

# Vedanta

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Meditation  
*Swami Virajananda*

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Why to fool ourselves?  
*Swami Yatishwarananda*

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## Divine Wisdom

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*BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "What are the means by which one can see God?"*

*MASTER: "Can you weep for Him with intense longing of heart? Men shed a jugful of tears for the sake of their children, for their wives, or for money. But who weeps for God? So long as the child remains engrossed with its toys, the mother looks after her cooking and other household duties. But when the child no longer relishes the toys, it throws them aside and yells for its mother. Then the mother takes the rice-pot down from the hearth, runs in haste, and takes the child in her arms."*

*BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Sir, why are there so many different opinions about the nature of God? Some say that God has form, while others say that He is formless. Again, those who speak of God with form tell us about His different forms. Why all this controversy?"*

*MASTER: "A devotee thinks of God as he sees Him. In reality there is no confusion about God. God explains all this to the devotee if the devotee only realizes Him somehow. You haven't set your foot in that direction. How can you expect to know all about God?"*

*"Listen to a story. Once a man entered a wood and saw a small animal on a tree. He came back and told another man that he had seen a creature of a beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied: 'When I went into the wood, I also saw that animal. But why do you call it red? It is green.' Another man who was present contradicted them both and insisted that it was yellow. Presently others arrived and contended that it was grey, violet, blue, and so forth and so on. At last they started quarrelling among themselves. To settle the dispute they all went to the tree. They saw a man sitting under it. On being*

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352 MARCH-APRIL 2010

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## Contents

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- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 50 | Editorial: Growing Gracefully into Old Age   |
| 54 | Meditation<br><i>Swami Virajananda</i>   |
| 61 | The Raja Yoga of St. John of the Cross (cont.)<br><i>Swami Siddheshwarananda</i>     |
| 68 | Leaves of an Ashrama 33:<br>How to Accept Denunciation<br><i>Swami Vidyatmananda</i> |
| 70 | The Song of the Sannyasin<br>(An Interpretation)(cont.)<br><i>S.C.</i>               |
| 80 | What happens by Intensely Thinking of God?<br><i>Swami Ghanananda</i>                |
| 87 | Why to Fool Ourselves?<br><i>Swami Yatishwarananda</i>                               |
| 94 | Book Review<br><i>John Phillips</i>  |
| 96 | Programme  |
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## Growing Gracefully into Old Age

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**T**hat which is born is sure to decay and die, living or non-living. Existence is inevitably associated with growth, youth, old age, decay and death; there is no exception.

Shankaracharya, it is said, was walking along a street in Varanasi, accompanied by his disciples. He saw an old man trying to master Sanskrit grammar. Taking pity on him, he advised him not to waste his time on learning grammar at his age but to turn his mind to God in worship and adoration. That is how the famous hymn *Bhaja Govindam* came to be composed.

“As long as one is fit and able to earn and support one's family, all the kith and kin are affectionate. But no sooner does one become old and infirm and one's earnings cease, no one cares to enquire of one's well-being even in one's own home.

“Childhood is wasted in sport and play. Youth flies off in pursuits of passions. Old age passes away in brooding over the past and the future. And there is hardly any time left for contemplation on God.

“The body is worn out. The head has turned grey. All the teeth have started to fall out. The legs totter and the old man moves about with the support of crutches. Even then the desires are so strong.”

In the *Bhagavatam*, old age is depicted as an “ugly grey haired unwanted daughter of Time, and the sister of fear.”

When the young prince Siddhartha beheld an old and tottering man, a diseased man and a dead man he was horrified. He did not expect to see such a sight. He never thought he would have to confront old age, sickness or death. When he realised these were inevitable, he renounced home in search of a cure. He did not find a cure for these ills of life. He found a spiritual way to

become immortal. He became Buddha, the Enlightened.

Like Siddhartha none of us want to suffer from old age, sickness or death. There is no way to cure the ills of life, but we can become Buddhas and overcome them.

The cult of youth rules our present day. No wonder even the old people try to pretend, appear and behave like young people.

Fearing old age, millions are taking recourse to all kinds of therapies - drug and diet therapy, gene therapy, hair colouring, hair implantation etc. - to maintain their youthful appearance. Billions of dollars are being spent by the cosmetics industry in search of products to hide the outward signs of aging.

Appearances are deceptive. No amount of cosmetic change could change the fact of old age. Is it not then far better to accept the fact of existence and grow old gracefully?

The World Population census tells us: "The global population was estimated to have only 1% of people aged 65 years and over. By 2000 this figure was 7%, and by 2050, the estimated proportion will be 20% to 25%. The world's population 'boom' is not a result of an increase in birth rates, but rather a decrease in death rates within the next 15 to 20 years."

What this means is in another two decades one quarter of the population will be old or elderly. Thanks to progress in medicine, more people will be living longer, stronger and full of energy. Already a large proportion of money is being spent on the health and social care of the elderly. Like it or not, we have to accept this fact. What would be the economic and social impact of this fact is anybody's guess!

### Signs of old age

Old age brings many changes physically and mentally. There is, often, a general physical decline, and people become less active. Old age can cause, amongst other things: wrinkles and liver spots on the skin; change of hair colour to gray or white; hair

loss, lessened hearing, diminished eyesight, slower reaction times and agility; shaking of the limbs; reduced ability to think clearly; difficulty in short-term memory. One perhaps repeats the same old story again and again!

More importantly; biological aging apart, there is something called mental aging. One loses enthusiasm; perhaps pessimism sets in; one loses faith in God and high ideals; becomes a sceptic and develops the habit of ridiculing everything; grows wisdom teeth at the cost of a wise and happy life; often looks back with a sigh at the (non-existent) 'golden past'!!

Young or old, when one is not prepared to change bad habits and to form good habits one is old.

When good advice falls on deaf ears, when one takes offence easily at even insignificant things, one has definitely become old.

To sum up: it is not merely the biological age that matters. It is the mental and spiritual state of one's mind that really counts.

Cheerfulness, harmony, positive attitude, a higher goal in life and self-control are the characteristics of a mature personality and maturity in age. When these are absent one is definitely old and needs treatment.

When does old age begin?

As one wag said : "From day one! Otherwise why do we ask, 'How *old* is the baby?'"

According to one report (from the internet) old age begins at 27. New research shows that many well-known effects of aging may start decades before our twilight years. According to scientists, our mental abilities begin to decline from the age of 27 after reaching a peak at 22.

There is some good news, though. The report states that abilities based on accumulated knowledge, such as performance

on tests of vocabulary or general information, increase until at least the age of 60.

According to Sri Ramakrishna when one's hair starts to turn grey one should recognise old age. According to him age 50 is good enough to accept that one is old and gracefully step into the *Vanaprastha Ashrama*, the third stage of life.

In Hinduism, life was divided into four stages: childhood, youth, middle age, and old age; but our modern culture has downsized the categories to three: childhood, youth, and “you are looking fine.” (Courtesy of Swami Adiswarananda)

### Reactions to old age

Is old age really that bad? Why is it old people do not wish to gracefully accept old age? These days it is an offence to ask elderly people their age (even on their birthdays!!).

Loneliness, frustration, fear of being treated as insignificant etc., and boredom are some of the reasons why people do not accept old age. Unable to bear this loneliness some even commit suicide. Old age also hardens one's habits, likes and dislikes, prejudices and perceptions.

Many of us get panicky when we become old. This is because we never planned for this event; we never pause to think that one day we also will become old and are emotionally ill-prepared to face it. And mere acceptance of becoming old is not enough. Just as we plan for our financial future we also have to plan for the day when we become old, retire and have to spend our days fruitfully.

*Vedanta* tells us not to worry. It tells us the way to grow old gracefully, joyously and become fruitful. We will discuss this in our future editorial.

*(to be continued)*

*Swami Dayatmananda*

## Meditation

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To realise God an aspirant must have patience, perseverance, purity of body and mind, intense desire or yearning, the aggregate of the six attributes, namely *shama* (tranquillity of mind), *dama* (restraint of the senses), *uparati* (giving up attachment to objects), *titiksha* (remaining unaffected amidst all kinds of afflictions), *shradha* (faith in the words of the spiritual teacher and the scriptures) and *samadhana* (concentration of mind on the Chosen Ideal, or God).

Do not tell anybody else, except the Guru, the realisations and the visions, or similar experiences, that spiritual practices may bring you. Always keep your spiritual treasure - your inmost thoughts - hidden within you. These are not for vulgar gaze. These are your sacred possessions to be shared only between you and the Lord in secret. Likewise, do not talk of your defects and blemishes to others. You lose thereby your self-respect and the respect of others for you. They are for you to confess to the Lord. Pray to Him for strength to overcome them.

When you begin meditation, first sit steadily for a while and watch the mind; let it wander wherever it pleases. Think that you are the witness, the seer. Sit watching how the mind floats and sinks, runs and skips; keep thinking, "I am not the body, nor the senses, nor the mind; I am altogether separate from the mind. The mind, too, is material; it is only a finer form of matter. I am the *Atman* (Self), the master; the mind is my servant." Whenever any idle thought arises in the mind try at once to put it down forcibly.

Ordinarily one breathes through the left nostril at the time of rest, through the right at the time of work, and through both at the time of meditation. The state most favorable to meditation is

when the body and mind have become calm and there is an even flow of breath through both nostrils. But do not pay too much attention to watching your breath, nor make this a guide by which to regulate your activities.

When the mind is absolutely calm, breathing becomes steady and *kumbhaka* (suspension of breath) follows. When breathing is steady, the mind becomes one-pointed. *Bhakti* (love of God) also brings about *kumbhaka* and breathing becomes steady. Even without practising *yoga*, *pranayama* (control of breath) is attained automatically if one remembers, and thinks of, the Lord and does *japa* (repetition of the *matram*) with a yearning heart. There is no other easy or convenient method to achieve one-pointedness of mind except by *abhyasa*, or repeated and sustained efforts, and *vairagya*, or non-attachment to worldly objects.

Whatever be the time you devote to *japa* and meditation - even if it be only ten or fifteen minutes - do it with all your heart and soul. The Lord is the indweller, the inner guide. He sees your heart; His measure is not how long you meditate on Him nor how many times you do *japa*, but your inner longing.

Self-effort (*purushakara*) is necessary for spiritual attainment. Resolve firmly, "I will realise God through my own efforts by doing spiritual practices," and go on steadfastly practising *japa* and meditation, seated in proper posture, for at least two hours every morning and evening, for three or four years - and see if you succeed or not.

When by continued practice of *japa* and meditation the mind will have become calm and purified, then the mind itself will be your Guru or guide, and you will have proper understanding of everything, and find the solution of your spiritual doubts and questions within yourself. The mind will tell you what you should do, one thing after another, and how you should conduct yourself.

*Japa*, or mental repetition of the *mantra*, counting it on the fingers, using a rosary, or keeping the number of the repetitions - all these are only preliminary means to help withdraw the mind from other objects and fix it on the object of worship. Otherwise, you will not know when the mind may have run away in another direction; or you may even have dozed off. So, though these processes may appear to cause a little distraction at the outset, they will enable one to keep watch over the mind's vagaries and to detect them easily, and to draw the mind back and keep it on the object of meditation.

Never think yourself to be weak. Have firm faith in yourself. Think, "There is nothing that I cannot do; I can do everything if I want." Why should you acknowledge defeat to your mind? Know that if you can subdue it, the whole world will be under your feet. One who has no self-confidence does not have real faith in God. Swami Vivekananda has said that the real atheist is he who has no faith in himself. Nobody listens to the words of one who has no self-confidence; and God also does not listen to his prayers.

*Asana* is that posture in which one can sit for meditation steadily and with ease for a long time. But the spine has to be kept straight, and the chest, neck and head should be held erect, so that the entire weight of the upper part of the body may fall on the ribs and the chest may not sag. A stooping posture in any case is not healthy.

*Japa*, meditation, ritualistic worship, prayer, recollectedness, reading sacred books, association with holy men, godly conversation, retiring into solitude and thinking spiritual thoughts - whichever of these attracts you, according to mood and opportunity, and gives you joy, take advantage of that and do it. But meditation and *japa* are the main things. Never miss them for a single day however occupied you may be, or even in times of

sickness or infirmity, in misfortune or calamity. In such circumstances, if you cannot or do not find it convenient to carry on your practice in full measure, make salutation, and pray and do *japa* for at least ten or fifteen minutes.

The sensible man does not try to diagnose his own disease and prescribe medicine for himself by reading medical books. In case of disease, a doctor's advice should be sought. In the same way, if after reading many books and scriptures one proceeds to choose for himself a particular spiritual discipline his mind may become confused, and troubled by doubts and misgivings. Progress may be interrupted, and waste of effort and even harm may result. The reason is that the various scriptures contain divergent or even contradictory directions and methods for aspirants of different temperaments and capacities, and different stages of life. It is therefore dangerous in many cases to decide for yourself what is exactly suitable for you. The Guru alone can direct you to the right path. That is why spiritual knowledge has to be acquired direct from the Guru. Know that the initiation and instructions given by him are the only path for you to follow. If you do the spiritual practices as enjoined by him unswervingly and with full faith in them and in him, you are sure to achieve success in course of time. In any event, never give up these practices and take to other methods under anybody else's advice. If you jump from one thing to another, the only result will be that you will lose your way and drift about without gaining anything.

When God in His boundless mercy has, through the Guru, imparted the *Siddha-mantra* (mystic formula of the particular name of the Deity) which is the key to the portal of His sanctuary - know that He has given Himself away freely. But it is necessary for you to have that firm conviction. If you lose that invaluable jewel through carelessness and negligence, know that you are unfit for His grace. The right appreciation of this gift is the practice of the

*mantra* and the instructions imparted by the Guru with your whole heart and soul until the Goal is reached. Only by so doing will you be able to repay a part of the debt to him. The more you realise that God is nearer and dearer to you than your near and dear ones, the more you will be the recipient of His grace. Through His grace you will be free and ever blissful even in this life.

Until love and devotion to God grow, one cannot be aware of the transitory and insubstantial nature of the world. The mind is but one; and it cannot be partitioned into compartments, one part given to God and other parts filled with desires for name, fame and sense objects. God cannot be realised unless the whole mind be given to Him. Unless one can do that, one has to be born again and again in the world and suffer endless misery.

In order to renounce the world, one need not take the holy orders or retire to the forest. Real renunciation is of the mind. If you give up the world mentally, it is the same whether you remain in the world or in the forest. If you run away to the forest, without completely renouncing from your mind attachment for worldly objects, the world will follow you there also and trouble you just the same; there will be no escape from it.

If you have to be in the world at all, make God your world. Set up your home with Him. Whatever you do, see or hear, think that to be God. It is all play, a game with Him. Know life to be a game in which Mother herself is the Player and you are Her playmate. The world will be quite different when and if you know that Mother is playing with you. Then you will find that in this world there is neither happiness nor misery, good nor evil, attachment nor aversion, greed nor jealousy; consequently, all delusion, self-interest and conflict will vanish and no pairs of opposites can torment you there. All ideas of union or separation, of friend or foe, of high and low, of "I and mine" are non-existent in

that play of yours with the Divine Mother. There is only inexhaustible bliss, boundless love, and infinite peace. If even a drop of that bliss be experienced the pleasures of worldly objects will seem contemptible. The possession of even an atom of that love will make the whole world dearer than one's dearest ones, and heavenly bliss will be felt through every pore of the body.

There is no fear in that play, no anxiety, no bondage, no weariness; it is always an ever-new play. And what infinite modes of play does the Mother know! Endless are the forms and ways in which She plays! One loses oneself in the very thought of it and is merged therein. In that moment of transcendental ecstasy the play ceases; for who will play then, and with whom? That beatific experience, that state of blissful union, is beyond the reach of speech and mind! He alone knows who knows! Great fun! Oh, the great fun!

If God comes and says: "What do you want? Do you want me, or do you want to live a happy life full of name, fame, health and wealth for a hundred years with wife, children and grandchildren?" You will find that, except perhaps for one in ten million, all will eagerly pray for the latter.

To realise God one must devote oneself to the task heart and soul, a hundred per cent. Not even less by a millionth part of one per cent, or the minutest fraction thereof, will do. What almost all of us seek is to realise Him easily without much toil and trouble, and without sacrificing anything. We want to compromise between God and the world. We think that if the Guru out of his infinite mercy can get Him for us, and give us salvation, nothing could be better than that. Alas, how can this be? "The Lord must have His entire due, settled and squared to the last farthing."

He who really wants Him finds Him; he who does not, is made to dance to the tune of the five devils, becomes the sport of

the five elements which comprise the material of the body and the universe: earth, water, heat, air and space. He is at the mercy of evil influences of all kinds. □

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When a man is vain on account of his learning, what does he gain? Even if he has read all the *Vedas*, he is not qualified to know the Truth. Real learning is that which will enable a man to realise the Truth. As our Master used to say, repeating *Sadam, Sadam* (rice, rice) will not appease your hunger; so repeating the texts of books will not appease your spiritual hunger. Your hunger will be satisfied only when you see God. Intellectuality and spirituality are diametrically opposed to each other. Intellectuality is based on ego and spirituality is based on annihilation of ego.

*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless men now.

*St. Teresa of Avila*

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Indian Thought and Carmelite Spirituality  
The Raja Yoga of Saint John of the Cross (cont.)

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**T**he action of the Dark Night bears first of all on what St. John of the Cross calls "the two interior corporeal senses," namely imagination and fantasy, which yoga calls *samkalpa* and *vikalpa*. St. John of the Cross continues: "The one produces a kind of imperfect reasoning; the other forms the image which conforms to the object represented. . . . Meditation is the work of these two faculties, since it is a discursive act built upon forms, figures, and images fashioned by the senses, as when we imagine Christ crucified or bound to a column, or at one of the stations of the cross; or God seated on a throne in resplendent majesty; or when we imagine the glory of heaven to be an incomparable light, or picturing any other human or divine thing. Now the soul will have to cast out all these imaginings and leave the senses in darkness if she wishes to attain union with the divine." (AMC, Bk. II. Ch. 12, 3)

Then, a little further on: "Thus those who picture God in images, such as a devouring fire or a brilliant light or any other form, and think they have a good picture of Him are actually very far from Him." (AMC, Bk. II. Ch 12, 5)

Here we come to the matter of meditation and concentration, a subject explored in great detail by yogins. Patanjali speaks of diverse objects of meditation which have as their purpose rendering the mind capable of intense concentration. The fifty-first sutra of the first chapter explains the method of training for *samadhi* "without seed" (*nirbija-samadhi*). The disciple does not touch his goal until he has destroyed any attachment to all categories of concentration and meditation. As soon as the control of *samkalpas* and *vikalpas* is complete, no kind

of representation is any longer produced. St. John of the Cross accords permission to use certain representations and meditations to those who are not yet initiated into a higher level of spiritual life. This is in order to “enkindle bit by bit their love and feed their souls by means of the senses. But they must learn to do without representations and not stay at that stage; for if they did, they would never arrive at their goal, which has no connection with those means which have to be left behind... Those means are like the steps of a staircase. They are only the means for climbing up . . . ‘We should not think that the Divine Being is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man.’” (Acts 17:29)(AMC. Bk. II, Ch. 12, 5)

In this manner St. John of the Cross speaks to beginners who after having used representations, become attached to them and do not try to go beyond them. They cry out in despair. "If all this is only the means, where and when will we enjoy the goal?" Then the saint speaks of a degree of spiritual life during which they must apply themselves to “discursive prayer by means of representations, images, forms, and figures (of which we have spoken); for we must not give them up sooner or later than the spirit requires. They must be left behind at just the right time so that they will not hinder the soul in her journey to God. It is equally necessary not to abandon imaginative meditation before the proper time, lest there be a regression... For although the apprehensions of these faculties do not serve as proximate means of union for those who are proficient, they serve nevertheless for beginners as a distant means for disposing and preparing their spirit; they serve equally to void their sense of all base, material, worldly and natural forms of images.” (AMC, Bk II, Ch. 13, 1)

All these remarks prove the depth of St. John's understanding of spiritual life. In India, the yogi uses the method of concentration and meditation to turn the mind away from

worldly matters. Since the wandering mind cannot suspend its imagination and fantasies, at least he let them have some sort of spiritual content. Sri Ramana Maharshi once told us this anecdote: the agitated and undisciplined mind can be compared with an elephant's trunk which is always in motion, breaking branch after branch of the tree to which he is attached. In order to prevent him from doing too much damage, a chain is put on his trunk. Immediately the animal begins to play with his chain. The same thing happens when imagination and fantasy are distracted by a spiritual subject. The movement of the elephant's trunk does not stop; its imagination is the same as before, but the subterfuge of the chain makes it possible to limit the damage.

St John of the Cross gives a detailed description which indicates to the soul that the moment has come to abandon discursive meditation with its representations and images.

1. "The soul finds that it has become impossible to meditate; one no longer finds pleasure or sweetness in meditating but only dryness.

2. "The soul no longer experiences any wish to apply imagination or the senses to any exterior or interior object of meditation; not that the imaginative faculty ceases to function, but that there is no longer any desire to apply it to those objects intentionally.

3. "Our author tells us that the final sign is the most certain. "The soul finds pleasure in being alone with God in loving awareness of Him."

"In this state the faculties (intellect, memory, will) are inactive; the soul enjoys an interior peace in that 'general, loving knowledge of God' of which we have already spoken." (summarised from AMC, Bk. II, Ch. 13, 2-4)

After having recognised these three signs simultaneously, the soul can quite safely abandon discursive meditation and enter

into contemplation. However, St. John of the Cross insists that one must be careful here not to confuse tepidity and lack of concentration with the first sign. The soul must discover the second sign in herself, experiencing no desire to be concerned with anything other than God. But that is still not enough: she must be possessed by the desire to be alone with God. In fact, if the soul has no more inclination to meditate and experiences no attraction for anything else, "this state could proceed from melancholia or some other mood coming from the heart or the head, and the soul might let herself relax in the charm of that torpor."

When these three signs are distinctly and simultaneously present in the soul, the soul discovers that the preliminary exercises in meditation were only "the shell of spiritual life." At this point a particularly difficult stage of spiritual life begins. The man devoted to spiritual life holds firm in his loving attention to God and preserves peace in his mind when he cannot meditate; it even seems to him that he is doing nothing. The life of the disciple at this moment begins a long period of strong tension. Discursive meditation accompanied by images and representations no longer attract him, but he has not yet reached infused contemplation. He has barely that general knowledge which we have studied already at length.

The aspirant is protected from natural and supernatural dangers thanks to the discipline which Faith (the Church, the Guru) has imposed on him. One of the dangers which the *sadhaka* meets on his way, yoga warns us, and which threatens to check his progress, is certainly the attraction which supernatural experiences can exert on his mind. How many people have we met, in India or in Europe, who think they have reached a very advanced stage because they have visions! For St. John of the Cross their sole value is the following: "When the soul is thus

prepared by this natural exercise, God customarily enlightens and spiritualises her further by some supernatural visions which we here call imaginary and which, as we have already said, produce a great fruition in the spirit, gradually raising her above grossness and very slowly perfecting her." (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk II, Ch. 17, 4)

Here the help of the director of conscience becomes all-important. He must establish beyond doubt which of the soul's experiences can rightly be accepted and which must be rejected. St. John of the Cross begins his explanation of this subject by considering some of the difficulties a director of conscience must confront in his relationship with the disciple. He says first of all: "I understand how difficult it is to explain how the spirit of the disciple is formed in a secret and intimate manner on the model of his spiritual master... One cannot explain anything concerning the disciple without explaining what concerns the master. Thus if the spiritual father is inclined towards visions he cannot fail unconsciously to impress the same inclination onto his disciple." And if the disciple has the same inclination, he will hold the visions in all the greater esteem. When the confessor does not have the necessary prudence to turn his disciple away from those visions, he communicates the signs by which the good and bad visions are recognised and risks throwing the soul into all sorts of dangers and preoccupations. But there is more. Certain directors, noting that some souls are able to communicate with God, use them, asking them to reveal certain secrets; and those souls obey, thinking it licit to beg revelations this way. If God hearkens to their request, they become confident and imagine that God is happy about that - which is not true. Their acts and beliefs follow those revelations, and they become attached to that way of dealing with God. However, if it happens that the facts do not correspond to the revelations they are amazed and ask

themselves whether the revelations come from God or not, for, according to them, the revelation would have to be realised the way they imagined it "And that is a great illusion, for the revelations or Words of God do not always verify what men imagine."

St. John of the Cross concludes by saying that God does not like that process, and he shows his irritation: "What is certainly the best thing to do is to get those souls prudently to flee from such supernatural communications, and habituate them, as we have said, to seek purity in spiritual poverty and the darkness of faith, for that is the way which leads to union with God." In reading the following lines, we think we hear an echo of Shankara. St. John of the Cross tells us: "For those who wish to follow our advice we propose accepting supernatural communications if they conform to reason and to the teachings of the Gospel. In that case, those communications are accepted, not because they come by revelation, but because they conform to reason, leaving aside the question of revelation."

The prudence of St. John of the Cross is in perfect accord with the instructions we have received from the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Sarada Devi used to recommend to her spiritual children to keep their heads cool and their digestive system in good condition. If the brain heats up, it becomes easily subject to hallucinations. St. John of the Cross considers that even if the visions come from an authentic supernatural source, it is good to reject them and not accord them any importance. Instead of fortifying evangelical faith, visions remove the mind from the substance of Faith, for the substance of Faith surpasses all means of expression. Monks of a spiritual order have renounced their families, possessions, and worldly career for a single goal: to realise God. When, under the pretext of spiritual experiences, they become subject to visions or supernatural voices, etc., with a

few rare exceptions, the way is opened to schizophrenia or paranoia. Thus the Holy Mother says, with a kind of irony, that precisely those who have devoted their lives to a good cause (and their number is greater than one imagines), those whose prime objective is liberation (*Mukti*), are the ones who get most tightly bound in the meshes of *maya*.

If the disciple finds a suitable spiritual director, those dangers are avoided; but often spiritual life is an evasion from the responsibilities of life, a search for artificial compensations and consolations which ends lamentably in pathological afflictions. St. John of the Cross fought fiercely against this kind of cheap spiritual glory. The saint's whole doctrine is completely oriented towards what Zen calls "letting go." However, the supernatural forces which awaken in us are powerful claws which reinforce the grip of the ego instead of obliging it to let go.

*(to be continued)*

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What will it avail if one makes charity with money stolen from others? To live long on the charity of others is as good as death. It is useless for a slanderer to repeat the name of God. This is why Jesus said, 'Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar; and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift.'

*Swami Turiyananda*

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## Leaves of an Ashrama 33: How to accept Denunciation

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**A** friend from another ashrama wrote me not long ago: “Last week one of the younger men here came in and told me very plainly just what he thought of me. It was devastating. I’m still reeling from his aggressiveness. Did that ever happen to you?”

Of course it has happened to me. Not only in spoken form but by way of poisonous, unsigned letters also. Anyone who has had to deal with ‘the public’ is subject to such denunciations.

Aggression becomes dangerous when it is answered in kind. Then it turns into confrontation, whose end no one can predict. Sri Ramakrishna has pledged his children to seek harmony, reconciliation, harmlessness, peace. But how to persevere in these virtues when attacked?

So a formula must be found, or a way of thinking, which permits us to respond positively to those scoldings, denunciations, and aggressions which are bound to occur when people come together in religious centers and groups. Well, I have found such a formula, tested it, and am able to recommend it to others.

First, on such occasions I should examine closely what the person scolding me has to say, to see whether there is some truth in his accusations. Generally people speak candidly when they are angry, and what they say may alert me to a fault of which I am not aware. In this case, although it hurts, I should receive the scolding gratefully. The Divine Guru often employs an astonishing indirection to point out to us something we need to know.

Second, I should recall at the moment of impact all the praise that I have received, and discriminate at once that praise

and blame are nothing but pairs of opposites, the one no more valid than the other. While being shouted at, let me dwell on the time when X. spoke flattering words and Y. kissed my hand in gratitude. If I would accept the pleasant I must accept the unpleasant. If I would deny the unpleasant I must deny the pleasant. Thus I can use the praise I would accept to cancel out, to neutralize, the blame I would reject.

Third, I shall remember that denunciation from another may well reveal more about him than about me. There may be little solid truth in what he is saying. He is simply discharging in a bolt of lightning the accumulated charge of bad feelings built up in him, and using me as a handy lightning rod. The trouble is his trouble, not mine. In a bad mood, or hurt, or jealous, he searches for a point where he may relieve this uncomfortable feeling, and invents a justification in something which I have said or done. Out comes the denunciation, together with the relief it produces.

So let me think of myself in such a situation not as an innocent harmed but as a therapist offering comfort and healing to a brother human being. This technique is what Laura Huxley elaborated in her book *You are not the Target*. If I remain silent and unconcerned, my assailant will have a reaction afterwards and will feel remorse, which will provide him with a learning experience. "To whom does a gift belong," asked the Buddha, "if it is not accepted by him to whom it is proffered?" Thus I have on the one hand helped another in permitting him a convenient relief, and on the other hand given myself an exercise in practicing that evenness of mind, that acceptance of all as His, which is my goal. □

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The Song of the Sannyasin  
(An Interpretation) (cont.)

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**4** “Who sows must reap,” they say, “and cause must  
bring The sure effect; good, good; bad, bad; and none  
Escape the law; but whoso wears a form,  
Must wear the chain.” Too true; but far beyond  
Both name and form is *Atman*, ever free.  
Know thou art That, *sannyasin* bold! Say -  
*Om Tat Sat, Om!*

As long as we have a psychophysical system we are subjected to the law of cause and effect. Every action we perform, every thought we think is like a seed waiting to germinate into a particular result that will be of the same nature of the action or thought that produced it. In another of his poems Swamiji writes, “I am my own embodied past; therein the plan was made; the will, the thought, to that conform, to that the outer frame; no one but me to blame.”<sup>1</sup> Everything we are today is the manifested result of our past deeds and thoughts, and nothing that we have sown with our body and mind in the past, can we avoid harvesting with our body and mind in the present or in the future. What is more, our present psychophysical system and life’s circumstances adjust precisely to the demands of that harvest, and search for it with irresistible force, “and none escape the law.” But let us not think that this is fatalism or pessimism; it is an encouraging thought actually, for if it is true that we cannot avoid the result of our bad karma, it is equally true that nothing can prevent us from making our future - whatever our present condition may be.

Now come words of great assurance. In spite of this

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<sup>1</sup> *No one to blame*, C.W.Vol. 8

irrefutable law of cause and effect that we see daily working in our life, there is another truth, much higher, much greater, unchanging: "...but far beyond both name and form is *Atman*, ever free. Know thou art That, *sannyasin* bold." Is it not amazing the liberating power of those words! Yes it is true that name and form are weighing heavily on us, it is true that seemingly unbreakable chains are all around us, but why to fear! Far beyond, untouched by them is our real nature, ever free, never affected by our psychophysical nightmare, however real it may seem to us for the time being. This is the glory of the *Atman*, whose nature is freedom, untouched, untarnished, and we are That!

5. They know not truth, who dream such vacant dreams,  
As father, mother, children, wife and friend.  
The sexless Self! Whose father He? Whose child?  
Whose friend, whose foe is He who is but One?  
The Self is all in all, none else exist;  
And thou art That, *sannyasin* bold! Say-  
*Om Tat Sat, Om!*

What is a dream but the mental projection of a world that does not exist except in the mind, and only for as long as the mind holds it. The universe we see 'outside' us is exactly that. We project the universe and all its values upon the 'screen' of the Self - as in a movie - and upon that we live and judge, enjoy and suffer; while all the while only the screen is permanent, not the movie.

Swamiji not only calls family life a dream, but a vacant one. It is like children playing with dolls. They have five or six dolls and they make a family out of them. They say, "This is the father, this is the mother, etc." But the truth is that they are all plastic dolls, nothing else. The difference is in their shapes and in the names that the children give them; but the substance, the only reality there, is plastic. The dolls are simply different

modifications of that plastic. If you melt them, they will become an undifferentiated mass of plastic. It will no longer be possible to tell which part of that mass was the mother or the child.

All human relationships are mere projections of the mind. Sri Ramakrishna was fond of telling his disciples the following story: "There was a farmer who lived in the countryside. He was a real *jnani*.<sup>1</sup> He earned his living by farming. He was married, and after many years a son was born to him, whom he named Haru. The parents loved the boy dearly. This was natural, since he was the one precious gem in the family. On account of his religious nature the farmer was loved by the villagers. One day he was working in the field when a neighbour came and told him that Haru had had an attack of cholera. The farmer at once returned home and arranged for treatment for the boy. But Haru died. The other members of the family were grief-stricken, but the farmer acted as if nothing had happened. He consoled his family and told them that grieving was futile. Then he went back to his field. On returning home he found his wife weeping even more bitterly. She said to him: 'How heartless you are! You haven't shed one tear for the child.' The farmer replied quietly: 'Shall I tell you why I haven't wept? I had a very vivid dream last night. I dreamt I had become a king; I was the father of eight sons and was very happy with them. Then I woke up. Now I am greatly perplexed. Should I weep for those eight sons or for this one Haru?'

"The farmer was a *jnani*; therefore he realized that the waking state is as unreal as the dream state. There is only one eternal Substance, and that is the *Atman*."<sup>2</sup>

Our dreams are real to us as long as we are dreaming - this is undeniable - but its insubstantiality becomes apparent as soon

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<sup>1</sup> A knower of the Self

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pg. 651, 652

as we wake up; at that time everything we have experienced loses its value in a moment. Such is the case of those who are awake to the Self. They are conscious of that reality that never changes, and against which all other 'realities' vanish like the mist.

But there is one more side to this that must be said (we will only mention this here, for Swamiji will expand on this topic on the next verse): The dream, ephemeral though it is, is also part of the dreamer, for as Swamiji explains, "the Self is all in all, none else exists." So for those who have realized the Self, the world stops existing as 'world' - the world-reality disappears like a dream - but it exists now as what it always was: the Self.

In the first verse of the *Isha Upanishad* a practical advice is given to those of us who have not realized the Self: "All this - whatever exists in this changing universe - should be covered by the Lord. Protect the Self by renunciation."<sup>1</sup> This is the renunciation that Swamiji insists we must practice, to cover all human relations and everything there is with the awareness of the Self, realizing that "none else exists; and thou art That." This renunciation 'protects' the Self by preventing the projection of our mental concepts over It, and by keeping our sight pure and free from the delusion of multiplicity.

6. There is but One, the Free, the Knower – Self!  
Without a name, without a form or stain.  
In Him is *Maya*, dreaming all this dream.  
The Witness, He appears as nature, soul.  
Know thou art That, *sannyasin* bold! Say –  
*Om Tat Sat, Om!*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Upanishads* by Swami Nikhilananda

In the first two lines of this verse Swamiji continues the same idea of the previous verse; that there is only one absolute existence, undifferentiated, immortal, pure and free. So what is this dream of duality, so persistent that it never stops asserting itself in our lives? When we discriminate on the nature of the world, we find it to be utterly impermanent and not worth struggling for, and still its existence seems to be an inseparable part of us.

This verse deals with the very essence of *advaita vedanta*. But before we try to understand any further, let's see what did Sri Ramakrishna say about *Brahman* or the Self, and *Maya* or *Shakti*:

"The *jnanis*, who adhere to the non-dualistic philosophy of *vedanta*, say that the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, the universe itself and all its living beings, are the manifestations of *Shakti*, the Divine Power. If you reason it out, you will realize that all these are as illusory as a dream. *Brahman* alone is the Reality, and all else is unreal. Even this very *Shakti* is unsubstantial, like a dream.

"But though you reason all your life, unless you are established in *samadhi*, you cannot go beyond the jurisdiction of *Shakti*. Even when you say, 'I am meditating,' or 'I am contemplating,' still you are moving in the realm of *Shakti*, within Its power.

"The Primordial Power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving, and destroying in play, as it were... When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then we call It *Brahman*. But when It engages in these activities, then we call It Kali or *Shakti*. The Reality is one and the same; the difference is in name and form."<sup>1</sup>

So this *maya* seems so real and so inseparable from us for the simple reason that *maya* is but a modification of the Self, the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel of Ramkrishna*, pg. 134, 135

whole universe is a manifestation of the Self. We cannot help experiencing it unless we are established in *samadhi*, as Sri Ramakrishna said, until we are fully established in the realization that we are the witness. Then we will understand, after coming down from that lofty state, that it is the *Atman*, the witness, who is experienced as nature when seen through the ego and the five senses. What is more, the Self in the form of the individual soul is experiencing itself in the form of the universe, and remains unaffected in the form of the witness. And *maya*, as Swamiji explains, it this inexplicable phenomenon that creates the appearance of division in the Self, and the subsequent perception of multiplicity.

7. Where seekest thou? That freedom, friend, this world  
Nor that can give. In books and temples, vain  
Thy search. Thine only is the hand, that holds  
The rope that drags thee on. Then cease lament.  
Let go thy hold, *sannyasin* bold! Say –  
*Om Tat Sat, Om!*

Here is an admonition to all sincere spiritual seekers, and particularly so to the *sannyasin*, the standard-bearer of freedom. We all search for freedom every moment of our lives, but “Where seekest thou?” Commonly we find that our efforts are mainly unconscious, we search for freedom in the guise of enjoyment, not realizing that it only increases our slavery. But there are some very few individuals that become aware of their plight, and consciously try to break away from the circle of pleasure and pain that turns around the embodied life. Then the real search begins. When the mind becomes aware that every experience is painful, renunciation awakes.

As we saw in previous verses we are essentially infinite, and no finite existence can ever satisfy us. Neither this world nor

any world to come can give us true freedom, for every world implies an embodied state and all its concomitant limitations. In our initial search we may turn to “books and temples,” but soon we discover that even they cannot break the ties that bind us, they only point the way.

Finally, after all the weeping and praying and longing, after all the searching and struggling to break free, we come to this concluding fact: “Thine only is the hand, that holds the rope that drags thee on.” What a blow! But what a necessary blow! Within it is the key to all freedom. With the dawn of this understanding, the final way turns clearly visible. It is the final stage and yet it is the hardest, for now we know that we are our only obstacle - we must let go. Let go of life, let go of death, let go of every single thing and thought that tells us we are finite; that tells us we are different from the rest of the universe. “Let go thy hold, *sannyasin* bold!”

8. Say, “Peace to all: From me no danger be  
To aught that lives. In those that dwell on high,  
In those that lowly creep, I am the Self in all.  
All life both here and there, do I renounce,  
All heavens, and earths and hells, all hopes and fears.”  
Thus cut thy bonds, *sannyasin* bold! Say –  
*Om Tat Sat, Om!*

Now we are face to face with the very heart of the monastic life, and the sum and substance of the *sannyasin*'s vows. How beautifully phrased; so concise and perfect! Like a song it flows from the heart of the *sannyasin*, filling all the worlds, encompassing all beings with that sense of oneness. And out of the fullness of that supreme renunciation, pours out, in all directions, the boon of fearlessness to all creation.

Having renounced all selfish motives and feeling that the same *Atman* dwells in all being, the *sannyasin* offers that assurance

that none should fear him for “I am the Self in all.” As long as one sees many, there will be fear, but standing in the conviction of oneness all fear vanishes – whom to fear if I am the only existence? These are the most important vows that the *sannyasins* take: Fearlessness to all beings and the complete renunciation of all personal motives, goals and aspirations; in this world, in our imagination or anywhere else. “All life both here and there, do I renounce, all heavens, and earths and hells, all hopes and fears.”

The severity of these vows is simply daunting, and yet with what joy they are taken. What a glorious relief it is to give up the burden that ties us to life. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of telling the following story, which gives some idea of what is felt by every monk and nun:

“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. The kite flew to the south and the crows followed it there. The kite flew to the north and still the crows followed after it. The kite went east and west, but with the same result. 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.’”<sup>1</sup>

9. Heed then no more how body lives or goes,  
Its task is done: let karma float it down;  
Let one put garlands on, another kick  
This frame; say naught. No praise or blame can be,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pg. 314

Where praiser praised, and blamer blamed, are one.  
Thus be thou calm, *sannyasin* bold! Say –  
*Om Tat Sat, Om!*

Having thus performed that supreme renunciation mentioned in the previous verse, Swamiji explains now the natural result of those who actually attained to that inner state of perfect detachment. The realization of this state is graphically described by Swamiji in the following analogy:

“Two wheels joined by one pole are running together. If I get hold of one of the wheels and, with an axe, cut the pole asunder, the wheel which I have got hold of stops, but upon the other wheel is its past momentum, so it runs on a little and then falls down. This pure and perfect being, the soul, is one wheel, and this external hallucination of body and mind is the other wheel, joined together by the pole of work, of karma. Knowledge is the axe which will sever the bond between the two, and the wheel of the soul will stop - stop thinking that it is coming and going, living and dying, stop thinking that it is nature and has wants and desires, and will find that it is perfect, desireless. But upon the other wheel, that of the body and mind, will be the momentum of past acts; so it will live for some time, until that momentum of past work is exhausted, until that momentum is worked away, and then the body and mind fall, and the soul becomes free.”<sup>1</sup>

So the knowledge of the Self, which is the immediate result of total renunciation, is the axe that cuts the bond of ignorance, putting an end to any further need for effort. There is nothing left now to attain, and the only task ahead is to stay still and let karma take its course upon the body-mind system. Hence Swamiji says, “Heed then no more how body lives or goes, its task is done.” Whatever it may come can never touch the Self: good

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<sup>1</sup> C.W, Vol II, pg 280-281

and evil, praise or blame are no different, for the Self is the only experience of the free.

Of course, for those *sannyasins* that have embraced external renunciation but are not yet free, the verse indicates the practice that they are to follow. Remaining as the witness, they try to pass through life paying no attention to their fate and always struggling to have no personal hopes, desires or fear, until the state that now is only imitated will eventually come true. For as the saying goes, “dancing, dancing, one becomes a dancer.”

*(to be continued)*

You have quoted a passage from the scriptures. It is true, without renunciation immortality cannot be attained. But the sages have prescribed two paths for arriving at the goal of renunciation. Those who have known the transiency of the world and are free from all physical cravings give up everything and embrace the life of monasticism. This is the path of negation. In this path the spiritual aspirant is aware of his goal from the very beginning and consequently renounces the popular view of the world and life that makes one forget the reality. But there is the other path that is equally true and equally helpful in leading aspirants to the highest goal.

*Swami Saradananda*

## What Happens by Intensely Thinking of God?

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Seekers of God are often apt to ask, "What happens by intensely thinking of God?" Some of them are aware that intense thought makes them feel the existence and even the presence of God intensely. Others believe that it will one day take them to God-consciousness, the divine goal.

The followers of *Vedanta* use the word 'meditation' for 'intense thought of God.' Meditation has been defined by Ramanuja, a great Indian scholar and teacher of *Vedanta*, as the continuous and steady flow of mind towards the object of meditation, which is like the flow of oil without a break from one vessel to another. Such meditation is very hard, especially for beginners, as their subconscious mind pulls the conscious part of their mind in diverse directions and prevents it from being concentrated sufficiently and for a sufficient length of time. That is why spiritual aspirants are advised by all religions to practise moral virtues and ethical precepts for self-purification and mental control. This practice should go hand-in-hand with the practice of meditation.

Many are the ethical precepts and moral virtues that have been enjoined on their followers by all religions. The *Rishis* (seers) of the *Upanishads*, Patanjali, the teacher of Yoga, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, have all mentioned them as the essential prerequisites of spiritual life without which meditation cannot become deep or successful. They are several, if not many, but as pointed out by Swami Brahmananda, a disciple of Ramakrishna, three of the virtues and disciplines are important: these are truthfulness, personal purity and *japa* (repetition of a *mantra*).

Truthfulness is not as easy to practise as it appears, but by

sincere effort one can succeed. It exercises a restraining influence on the mind and makes it more introspective and meditative.

Personal purity is another virtue which helps concentration and meditation on God. It is the most difficult of achievement. It is a great ideal and has exercised a rare fascination on seekers of God, inspiring many men and women to lead a monastic life and become monks and nuns. Married men and women cannot be expected to succeed well in the practice of celibacy, but they are enjoined to live a controlled life in which enjoyment is not sought for its own sake but is so regulated that an aspiring soul is able to overcome all desires for it eventually by a graduated process of sublimation.

The third discipline is the practice of *japa* which means the repetition of a *mantra* taught by one's *Vedanta* teacher. This is one of the great aids to concentration. It is also invaluable as a purifying agent which cleanses the subconscious of its latent tendencies and impressions, helps the aspirant in keeping up his personal purity, and brings about greater concentration in meditation on God.

When these disciplines and virtues are practised, meditation becomes steady, long and deep. Man derives a rare spiritual delight by such meditation which is food for the soul, and feels that he is progressing.

What happens when such meditation is practised for months and years? The answer to this question will depend on the approach to the ultimate Reality called God and on the method of meditation.

Suppose a seeker studies scriptural and philosophical books and learns from teachers of *Vedanta* that God is in both animate and inanimate nature in this vast Cosmos - in both the macrocosm and the microcosm, in the universe and man, in the object and the subject - in every molecule and atom and tiniest

conceivable thing. The aspirant then thinks of this all-pervading spirit in the universe in the initial stage. He finds it difficult to intensify his thought or hold his mind on to the object of meditation for any considerable length of time, as his mind is not quick enough to move wherever there is the omnipresent Spirit which, therefore, eludes his grasp. He then tries to symbolize this Spirit in a temple or church or mosque. He finds this of great value and help in intensifying his thought of God, for that which was limitless and universal has now become localized as it were, confined within narrow limits. He may attain peace and light to a certain extent, but he cannot help thinking of God except through the temple, church or mosque. He cannot, however, have a house of God wherever he goes in this world, nor can he have one after death. He, therefore, hugs the eternal Spirit to his bosom, cherishes It within his own heart, so that It may ever abide with him in all conditions and circumstances. This leads him to genuine meditation on It in his heart until at last, on a blessed day, this meditation ripens into realization.

What is the process by which the seeker attains this realization? When he learnt from books and teachers about the universal all-pervasive Spirit, which is Pure Consciousness, he comprehended It mentally. But mental comprehension is far from spiritual experience. The former is man's contacting the Consciousness through his mind, the latter means his contacting It through his consciousness. When he realizes the Pure Consciousness within him, he intuitively realizes the Pure Consciousness without, just as by analyzing a sample of water in his laboratory a scientist discovers that a molecule of it is composed of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen, and intuitively knows that water all over the world is composed of these two elements in the same proportions. He who sees God within sees Him also outside, this being the last stage in spiritual evolution.

Two important teachings emerge clearly from this brief description of a spiritual experience:

1) In simple dualistic language, God of the heavens comes nearer to man and enters his heart where he realizes Him. Or in the words of monism. God is already in man who has only to uncover the Truth or bring about this spiritual unfoldment by rising above layer after layer of his mind. It is a characteristic feature of the *Vedanta* teaching that we should meditate on God in the innermost recesses of our own heart. It is here that we contact that point of Consciousness called the heart centre. Often Jesus Christ is painted by Western artists as looking at God heavenward with fervour, whereas Indian pictures of the Buddha in meditation pose delineate his inward look. This is due to different conceptions of art in India and the West.

2) Another teaching is that it is difficult for the mind to concentrate on the all-pervasive Spirit as manifested in the universe, or even the sky or the ocean. The aspirant is therefore advised to reduce the area of manifestation of the Spirit to a small compass, say a holy object or form, and reduce it still further until a spot or point is reached. This is called the practice of *dharana* in *Raja Yoga*, which means holding the mind to a spot. When an aspirant meditates with his heart and soul on a form which inspires him, and then in due course succeeds in meditating on a spot or point he has progressed a great deal. The point is not a superficial point which is within time and space, but a point of consciousness which is beyond both.

Many seekers of God begin their spiritual life by meditation on a divine or spiritual Form which endows them with great faith and fills them with deep devotion. This may be the form of a great teacher or saviour, or one of those forms associated with the Hindu pantheon like Durga, Shiva, Vishnu and so on. These seekers in due course rise from form to formlessness and

from formlessness to the very Absolute.

We have given so far only a brief description of a spiritual experience of the immanent Spirit. The instructions of Krishna to Uddhava as given in the *Bhagavata* indicate in more detail the different stages that a seeker passes through in his spiritual practice. The instructions are based on what happened to those who had arrived at the several phases of progress and realized the highest goal by meditation.

Krishna begins his instructions by mentioning how *prana*, the psychophysical energy, is first to be controlled by the aspirant. Krishna then proceeds to teach how to practice meditation. In the human body there is the lotus of the heart, with its stalk above and point below. It has eight petals and a pericarp. At the time of meditation one should imagine the lotus to be erect and in the pericarp think of the 'sun', 'moon' and 'fire' one within the other. In the fire, says Krishna, Uddhava should meditate on His form which He Himself describes as follows:

“Symmetrical, serene, of a benign face, endowed with four long and beautiful arms, possessing a well-shaped and beautiful neck, charming cheeks and a gracious smile: with bright alligator-shaped pendants in the symmetrical ears, with a golden cloth, of dark complexion like the cloud, with the marks of Srivatsa and Lakshmi on the chest: adorned with conch, discus, mace, lotus and a garland of forest-flowers, and with the chest radiant with the gem Kaustubha; decked with a shining crown, bracelet and a waistband, beautiful in every feature, appealing, with face and eyes beaming with graciousness and exquisitely tender.”

Krishna instructs Uddhava to meditate on this form, concentrating the mind on all the features. The self-controlled man should withdraw the sense-organs from the sense-objects with the help of the mind (will), and, with the discriminative

faculty (*buddhi*) as guide, throw the mind on the whole body. When the mind is thus distributed all over the body, one should concentrate that mind on one part, namely the face, and meditate on the smiling countenance alone and nothing else.

The next stage of meditation is more difficult. Krishna points out that the mind which is concentrated on the smiling countenance should be taken off and fixed on the Supreme Cause - on the Lord as projecting the universe. Here begins the regular meditation on the formless. Last comes the most difficult stage: leaving the meditation on the Supreme Cause, one should rest on the supreme *Brahman*, Pure Consciousness, divested of all attributes, and forget that one is meditating. By giving up the thought that one is meditating, that this is the object of meditation, and so on, one goes beyond the ego.

In the above instructions one begins with meditation on a divine form and passes through the formless to the Absolute beyond all forms and even attributes.

*Vedanta* teaches that man passes through seven worlds which are seven planes of consciousness, beyond which is *Brahman*, the Absolute of monism. These are known as *bhuh*, *bhuvah*, *suvah*, *mahah*, *janah*, *tapah* and *satya*. By meditation the spiritual man passes through these one after the other.

In purely monistic meditation one first meditates on one's Self or *Atman* which is beyond the ego and is Pure Consciousness, and then concentrates this Self on the Oversoul, and realizes the identity of the Self with the Oversoul. It is said that if the aspirant does not realize the Oversoul in this life, he goes after death straight to the *satyaloka*, the seventh plane, and in due course is united with *Brahman*, the Oversoul.

In the language of Yoga man passes through seven centres of consciousness by years of meditation. These are known as *muladhara*, *swadhishtana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *vishuddha*, *ajna* and

*sahasrara*. After reaching the seventh centre of consciousness he becomes united with Shiva, the Absolute Consciousness Supreme.

Emotions of all kinds, love for human beings and devotion to God, anxiety, fear, shame, etc.. are associated with the heart centre, whereas deep thinking, intellectual exercises, *jnana* or wisdom of the *Vedanta*, etc., are associated with the higher centres, *vishuddha* and *ajna*. □

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God and the lust for worldly enjoyments cannot go together. To have one you have to let go the other. At the same time it is not possible to entirely give up the lower pleasures unless you have tasted the joy of the higher. That is why I insist that you give your whole heart to God now, while you are young. Make him your own. 'God is my all in all.' Fix this truth firmly in your hearts, and the path will be easy. When once you taste the joy of the Lord, all other pleasures will become insipid. Dedicate your lives to him. Take refuge in him only, and then let him do with you what he wills.

*Swami Brahmananda*

## Why to Fool Ourselves?

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**S**piritual life, if it means sublimation and purification of our feelings, means at the same time, developing our will-power and forcing the mind to take to the higher path. This will of ours must be wholly directed towards the higher life. We find in the world tremendous will-power and concentration, but both are given a wrong direction and thus lead man into deeper and deeper darkness and ignorance. If we want to follow the spiritual life, we must rise above temptations, and in order to do this, tremendous will-power is necessary, tremendous undauntedness and singleness of mind. If all the will-power you find in the world were directed along the right channels, this world would immediately become a heaven.

The parasite ever remains a parasite because it can never have any independent existence. We, instead of leading the spiritual life in right earnest, want to be parasites or to get some religion by proxy.

We must set the spiritual goal very clearly before us. If we are able to rouse tremendous enthusiasm in ourselves for the spiritual goal to be attained, then only shall we have the necessary energy to strive for it and do our utmost. In the world of spiritual aspiration you often find people with a chaotic brain: They do not care to follow any definite clear-cut system and like to drift on the bottomless sea of their emotions and impulses. So they cannot attain anything; in fact, they attain just as little as out-and-out worldly people. No person with a muddled brain can have any success in the world, and much less so in the spiritual world. Settle once for all what you really want. Very often when what we want is peace, we follow a path that can only end in restlessness and trouble.

There is a song by Raja Ram Mohun Roy that says: “Relinquishing the abode of peace, you are just striving for peace. Is it ever possible for you to get it?”

God alone is the repository of all peace and blessedness. “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” We should try to look within and find the Lord seated within our own heart. This body of ours is the best of all temples, the holiest of all temples. This is a conception we find stressed again and again in all our scriptures. The highest temples of the divine are the greatest prophets and seers. That is why they exert the greatest attraction. Those who have realized the Truth in their own souls alone can teach others the way to realization. The Lord is always at the back of our mind, at the back of our whole personality, and only if we pray with a fervent heart, the prayer will be heard: otherwise not. When we pray we pray half-heartedly for different things of the world. Who cares to pray for the Lord and for renunciation and perfect dispassion? We should never think in terms of happiness when praying. This is bartering, not praying. Happiness (in the relative sense, i.e. pleasure) is no index for spiritual life. It is just like taking the mango of a tree that is reflected in water. Such happiness is no proof whatever of spiritual progress or realization.

The lover, when dreaming of his beloved, imagines things that have no reality. The madman, too, imagines things. We must try to get a glimpse of the truth, but if such a glimpse comes unawares, and if we are not properly prepared for it through long and regular training, the reaction will be tremendous, and we may become unsettled for life; first we must learn how to become fit for such glimpses, so that we can make them our own for good. Never judge of a thing in terms of happiness. It is even far better to judge it in terms of misery, hard though this may sound.

Spiritual evolution often brings great pain to the aspirant, not happiness. In the intermediate stage his life becomes very

difficult. At that time he no longer has any real interest in what he has, but he cannot just yet obtain realization. It is still beyond his reach. It is just like hanging in mid-air without being able to get either down or up.

Very often when I get a thing I find I never really wanted it. I may have been seeking it, but when I get it, I actually find the desire has vanished, and some other desire has taken its place. Many people mistake the true nature of their yearnings, giving them some worldly direction, whereas in reality no human yearning can ever find satisfaction in anything that is not permanent and unchanging, however we may try to deceive ourselves on this point. The void which is in each human heart can never be filled by anything that is temporal, that belongs to the phenomenal world, the world of manifestation and change. In the world, no love, no affection, no possession, nothing can ever take away the terrible void in our heart. And if we are sincere and look at things in a dispassionate and merciless way, we must confess that we all carry this void within us and have never succeeded in filling it with the dolls and puppets and the glamour of the phenomenal world. We may persuade ourselves to have done so, but this can only be for a time, and then this old haunting void appears again and mostly in a more terrible and relentless form than before. So we can never avoid facing it one day.

Only truth takes away all our wants, and as soon as all our wants are taken away, there is no void, but only fulfilment in every sense. Let Truth come and break our heart and let it break that of others. All that does not matter, because a puppet-show can never make anybody happy in the end. It may delude him for some time, but when the awakening comes, it is all the more terrible the longer the delusion lasted. Never think of such things and relations in terms of happiness, but try to see them in the Light of Truth, without identifying yourself with what is non-permanent

in you. People seek happiness outside, happiness in attributes, in forms, in the phenomenon, whereas it is only that which is your very own, from all time and for all times, which you can never lose. Whatever I can lose in any way, can never mean true happiness to me. We commit the mistake of looking at a certain span of time instead of looking at the whole. Temporary happiness there is, no doubt, in worldly things and worldly relations of human love and human affections, but temporary happiness can never mean happiness, rather it is the opposite of it.

There are other people who get a glimpse of Truth, but then go and commit the mistake of filling in the picture with their own unpurified imaginations.

The test of Truth is this: whereas in the case of worldly things and worldly relations you will never get any ultimate satisfaction, in the case of spirituality and spiritual life you will get perfect satisfaction which is not dependent upon anything external. So the great sage Narada says, "Realizing That, one attains to one's heart's desire. And thus only does one become immortal. Thus only does one become full of Bliss."

In the case of worldly things, once we get them, they always fall upon us and fall short of our expectations. They can never really satisfy us deep down in our soul. The seeker after Truth must be strong and undaunted enough to face Truth as it is, for it may shock him, it may break his heart, it may break all his worldly ties and affections and thoughts and aspirations. All our miseries and troubles are due to a false conception of ourselves. We want to cling to falsehood and hug it to our breast. We want to cling to false human dolls, calling them our own. We want to love phantoms, we want to possess things which decay while we are still holding them in our hands.

You are not a man, not a woman. Your Reality is ever beyond the pairs of opposites, ever beyond the dualism of sex.

Because you desire to have contact with human love and human beings, you do not realize the Truth. Because you imagine you are a man or a woman or even a human being, you do not realize the Truth. You are none of these things. Most people are shocked when they are told this fact. No human love is true, because all human love clings to falsehood, to the fatal falsehood of personality. Initially you get a false conception of yourself, and once this initial mistake has been committed, you begin piling falsehood upon falsehood. There are innumerable false conceptions haunting your brain.

Let us have the desire to know our true nature, to know ourselves. Everywhere there is self-love. So naturally, spiritual striving is self-love too. Human love is self-love, but this form of self-love can never find any satisfaction, because deep down in his soul no human being is fully satisfied with the human love he gets. He may try to hide this truth from himself. He may push it into some dark corner of the subconscious mind. But still it is there, and he will recognize it if he is sincere and has to uncover what he has been trying and trying to hide from himself and others. Love can only find satisfaction when it begins to love the true Self. Christ's famous saying might be interpreted as "Love thy neighbour as thy Self."

This is what Christ meant, because this alone gives the ultimate reason why I should love my neighbour. First you must find your real Self, and then you will know how to love others. Do not try to love others before you have found your real Self, because such love will be blind and will do harm to them and to you. Such love is a fatal mistake that many people are inclined to make, even with the very best intentions. And this at once bars all spiritual progress. Before you get the realization of your own Self, all love for others is mere imagination, if not something worse. It is always and in every case self-deception. It is not love. Real love

only comes with the vision of truth. Everything before that may be done as discipline. Try to serve others to the best of your ability. Try to make yourself eligible for love by becoming selfless, but do not flatter yourself that by trying to do this you have come to know what love really is. And, above all, do not sacrifice your ideal for anyone, whatever happens. Do not care for a broken heart. The moment your ideal is involved you must become hard and adamant and as relentless as a stone. Never sacrifice your ideal for anyone, not for anything that belongs to the world of manifestation. If my parents, my wife, my children, etc., etc. want me to take the wrong course, let their hearts break, because I am not allowed to sacrifice Truth to their selfish interests and to their selfish love. I do not want to give them that wrong happiness and increase their delusion.

If anyone makes a demand because of which you have to give up spiritual life, never satisfy him, even if his heart should break. If the bond is snapped - all right, let it be snapped; even learn to face such possibilities in the case of your nearest and dearest. Today there may still be the question of your striving being pleasant or unpleasant to others. Later on the day will come when others will have to accept your ideas or to reject them, causing thereby a definite breach. But we cannot fulfil any demand by falling off from our ideal, even if such a demand comes from one of our nearest and dearest. In such cases all bonds must be snapped relentlessly without hesitation. "Call none your father upon earth: for one is your Father who is in heaven," as Christ said. All misplaced sentimentality must be uprooted, and your hearts must become as tender as the tenderest flower and as hard as the hardest adamant, as soon as the very principle of spiritual life is involved. Never sacrifice the highest for the sake of some temporal bond. This is the most fatal mistake an aspirant can commit, and the one for which he has to pay most dearly. It is a

betrayal to God and nothing short of that. Learn to have the higher outlook in all such matters, however difficult this may be in the beginning. □

Reprinted from *Vedanta for East and West*, May-June 1973

Just imagine that your Chosen Deity (*Ishta-Devata*) is seated in the temple of your heart, with a serene and smiling look and that you are performing *Arati* by waving the lights, burning camphor, a flower and then a *chamara* (fan of yak's tail). Continue this *Arati* as long as you can. When it is finished, think that you start making garlands with flowers of various kinds, large and very beautiful and of the sweetest fragrance. When this is over, suddenly fresh new flowers will come in, and you will begin to offer them at the feet of your Beloved - handfuls of lotuses, of white, red and other colours. When they have been exhausted you will find a heap of *Jaba* (hibiscus) by your side. You will go on offering them all, while flowers keep on coming to you, one kind after another, there's no end to it.

Do not allow this trend of thought to come to an end. After flowers, come fruits and sweets in all their varieties and you are offering them to your Beloved. In this way let your mind cling to your Chosen Deity. The natural tendency of the mind is towards enjoyment of the objects of the senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste). Enjoy these with your Chosen Deity. Then the enjoyment will lose its evil effect and become divinized.

*Swami Akhandananda*

## Book Review

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ADVAITA: The Truth of Non-Duality

In the words of V. Subramanya Iyer

*From the posthumous collections of Paul Brunton*

*Edited by Mark Scorelle*

*Published by Epigraph Books, Rhinebeck, New York, 2009*

**V** Subramanya Iyer was born in 1869 in Salem, Tamil Nadu, India. After completing his studies in Madras and Bangalore, he received initiation into classical *Advaita Vedanta*. In 1920 he became the personal tutor to the Maharaja of Mysore. At the instigation of the Maharaja of Mysore, the Mysore Circle of Vedantic Studies was started. Here Iyer was to train scholars and, in particular, many monks of the Ramakrishna Order, in *Vedanta* philosophy. One of those who frequented Iyer's classes was Paul Brunton, who is well known as the author of a book concerning Sri Ramana Maharshi. The present selection of Iyer's teachings owes its origin to the notes taken down by Paul Brunton.

This 95-page booklet was compiled by Andre van den Brink from teachings recorded in *Lights on Advaita: Selected Teachings of V. Subramanya Iyer*, edited by Mark Scorelle and with the kind permission of Kenneth Thurston Hurst.

The approach that V. Subramanya Iyer recommends is an inquiry into truth. In pursuing this inquiry we should be guided by reason and not by feeling. *Advaita* is not to be attained by reading books or attending lectures, but by thinking it out for oneself. He maintains that science is a starting point and it leads to philosophy.

Some of the thoughts expressed in this little book are quite intriguing and stimulating. It says, for instance, that *Advaita* does not prove that there is One: it proves that there is no second thing. It is not enough for someone to say, "I have seen God;" he must prove it. That which dupes 99% of people is taking satisfaction for truth. Beware of that which satisfies your feelings. Iyer goes on to explain the *Advaita* philosophy from a practical rather than a purely theoretical point of view.

In reading this book, one is often reminded of the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. V. Subramanya Iyer, however, goes further. He says that the "Who am I?" formula (i.e. the one recommended by Sri Ramana Maharshi) is useful as a first stage "to show the illusoriness of ego and thus help the seeker to get rid of it. This prepares him to consider the higher question: What is the world?, the truth about which cannot be learnt by those attached to their ego..."

He goes on to say: "*Vedantins* take all the facts - science, religion, art, etc. - and then ask of them, Which is the truth? We collect as much evidence as possible, even contradictory, and then proceed to examine all of it. We are not opposed to anything, but say, Analyse: how far is it true?"

Anyone who is seeking the fundamental truth of our existence will be interested in reading the forthright and provocative statements recorded in this little book. It is to be especially recommended for those who prefer a philosophical approach to a devotional one. □

*John Phillips*

## Programme for March & April 2010

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

**Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre**, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - [www.vedantauk.com](http://www.vedantauk.com)

Mar	7	Day Retreat	
Mar	14	Spiritual Values 1	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	21	Spiritual Values 2	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	28	Spiritual Values 3	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	4	Spiritual Values 4	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	11	Spiritual Values 5	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	18	Katha Upanishad 13	Swami Shivarupananda
Apr	25	Day Retreat	

### Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda at  
the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 7<sup>th</sup> March & 25<sup>th</sup> April  
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

### Vedanta Study Circle in Cheshire Area

April 18 at 11:00 am

Mundaka Upanishad 1 *Swami Dayatmananda*

For information contact Mr Aswani (tel: 01625 527075)  
between 9:30 pm - 10:30 pm

*continued from the front cover*

*asked, he replied: 'Yes, I live under this tree and I know the animal very well. All your descriptions are true. Sometimes it appears red, sometimes yellow, and at other times blue, violet, grey, and so forth. It is a chameleon. And sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has a colour, and now it has none.'*

*"In like manner, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. "*

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, October 28, 1882

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John Phillips

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Spiritual attainment does not depend on any dogma, or doctrine, or belief. Whether one is Christian or Jewish or Gentile, it does not matter. Are you unselfish? That is the question. If you are, you will be perfect without reading a single religious book or without going into a single church or temple.

*Swami Vivekananda*



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