influences thought and conduct. If it is associated with an unexpressed emotion, then the emotion needs to be realized as well as the image.

18) The vision as seen through the eyes has become "stuck" in a false viewpoint in the

organism. It does not see things as others see them. Its sight lacks perspective and depth and may be only two-dimensional.

The above list is not exhaustive. There may be any one or more modes influencing the self at any one time, and they are either helping or hindering the individual in moving in the direction of his ideal. The approach to understanding of the mind briefly outlined here has nothing to do with psychiatry or any other mental therapies. It is all to do with enabling the individual to become more self-determined. Psychiatry is not able to accept the existence of a spirit that is separate from the mind but which pervades it and makes it capable of self-observation and self-direction.

The individual who lives in ignorance of the various modes of the functioning of his own mind and the changes of mode, is prone to becoming less and less self-directed and more other-directed, by other persons or influences. His innate power for self-observation and self-will thus enters into a state of decline.

Whatever the mind has been doing in the past is not very important for the purpose of self-observation now. What is important is the ability to step back and be the watcher and the witness of the modes of which the mind is functioning, whatever one is thinking and doing in the immediate present, and then taking responsibility for it. Achieving awareness of the changing modes of one's own mind is one route to discovering the truth that is the self. The practice of self-observation, self-assessment and self-direction is an early stage in the understanding of the mind. The predominant mode precedes the thought, the feeling and the action that follows. The enquiring mind is best analysed by itself on an experiential basis, but within a validated framework of principles and practice.

When the mind has become aware of the modes, whether innate, imposed or acquired, which are governing the way it functions as an individual and when these various modes are realized, then the alert mind knows of its own volition which mode is appropriate to be adopted in any given circumstances. The mind that has freed itself from retardant or superfluous modes of functioning is able to discern for itself those modes that are most beneficial for its progress, as a spiritual human being and as a personality. The mind can be freed from its self-created ailments and it is capable of being its own healer.

If Ramakrishna Were Alive Today (continued)

Swami Chetanananda

Seeing Through the Physical Eyes and the Spiritual Eye

With our physical eyes we see the world and all its beings, which are created by God's maya. There is no end to this visualization. It is because maya makes One into many that this world is full of variety and diversity. When through sadhana we transform our physical eyes into the spiritual or mental eye, we see unity in the multiplicity. This is called same-sightedness or knowledge of Oneness. At that time one realizes: "As the same nondual fire, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it burns, so also the same nondual Atman, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever It enters. And It also exists without."

M. wrote: "Once somebody asked the Master, 'Is God with form or without form?' The Master answered: 'I have seen the Mother both ways. She is the indivisible Satchidananda, and again She assumes various forms for the devotees. At Kalighat (in South Calcutta) I saw the Divine Mother playing with some children and chasing a butterfly. Another time I saw Her walking on the Adi Ganga.' On one occasion the Master told us: 'Mother has come. She is wearing a red-bordered sari and has tied a bunch of keys in the corner of Her cloth.' He said this in the presence of Keshab Sen and others in his room at Dakshineswar. People heard the Master's words, but the Master alone heard the Mother's words. Another day he said: 'The Mother is going up and down the stairs in the temple. Her hair is dishevelled, and Her anklets are making a jhun-jhun sound.' Once in Cossipore he said, 'Today I saw the Mother playing a vina (a stringed instrument).' The Master was absorbed in the formless aspect of the Mother for six months during his sadhana.

"Not only did he see God, but he also used to talk to the Divine Mother, as we talk among ourselves, in front of people. One day he said, 'The Mother has come.' Then he began to talk to Her, saying: 'Well, Mother, to whom should I listen? This person is saying this and the other person something else.' Then the Divine Mother said something to him. Again the Master said: 'I understand, Mother. I shall listen to You and no one else.'" Our eyes and ears are not as subtle as Sri Ramakrishna's, so we do not see the Divine Mother as he did. We read about the Master; we listen to his message; we think of his divine play; but still he is not living to us. Sadhana is sweet and joyful when the aspirant uses his or her feeling and thinking capabilities together. Some people try to understand God only through the intellect; but they do not realize that intellectual understanding and true realization are not the same. For example, a man understands that smoking

causes cancer, but still he smokes.

M. sometimes advised the devotees to meditate on various scenes in the Master's life, such as the following three scenarios:

1. In the evening the Master is seated on his bed, absorbed in deep meditation. After meditation he says, "Those who think of God day and night don't need to practise spiritual disciplines at the stipulated times."
2. There is a dark cloud over the north side of the temple garden; its reflection falls on the Ganges. This cloud is behind the Master as he is returning to his room from the Panchavati.
3. At Balaram Mandir the Master said to Balaram's father: "All religions and all paths call upon their followers to pray to one and the same God. Therefore one should not show disrespect for any religion or religious opinion."

The famous writer Ishan Chandra Roy wrote an article titled "How to See Sri Ramakrishna," from which the following is taken: "One of my Christian friends lamented to me: 'If I had been born 1900 years ago, I could have seen Jesus Christ.' A devotee of Ramakrishna also said, 'If only I could have lived with the Master!' Their attitude is that their lives would be blessed if they could see their Chosen Ideals. Once the present writer also had a desire to see Ramakrishna. God always fulfils a sincere wish. Someone may say that when a person dies one can no longer see that person with his physical eyes, so how can a person see Ramakrishna when he is no longer in a physical form? "Undoubtedly it is a great fortune to see a great soul or an avatar. But would every human being truly see and recognize them? Thousands of people saw Lord Jesus. But the Pharisees and Roman soldiers did not see Jesus the way Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea saw him. They would not have persecuted and crucified him if they had seen the real nature of Jesus Christ. So, true seeing is not seeing through these mortal eyes only.

"In the eyes of a mother, a dark ugly boy is Nilmani (the blue jewel); and a blind boy is Padmalochan (the lotus-eyed one). A lover sees Helen's beauty in an Ethiope's brow. A man neglects a woman, and another man accepts the same woman, offering her everything he owns. Why do such things happen? Because it is better to see through the mental eye than through the physical eyes. What one cannot see through the physical eyes, one can see or catch through the mental eye.

"Some may think that seeing through the mental eye is actually imagination, so it is unreal. This is not true. The beauty of the child is reflected in the mother's eyes. That beauty really exists, so it is real. Therefore, just as the result of seeing through the

physical eyes is true, so also is the result of seeing through the mental eye true." The scriptures say that one can achieve everything through love - even the vision of God. When we see Ramakrishna's pictures and the places where he enacted his lila, when we read his conversations and listen to the songs he sang, we feel the Master awaken in our hearts.

The Fortunate Ones Can See

According to Chaitanya Charitamrita: "Gaur (Chaitanya) is still enacting his divine play; only a fortunate few can see it."

We sometimes lament our bad luck that we never had the opportunity to see Ramakrishna. While reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, we are inspired for the moment, but afterwards we are again depressed. We lament that our lives have been lived in vain.

In this respect, M. gives us a little hope. He told some devotees: "One can see the Master even now in Dakshineswar. First one should know by reading the books when and where the Master sat and what he did; then one should connect oneself with that place and imagine the presence of the Master at that time. Thus one can have the association of the Master and one can even see him. What is imagination today is realization tomorrow. One can have this vision when one's imagination is deeply intensified.

According to the Yoga scriptures, everything is present; there is no past or future."

One day Latu came to Dakshineswar to visit the Master, but he was told the Master had left for Kamarpukur. This news did not lessen his tremendous longing to see the Master. He sat on the bank of the Ganges and started to weep. Someone had told him that Sri Ramakrishna was ever-present at Dakshineswar and that anyone who called on him would see him. Holding steadfastly to this idea, the boy sat there from midday until evening. Ramlal, the Master's nephew, was employed as a priest in the Kali temple at that time. He noticed Latu in the temple garden. He describes the scene in his own words: "As many times as I said to Latu, 'The Master has gone home,' so many times did he repeat, 'No, you do not understand; the Master is definitely here.' I found I could not convince the boy, so I went to the temple to conduct the vesper service. When it was over, I returned to the spot where I had left Latu, taking with me some prasada for him to eat. There I discovered him bowing down and touching his forehead to the ground. Mystified, I kept quiet. After a moment or two, when the boy rose and saw me standing before him, he seemed surprised and asked me: 'Ah! Where has the Master gone?' Dumbfounded, I gave him the prasada and went back to the temple."

Ramlal described a similar incident, in which the Master appeared before a monk: "A young Ramait monk (a worshipper of Ramachandra) in Ayodhya had a vision that God had again incarnated on earth, somewhere in the east. In order to see him, the monk started on foot eastward from Ayodhya. When he reached Bengal he heard that there was a great saint named Sri Ramakrishna near Calcutta. He finally found Dakshineswar after a long search and asked someone, 'Where is Ramakrishna Paramahansa?' The people of the Kali temple told him that the Master had just passed away a few days before. Hearing this heartbreaking news, the monk exclaimed: 'What! He passed away? I have come from Ayodhya on foot (nearly a thousand miles) just to see him. I went through so much hardship to get here and he has left the body!' The young monk began to sob.

"The manager of the Kali temple offered him some food from the temple store but he refused it. He went to the Panchavati and stayed there for two or three days without eating. One night Sri Ramakrishna appeared before him and said: 'You have not eaten anything for several days. I have brought this pudding for you. Please eat it.' He fed the monk and disappeared.

"The next morning I went to the Panchavati and found the monk full of joy. I asked: 'What happened? You were so unhappy yesterday. Why are you so cheerful today?' Then he told me everything. He even showed me the earthen bowl in which the Master had brought the pudding."¹

To Live in the Abode of Ramakrishna

Is Ramakrishna only in Kamarpukur, Dakshineswar, Cossipore, or Belur Math? He is God; he is everywhere, beyond space and time. He dwells in every creature, but he manifests especially in human beings. M. said: "The Master graciously put special glasses on my eyes, so I see everything red (the colour of love). I feel that everyone is my relative, my very own." This is called the eye of love. When this eye opens, one feels that all are children of God and everyone belongs to the Master.

Sometimes devotees imagine that after death they will go to Ramakrishna-loka, the abode of Ramakrishna. Once Swami Vijnanananda said: "Sometimes this question arises in my mind, 'Where shall I go after death?' In this respect Swami Shivananda says: 'We shall go to Ramakrishna-loka. We will live there with the Master.' I say that I will not go to any place like that. I will not go to any external world. If one can keep the Master always in the mind, if one does not forget him even for a moment, then one is living with the Master. If one's mind is constantly absorbed in the thought of the Master, wherever that person lives, he or she dwells in the abode of Ramakrishna." Krishna says

in the Gita (12:8): 'Fix your mind on Me alone, rest your thought on Me alone, and in Me alone you will live hereafter. Of this there is no doubt.'

M.'s Diary Is the Honeycomb

Bees fly from flower to flower for nectar; they gather it and fill the honeycomb. People extract the honey and enjoy it. M. used to run to the temple garden of Dakshineswar and to places in Calcutta to gather Ramakrishna-honey, the Master's immortal words. He gathered Ramakrishna-honey over a period of five years, recorded it in the Gospel, and dispensed it himself for nearly fifty years. He strongly believed that anyone who imbibes these immortal words of the Master will be immortal.

Once M. told some devotees: "I don't claim any credit for it. The Master's life was a glowing example of *jivanmukti* (liberated while living) and *videhamukti* (liberated at the time of death); we lived with him and witnessed those states. One cannot understand Vedanta only through reasoning; one needs experience. That depends on *sadhana*. Our doubts disappear when we see a person who is illumined and free. God descends as an avatar to manifest the true meaning of the scriptures and to correct their distorted interpretations. I am lucky because I associated with the Master over a period of five years, and I now understand a little. 'Just as by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the modification being only a name arising from speech, while the truth is that all is clay.' - This statement of Chandogya Upanishad (6:1:4) is an example of *videhamukti*."

It is said that relationships develop through frequent contact. Related to this is the saying, "Out of sight, out of mind." If we can establish a strong relationship with God, our lives will be free from anxiety, uncertainty, and fear. The Master used to say, "I am and my Divine Mother is." He depended on the Divine Mother alone, and none else. As a result, the Mother took care of him.

The Master taught his devotees various ways to establish a relationship with God. The Vaishnava scriptures describe five kinds of *sadhana*: *shanta*, *dasya*, *vatsalya*, *sakhya*, and *madhura*. One can create a relationship with God by cultivating any one of those attitudes. Standing on the southern ghat of the goose pond, the Master told Narendra: "Look here. Come a little more often. You are a newcomer. On first acquaintance people visit each other quite often, as is the case with a lover and his sweetheart. (Narendra and M. laugh.) So please come, won't you?" Narendra, a member of the Brahma Samaj, was very particular about his promises. He said with a smile, "Yes sir, I shall try."

The Master said to some people: "It will be enough if you visit this place occasionally."

By "this place" he meant himself in particular; but more generally he was referring to God. The Master was God in human form. M. wrote: "The Master said, 'Seeing an avatar is the same as seeing God.' Jesus also said: 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. I and my Father are one.' Why did the Master say that it would be enough to visit him? Because people would be awakened by seeing him. Why do people practise japa and meditation? So that they can feel the presence of God. We saw with our own eyes that God was seated in front of us in human form. So the Master would say, 'It will be enough if you visit this place occasionally.' He meant himself."

I Do Not Know Thy True Nature

To understand Ramakrishna, we go to different teachers and monks, pray in temples, practise spiritual disciplines, and read many books and scriptures. Sometimes we cry and lament, blaming our karma and our previous lives, and some of us think that we have been cursed. But we do not realize that time is a factor. Krishna said in the Gita: "Kalena atmani vindati - One knows in the course of time." Ramakrishna said: "The mother bird does not break the shell of the egg until the right moment arrives." One cannot get fruit as soon as one plants a seed in the ground. One may have to wait several years before one reaps a harvest. Similarly, in spiritual life one should be like a farmer who tills the ground whether there is rain or drought. If one continues practising spiritual disciplines, one day divine grace will dawn.

Once a brahmachari told Swami Saradananda: "Swami, we have so many defects, I doubt whether the Master will ever reveal himself to unfortunate ones like us." Consoling the brahmachari, the swami said: "Go on calling the Master. As a goldsmith heats an alloy to remove the impurities, so the Master will remove all impurities from your mind and give shape to it. He will definitely reveal himself to you. Don't fear. Have faith."

Some householder devotees believed that because they had met the Master, they would definitely attain liberation. They therefore had no anxiety on that account. Some even believed that they no longer had to practise spiritual disciplines because they had seen the Master. But Swami Vivekananda had a different opinion on this subject. He said: "It is not true that those who have not met the Master will not attain liberation and those who have seen him three times will be liberated."

Even the great soul Swami Vivekananda said that he understood the Master very little. Sometimes we try to understand Ramakrishna's true nature by studying the conversations of the Master's direct disciples and close devotees. We are frustrated in our efforts at times, but sometimes we see some rays of hope. According to the devotional scriptures,

ashabaddha (holding onto hope) is a good sign; it indicates love for God.

Swami Shivananda told this story: You will be surprised to hear that many Muslim men and women these days worship Sri Ramakrishna as Muhammad, the messenger of God. One year I visited the Nilgiri Hills (in South India). The devotees there arranged for my residence in a bungalow at Koonoor. Learning that I was there, a Muslim doctor and his family came all the way from Bombay to see me. Upon inquiry I found that he was a famous physician in Bombay who had been educated in England and had a very good practice. He was accompanied by his wife and two handsome sons.

In the course of conversation the doctor said to me, "We have come to see you, but my wife is especially eager to speak to you." Saying this, he moved to the adjoining room. His wife saluted me with great devotion and disclosed many intimate things related to her spiritual life. Since childhood she had been a devotee of Krishna. She worshipped Krishna as a child and occasionally had visions of him. After reading the Master's life and teachings, she had become very devoted to him. It was her conviction that her Chosen Deity Krishna had been born again as Sri Ramakrishna.

I noticed that she had profound love and devotion for the Master. She was quite intense in her spiritual practices and the Master had blessed her in many ways. When taking leave of me, she knelt down and bowed to me, saying, "Please bless me by touching my head with your hand. You had the blessed privilege of associating with Sri Ramakrishna and you were blessed by him. Please touch my head with the hand that once touched Sri Ramakrishna!" And how she wept! I felt in my heart again and again: "Glory be unto the Lord! Blessed is Thy power! Who will understand Thee?" The hymn describing the greatness of Shiva came to my mind.

O Lord, I do not know Thy nature nor what Thou art.

Whatever Thou art, O Great God, my salutations to Thee again and again.

Actually the same thing can be said about the Master.

Shall We Be Satisfied With the Picture Only?

There were no cameras during the times of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Christ, so we really do not know what they looked like. Different painters and sculptors have used their imagination when making images of those avatars; we satisfy our souls by visualizing those images. Six photographs of Sri Ramakrishna were taken: four while he was alive and two after he had passed away. We know from these pictures exactly how the Master looked. We do not need to try to imagine what he looked like. This helps our meditation.

The three well-known pictures of the Master were taken while he was in Samadhi: the first one was taken during kirtan at Keshab Sen's house in Calcutta; the second one, a standing pose, at the Bengal Studio at Radhabazar, Calcutta; and the third one at Dakshineswar, while he was seated in front of the Krishna temple. A fourth picture was taken by the arrangement of Ram Chandra Datta. When he saw this picture, the Master remarked: "I don't look like that." According to Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, when the Master saw the print, he remarked: "Who is this? Am I such an angry man?" Ram gave no reply. He understood that the Master did not approve of the photo, so he threw both the print and the negative into the Ganges.

The Master's devotees would love to see him with their own eyes. Once a monk asked Swami Shivananda: "Swami, will my life end after only having seen the picture of the Master? Shall I have no realization?" "No, no," replied Swami Shivananda encouragingly, "why should it be in the picture alone? You will have your living vision here (pointing to his own heart)."

The Holy Mother told a thrilling story about the shrine picture of the Master (the seated pose). When she was in Puri, she had no altar, so she put the picture on a large can that contained ghee. One day she performed her ritual, then went to visit Lord Jagannath in the temple. Upon her return, she saw that the picture was on the floor. The Holy Mother said later: "I saw that many red ants were crawling over the can, which contained ghee. Because those ants crawled over the picture of the Master, he moved to the floor."

Another time a devotee asked: "Does the Master exist in the picture?"

Holy Mother: "Of course he does. The body and the shadow are the same. And what is his picture but a shadow? If you pray to him constantly before the picture, then he manifests himself through the picture."

Sri Ramakrishna said: "An imitation custard-apple reminds one of the real fruit."

Similarly, Ramakrishna's picture reminds us of Ramakrishna. One of our well-known Hindu families went to Saudi Arabia on business. According to government policy, religious pictures are not allowed there. At the airport, the customs officer found a framed picture of Ramakrishna in one of the suitcases and asked, "Who is this?" The wife replied, "He is my father." The officer raised no objection. The lady did not lie; truly, the Master is our real father.

(to be continued)

Leaves of an Ashrama: 14

Superimposition as Spiritual Technique

Swami Vidyatmananda

The Vedantist says that the world we experience ordinarily is a false reading of the Real, like seeing a snake in a coil of rope. The world that we perceive is, through avidya or ignorance, something superimposed upon the immutable Self. This universal error is the source of all woes. All our disciplines, all our "lying awake in the night and weeping for our sins", have as their object the elimination of this superimposition.

However I see that the principle of superimposition can also be turned to our advantage. We can learn to reverse the process and try to superimpose the divine upon the gross. Thus what cannot readily be cured can not only be endured, but can be turned into an aid. The importunate person who asks too much, becomes for me Jesus standing at the door and knocking, and is welcome. The critic is transformed into a guru, advancing my education. He who dislikes me and opposes me is changed into a divinity exacting dispassion; and one who irritates and bores me - I recast him in the aspect of a deity compelling patience.

Available here is also a technique for cooling sensual drives. Sri Ramakrishna taught man to look upon woman as mother. Even better, man can try to look upon woman as the Divine Mother. A woman may learn to see an Incarnation occupying the form of the man who otherwise would attract her carnally. "Where Rama¹ is kama (lust) is not." In consciously making such an overlay, one can smother the fire of desire under a blanket of purity.

In so doing, it is possible in a sense to see God with open eyes. Through the technique of superimposition, cultivated habitually, divinity is made tangible and thrown over everything. This is not a fanciful exercise in self-delusion. It is a conscious effort to superimpose the snake on to the rope. We are attempting with conscious effort to see in the same fashion as the vijñani² sees habitually: all has become God.

Ordinarily we use the expression "Jiva is Shiva" to refer to Swami Vivekananda's discovery that serving man as God is the same as serving God directly. But jivas (individual souls) can become Shiva also in the manner I have described above - through our calculated misreading of the mundane in terms of the divine. To the extent that we can turn that trick, to that extent we can behold as God beholds: "Do you know what I see? I see Him as all. Men and other creatures appear to me only as hollow forms, moving their heads and hands and feet, but within is the Lord himself."

