

Vedanta

362 NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2011

God Vision

Swami Premananda

Cultivation of Strength and Fearlessness

Swami Buddhananda



Divine Wisdom

BANKIM (to the Master): "Sir, how can one develop divine love?"

MASTER: "Through restlessness - the restlessness a child feels for his mother. The child feels bewildered when he is separated from his mother, and weeps longingly for her. If a man can weep like that for God he can even see Him.

"At the approach of dawn the eastern horizon becomes red. Then one knows it will soon be sunrise. Likewise, if you see a person restless for God, you can be pretty certain that he hasn't long to wait for His vision.

"A disciple asked his teacher, 'Sir, please tell me how I can see God.' 'Come with me,' said the guru, 'and I shall show you.' He took the disciple to a lake, and both of them got into the water. Suddenly the teacher pressed the disciple's head under the water. After a few moments he released Him and the disciple raised his head and stood up. The guru asked Him, 'How did you feel?' The disciple said, 'Oh! I thought I should die; I was panting for breath.' The teacher said, 'When you feel like that for God, then you will know you haven't long to wait for His vision.'

(To Bankim) "Let me tell you something. What will you gain by floating on the surface? Dive a little under the water. The gems lie deep under the water; so what is the good of throwing your arms and legs about on the surface? A real gem is heavy. It doesn't float, it sinks to the bottom. To get the real gem you must dive deep."

continued on the inside back cover

Is Buddha Relevant for Us (cont.)

Right Mindfulness

Right Mindfulness is the seventh step on the Noble Eightfold Path, and belongs to the wisdom division of the path. Buddha gives right mindfulness a very high place in the scheme of spiritual practice. He says: "This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and distress, for the attainment of the right method, and for the realization of unbinding."

The Buddha explains: "And what, monks, is right mindfulness? Herein, a monk dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief concerning the world. He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings... states of mind in states of mind, phenomena in phenomena..."

The Buddha says that these four foundations of mindfulness form "the only way that leads to the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering upon the right path and the realization of *Nirvana*." To be established in Right Mindfulness is to be in *Nirvana*.

Right mindfulness is both the foundation and companion of concentration. Concentration is holding on to a single idea or image steadily while right mindfulness is observing everything merely as a witness. Right mindfulness keeps a watch over the mind and puts a stop when the mind is losing attention, wandering and becoming restless.

What is right mindfulness?

The Pali word for mindfulness is *sati*, meaning observing, noting, witnessing. Mindfulness is being in the present moment. To be mindful (mind-full) is to be fully present, not lost in judging, imagining, daydreaming, anticipating, etc. Being fully mindful means being fully attentive to everything as it is.

Mindfulness like a mirror reflects only what is presently happening and in exactly the way it is happening. Mindfulness is non-judgmental observation. Mindfulness is an impartial watchfulness. Mindfulness is non-conceptual awareness. It takes place in the here and now. It takes place without any references to thoughts like 'me,' 'my' or 'mine.'

Mindfulness has no set goal or aim. In Mindfulness one does not strive for results, one does not try to accomplish anything. Mindfulness is watching things as they are changing. It just observes the birth, growth, and maturity of all phenomena. Here the practitioner is both the participant and also the observer at the same time.

The task is to be here and now without getting distracted by the tides of thoughts. In this watching there is no room for clinging, likes or dislikes etc.

Benefits of Right Mindfulness

1. The practice of Right Mindfulness alerts and reminds us of our present task. If the mind happens to, wander then it brings it back to meditation.

2. The practice of Right Mindfulness helps us see things as they really are and not to cherish wrong or distorted ideas about them and fall into delusion.

3. The practice of Right Mindfulness helps us get to the bottom of Reality. Through mindfulness we can clearly perceive

the three characteristic marks of existence: that this world is imperfect, temporary and full of suffering. Mindfulness facilitates the achievement of both serenity and insight. Mindfulness leads to Self-knowledge.

Swami Vivekananda compares a mind without mindfulness to a restless monkey. Practice of mindfulness brings rest, serenity and insight. It will slowly lead to deep concentration and wisdom. It also keeps watch over all the hindrances beneath their camouflage and helps us expel them before they can cause harm.

Right attitude for the practice of mindfulness

Before undertaking the practice of mindfulness one must develop a special attitude of mind. This attitude consists of: Friendliness toward those who are sincerely striving; Compassion for those who are suffering; Joy seeing the others happy, and Equanimity toward the indolent.

Further there are three important factors in the practice of mindfulness: morality, concentration and wisdom. Each one influences the other, so one should cultivate the three of them together. Without the foundation of these three one will not be able to practice mindfulness.

Practice of mindfulness

Mindfulness can only be acquired with unremitting, constant practice. Only after a long time of practice can one achieve a complete and continuous awareness of what is happening both in the internal and the external world.

With the right mindfulness comes the ability to abandon the wrong view and develop the right view, abandon the wrong resolve and stay with the right resolve, abandon the wrong speech

and practice right speech, abandon the wrong action and follow the right action and abandon the wrong livelihood and pursue the right livelihood.

There are five hindrances and seven factors of enlightenment that require special attention.

The five hindrances are: sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry, and doubt. Right mindfulness helps us detect and overcome these five obstacles.

Similarly there are seven factors of enlightenment that aid spiritual progress. These are: mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquillity, concentration, and equanimity. With the help of these one can advance towards *nirvana*.

Right mindfulness helps us overcome all obstacles and gradually leads us to the state of enlightenment, *nirvana*.

(To be continued)

Swami Dayatmananda

It is very difficult to truly understand the intricacies of the mind without being an advanced aspirant. How many are the ways in which the mind is deluding us! If anyone points out the delusions, we find excuses for them! We do not understand how many kinds of self-love are in us. It is no joke to submit to anyone - not outwardly, but in spirit. Swami Vivekananda was once reading the Bible. He was in those days a vegetarian. When he read of Jesus' meat-eating, he did not like it. But at once he thought, 'Oh, how proud I have become because I am living on vegetables!'

Swami Turiyananda

God Vision

See God, know the *Atman*, then will the book of infinite wisdom be opened to you. He who is infinite wisdom and infinite Being dwells within you. The experiences of the seers and prophets of old are recorded in the scriptures, but the mere study of the scriptures is not enough. In order to gain the true knowledge of God you have to have the experience yourself. Then alone will the door to all mysteries be opened. It is written in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "That *Brahman* is beginningless, transcendent, eternal. He is said to be equally beyond what is and what is not."

The key to the knowledge of God is in His hands. Therefore, pray for His grace. Make Him your Chosen Ideal. Yearn for Him, for, to a loving heart He stands revealed. That is what our Master taught us.

While it is true that every divine incarnation and God-man embodied all the great ideals, yet each one emphasized one particular ideal. For instance, Sri Chaitanya was the very embodiment of love. Just as congealed water takes the form of ice, so congealed love took the form of Sri Chaitanya. In the same way, Shankara was the embodiment of knowledge, Buddha the embodiment of renunciation, and Sri Krishna the embodiment of selfless work.

The harmony of the divergent philosophies and creeds is found in the *Gita*, as taught by Sri Krishna, he emphasized the truth that selfless work, meditation, knowledge, and love, are but different limbs of spiritual disciplines. But in his own life he exemplified the discipline of selfless action. Such selfless work leads to purity of heart. Dispassion can arise only in a heart that

is pure. In his own life, Buddha exemplified dispassion. He asked nothing for himself, not even liberation. All his struggles were for the good of mankind. Out of dispassion springs knowledge. Shankara was the embodiment of knowledge. Knowledge leads to love, and Chaitanya came so that mankind might bathe in this love. Yet man, in his ignorance, thought that these ideals differed one from another, and out of this ignorance divergent creeds and sects were formed. But with the coming of Sri Ramakrishna these differing opinions were harmonized. The divergent streams met in him, the ocean of harmony.

Sri Ramakrishna practiced the disciplines prescribed by all the different religions, and through each one of them he realized God. He saw God in all beings, and to him there was none hateful. We have seen him living most of the time drunk in the love of God. The very idea of a sect being formed around him was abhorrent to him. And, after all, how is it possible to hedge about a God-man, a knower of the *Atman*, one who was the very embodiment of divine love, and who had probed to the very depths of every religion? Sects are formed when religion degenerates and its followers become weak, jealous, fearful. It is the water of a pond which stagnates, never the waters of a flowing river. Guard yourself against fanaticism. Never disturb the faith of another. Never say "we belong to the sect of Sri Ramakrishna; he is the only saviour, he is the greatest *Avatara*, therefore all people must worship him!"

Sri Ramakrishna had absolutely no sense of egoism. He lived by giving the power of attorney to the Divine Mother. To do that means to surrender one's own power to act entirely to the will of another. Girish Ghosh gave the power of attorney to Sri Ramakrishna. Such complete surrender is difficult, even impossible, as long as there remains even the least trace of ego in

one. Sri Ramakrishna used to say it was like living as a dry leaf at the mercy of the wind.

He who feels neither elation nor affliction in the presence of pleasure or pain, but keeps his mind poised in God; he who truly lives as an instrument in the hands of God, he it is that follows the teachings of Sri Krishna in the *Gita*: "Lay down all duties in Me, your refuge." And truly the Lord does fulfil his promise: "Fear no longer, for I will save you from sin and from bondage. "

All else is vain, but to see and feel God's grace. "The Self is not known through the study of the scriptures, nor through subtlety of the intellect, nor through much learning. Whom the Self chooses, by him is he attained." And it is when that grace descends that the infinite knowledge unfolds. Then one no longer cares for the study of the scriptures. Direct knowledge is one thing, and book knowledge is another. This, however, does not mean that one should give up the study of the scriptures, for, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The fan is needed until the spring breeze blows."

Be merged in God. Dive deep. God is not a mere word to be uttered. He is the Reality to be attained. Attain Him even in this very life. There is no other way to cross this vast desert of worldliness, the abode of suffering and death. Nothing other than devotion to God can bring peace to the arid heart.

Be selfless. Be free from vanity. Practice your spiritual disciplines with earnestness and enthusiasm. Thus shall you reach God. Consider the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever he undertook to practice some particular spiritual discipline, he became completely absorbed in it and followed the practice through to its conclusion with great earnestness, perseverance, and single-hearted devotion.

Be active also. Free yourself from all sense of ego, and work selflessly. Be very careful that neither sense of leadership nor any trace of selfishness enters into you. Whatever you do, do as the servant of the Lord. Offer all the fruits of your actions to Him, then shall your work be turned into worship.

Dispassion, renunciation of the ego, love, devotion, and living faith - these are the signs of a true monk. No garb ever made a monk.

For a householder to neglect his duty, for a *Brahmachari* to give up his vows, for a monk to be restless with passions - these are hypocrisy. The gerua robe is the sign of renunciation, and to one who is dispassionate it is an ornament. But if the mind runs after woman and gold and is made restless by the passions, then the wearing of the gerua robe is a farce. Colour your mind and heart with the colour of renunciation, dispassion, and devotion to Cod. Then only will you become a true monk.

"The king may subdue his kingdom; the general may win the battle; but he who rules his own mind is the greatest of them all!"

Let the strong wind of dispassion rise in your minds, that the trees of desires be uprooted. Then, even as birds fly from the shelter of trees before a strong wind, will the ignorance of selfishness, jealousy, hatred, and egoism take flight from your hearts. Then shall peace follow, and fill your lives, even as calm follows the storm.

Mould your lives so that, wherever you live, be it under a tree or in a meadow, *ashramas* will be founded and many spiritual aspirants will gather around you. No real work is done by merely lecturing; your lives must exemplify the ideals you preach.

Sri Ramakrishna was the living example of dispassion. Make him your ideal, and mould your life after his pattern. While the goldsmith is melting gold, he works with his hands, his feet,

and his mouth. With his feet he operates the bellows, with his hands he operates the fan, and with his mouth he blows the fire, so that the gold will melt more quickly. When it is melted he pours it into the mould; then only does he relax and smoke his pipe. In the same way you must strive with all the might of your body, mind, and heart to love God, to be melted into His love, and to become absorbed in Him. Keep alive the fire of dispassion and renunciation within you. and let your mind be renewed by the deep impression of purity. "Everything in this world is fraught with fear. Renunciation is fearlessness."

As you grow older it will become impossible for you to control your mind. Therefore you should practice now. Sri Ramakrishna used to liken the mind to a packet of mustard seeds which when once scattered, are difficult to collect again. In old age the mind loses its strength. A white cloth can be dyed any colour, but it is difficult to dye a cloth already coloured. In the same way, the mind that is coloured by worldliness is difficult to change. Your young minds have not been coloured by the world; that is why I am urging you to struggle hard now. Even though, in youth, the passions are strong, the mind is still stronger. Therefore strive to dye your minds in the colour of God's love.

Swami Vivekananda established this monastery with the idea of producing ideal characters. True, there is no lack of monasteries and temples in India, and Swamiji's purpose was not to add yet another one to the existing thousands. The sole purpose of this place is to inspire the youth of the country to the ideals of renunciation and the harmony of all religions. From this monastery monks will go out and teach these ideals throughout the whole world. Sri Ramakrishna did not come to found another sect. He came to bring new life, new impetus, into the spirit of all religions. And it was to produce young men of selfless character

and purity to broadcast the Master's ideal of universality that Swamiji founded this monastery.

You have come here inspired by the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna. Now mould your lives accordingly. The ideals of renunciation and purity must be so embodied in your lives that people of all countries will look to you, and pattern their lives after your example. The ideal of a monk's life is not merely to wear the garb, memorize scriptural passages, and wander about to places of pilgrimage. No! It is far better to remain in one place and engage yourself intensely in the practice of spiritual disciplines than to wander aimlessly about from one place to another. Especially for a beginner; he should stay in one place and practice meditation and *japam* with great regularity. Like the bird in the fable, he should hold fast to the mast of the ship.

Teach others by the example of your lives, not by mere words. Combine in your lives the idea's of the four yogas - *Karma*, *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Raja*. Blessed are you that you have taken refuge in the Lord. "Do, or die!" Make this your motto. Rome was not built in a day, neither can the ideal character be formed in one day. It is the sum-total of your every thought and action that makes up your character. Remember this, and every moment guard well your thoughts and actions.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that as long as one fibre was loose it was impossible for the thread to pass through the eye of the needle. In the same way, as long as there remains one desire in the heart, it is not possible to attain *samadhi*. However, the desire to know God, and to love Him, cannot be considered a desire in the ordinary sense. The only desire a monk should have in his heart, is the desire to realize God. It is not possible, however, for the householder to strictly follow this path of desirelessness. The golden mean is his rightful path. But, as I said before, you, as monks, must uproot the very tree of desire with the strong

wind of dispassion. Free your minds from all desires, and peace will reign in your hearts. To be liberated means to be desireless.

Desire, again, is of two kinds, good and evil. That desire which tightens the bonds of ignorance is evil, and that which loosens the bonds is good. Therefore, the desire to associate with the holy, or to serve them; the desire to work selflessly for the good of others are good desires. In the *Bhagavatam* we read how the great devotee Prahlada prayed: "May I never be attached to wife, nor children, nor home, nor wealth; but may I be ever attached to those who are the devotees of God. "

Attachment is bondage, yet again, attachment opens the door to liberation to one who becomes attached to God, or the Guru, or to the illumined souls.

There are desires also of a gross and subtle kind. Gross desires are the desires for wealth, pleasures, and enjoyments. Sometimes it happens that after a man has succeeded in freeing himself from these gross desires after great struggles and hard spiritual disciplines, only to succumb to the subtle desire for recognition, name, or fame. These, too, have to be overcome by the practice of spiritual discrimination. The root cause of all desire is the ego, and the identity with the physical body. "When the ego dies, all troubles cease. "Then alone a man attains immortality. Then is he liberated while living.

Through the practice of *japam*, meditation, and selfless works, the mind gradually becomes subtle. This subtlety of the mind arises from purity of heart. With such a mind it is possible to detect and root out the subtle desires that lie hidden within.

In order to attain wisdom of God and liberation for one's own self, one need only to receive the sacred *mantram* from an illumined Guru, and, with complete faith become absorbed in the practice of *japam* and meditation. But in order to help and teach mankind, it is necessary also to equip oneself with knowledge

from the study of the *Gita*, the *Upanishads*, and the other scriptures of the world.

Do you realize that it is upon you, and those like you who will follow the path of renunciation, that Swamiji placed the responsibility of showing the world the way to peace? He himself went to Europe and America to prepare the soil. It is for you to sow the seeds and reap the harvest. In its search for peace the West has reached the summit of material enjoyments. But where is the peace? How can peace be found in the pursuit of material objects? Sri Ramakrishna has shown the way of peace in this age. You are his children. You have consecrated your lives "for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many." Raise then, the standard of renunciation and the harmony of faith, and go forth. "Time is short, and the obstacles are many." Since death is certain for all, let us die for a sacred cause. Waste no more time. Struggle every moment to reach the goal and move, onward and upward.

I can assure you that you will attain liberation and peace if you but free yourself from lust and greed. There is no doubt about it. How many are there who really seek to find God? If a man prays at all he prays for health, for wealth, for success. How many seek God out of their love for Him? Who can say, "God is my own. I love Him, and without Him I cannot live!" He who can exemplify these ideals in his life, be he monk or householder, shall be called great. Peace will follow him. He will taste the bliss of immortality; having tasted which every other thing shall appear tasteless. Furthermore, just as certain as this is true in the case of the individual, so also is it true in the case of a nation. The nation which can make God the ideal of life, and follow that path, shall find peace. Only such a nation can survive, and only such a nation can be truly called civilized.□

Reprinted from *Vedanta and the West*, March - Jun 1947

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and M.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, which gives chronological details of Sri Ramakrishna's life and message, is a great source to know one of the great saints of India. For millions of his devotees, both in India and abroad, however, Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God like Rama, Krishna, Buddha or Christ. Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who went to America in 1893 to attend the Parliament of World Religions, and later lectured for nearly four years in many parts of that country and Europe on *Vedanta*, didn't speak about his Master much for fear of giving an impression that he was trying to establish a Ramakrishna cult in the West. But, as he told his Indian audience after his return, that whatever he said in America or England was nothing but the exposition and interpretation of his Master's message.

Addressing a rally of admirers in Kolkata (Calcutta) in January 1897, he said: "If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped any one in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his (my teacher, my master, my hero, my ideal, my God in life - Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.)"¹ This writer completely agrees with what the great Swami had said, and hence one can safely regard him the first to spread his Master's message in the West.

It is Mahendranath Gupta, popularly known by the initial M., however, that we need to pay our special homage for faithfully recording the conversations of Sri Ramakrishna with

¹ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (CWs), v.3, 312.

his devotees, and presenting his teachings to the world in general, but to the Indian people in particular. Most importantly, he presented them in the words of his Master, rather than his own, and in the language in which the Master spoke, which was Bengali. M. named his five-volume book as *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. According to the Indian tradition, the author of a scripture should introduce the text with an invocation in the form of a salutation *mantra*. Following that tradition, M. placed the following verse, as translated into English, on the title page of each of the five volumes of his original Bengali *Kathamrita*:

“O Lord, your nectar-like words relieve the burning misery of afflicted souls. Your words, which poets have sung in verses, destroy the sins of worldly people forever. Blessed are they who hear of your vast glory. Blessed indeed are those who speak of you. How unparalleled is their bounty.”

This verse is from *Srimad Bhagavatam*, and was addressed to Sri Krishna in that scripture. Since M. looked upon Sri Ramakrishna the same way as he looked upon Sri Krishna, an incarnation of God in the present age, he used that verse to introduce the *Kathamrita*, which indeed is a veritable scripture. *Amrita* is the Sanskrit term to describe the Lord’s words, which means both ‘nectar’ and ‘immortality.’ The words of the Lord are like nectar because they are a healing balm to those scorched by misery. The words of Sri Ramakrishna also give immortality, taking us beyond the cycle of birth and death, provided we listen to those words and live our lives according to them.²

It was this original Bengali version that Swami Nikhilananda translated into English in 1942 and called it *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Therefore, we regard M’s role as more than that of merely expounding and interpreting Sri

² Swami Lokeshwarananda, *The Way to God As Taught by Sri Ramakrishna* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Institute of Culture), 19.

Ramakrishna's teachings, but rather of presenting them as the Master spoke. Besides, M. presented Sri Ramakrishna's teachings in a way that reflected his Master's day-to-day life, moods and personality. The dramatic mode of presentation makes the study of the Gospel not an intellectual exercise but a profound spiritual experience. Most importantly, every spiritual instruction that issued forth from his Master's lips had been attested by M.'s own life. Furthermore, the highest thoughts were expressed in the everyday language of the Master, using the most common expressions and homely parables that the Master was fond of providing, thereby setting The Gospel apart from other theological and philosophical works. It is all these reasons that have made *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and its parent *Kathamrita* a favorite scripture for daily reading for millions of devotees throughout the world.

Mystic and author/compiler of the great philosophic work, *Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley wrote in the foreword to The Gospel: "... Making good use of his natural gifts ... 'M.' produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of the hagiography. ... Never have the small events of a contemplative daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity."³

Swami Vivekananda, too, praised M.'s innovative style: "The move is quite original and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are doing. The language is also beyond praise – so fresh, so pointed and withal so plain and easy."⁴

The Gospel is unique in another way. One can challenge

³ *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, page v.

⁴ CW, 5, 140.

the historicity of Krishna or Christ, but no one can challenge the historicity of Sri Ramakrishna. Not only that, while the lives and messages of saints and incarnations like Buddha, Christ, Chaitanya, Nanak, etc., were written by their devotees long after these people had passed away, the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna are a faithful record of what he had actually said, and have come to us by one who was a close witness of everything that he wrote within a couple of years after the Master's death.

Since Sri Ramakrishna knew about M. making notes about his conversations with devotees, he made it sure that M. understood everything he said accurately and truthfully.

To illustrate: it was Sunday, November 9, 1884, and the beginning of winter in Kolkata. The Master had felt the need for some shirts and asked M. to bring them. Besides two broadcloth shirts, M. had brought another of a heavy material, for which Sri Ramakrishna had not asked. So the Master asked M. "tell me what kind of shirts did I ask you to bring?" When M. told him that he had asked him to buy only the plain shirts and not the other of heavy material, the Master said "then you please take that one back." (The Gospel, 656)

Later that night, the Master asked M. how did he like that day's conversation? M. began narrating one conversation after another with his several devotees, and said that the Master had said: "God takes upon himself complete responsibility for one who totally depends upon Him. It is like a guardian taking charge of a minor. You also told us that at a feast a child cannot by himself find a place to eat his meal; someone finds a place for him." The Master said: "No it is not quite to the point. I said that the child doesn't fall if the father leads him and holds his hand."

The Master then wanted to know what he had said about *jnanayoga* and *bhaktiyoga* to a certain devotee. M. replied: "As long as one is conscious about the 'jar,' the ego will certainly remain.

As long as one is conscious of 'I,' one cannot get rid of the idea, 'I am the devotee and Thou art God.'" The Master said: "No, it is not that; the 'jar' doesn't disappear whether one is conscious of it or not. One cannot get rid of the 'I.' You may reason a thousand times; still it will not go." (The Gospel, 663) Sri Ramakrishna also once quizzed M. to know if he correctly understood the meaning of the principle of renunciation. M. replied: "Renunciation does not mean simply dispassion for the world. It means the dispassion for the world and also longing for God." The Master said, "You are right." (The Gospel, 506)

As pointed out before, M. lay before his readers detailed scenes and situations in which the Master spoke. For instance, he always began by telling where the Master was seated in his own room in the temple garden, or in some devotee's house, what was he wearing, or not wearing anything at all, who else was present in the room, from which direction someone came, and also what was the day like, high or low tide period of the sacred Ganges nearby, whether there was any music going on in any temple of the Temple Complex, and so forth. His skill in describing the atmosphere of the Gospel narrative is simply poetic.

Amazingly, however, the author himself is not in the picture at all. For, in the Gospel he calls himself not Mahendranath Gupta, but just by a single letter M., and that too always in the third person. Such a self-effacing personality of the author has no equal among the world's hagiographers. M's main objective in the Gospel was to keep the spotlight primarily on the Master in order to get the readers into a meditative mood and strengthen their devotion; goals in which he superbly succeeded.

It is this natural humility, self-abnegation and self-effacing personality of which saints are made of, and it is these characteristics that are essential in realizing God and making Him one's own. It is said that once Sri Radha asked Sri Krishna: what

is so special in your flute that you always keep it on your lips? Sri Krishna turning the flute upside down showed the flute to Radha, it was hollow, nothing, inside. She got her answer! The secret of seeing God face to face, according to Mahatma Gandhi, is to reduce one's ego to zero. It was this absence of ego in M. and his profound humility, combined with his literary and philosophical traits, not to speak of the grace of Sri Ramakrishna, which transformed this teacher/scholar into a veritable sage or *Rishi*.

Besides, there couldn't have been a better and more qualified messenger of Sri Ramakrishna's message to humanity than M.. From his childhood, M. was of religious bent. He was a brilliant student in college from which he graduated at the third place in his class, and had a razor-sharp memory. When just in middle school, he began to keep a diary where he would record in it the day's events; a couple of the following entries in the diary of early years would show his religious nature: "I got up in the morning and prostrated before my parents." "As usual, on my way to school I saluted Mother Kali and Mother Shitala." It was this habit of keeping a diary that stood him in good stead in carefully recording the Master's conversations with his devotees, ultimately leading to the production of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. In fact he himself commented on his *Magnum opus*, "I was an apprentice for fifteen years."

After graduating from college, he became a teacher of English literature, and served as headmaster in several schools in Kolkata. He was an excellent teacher, specializing in Shakespeare. He also had the knowledge of both Eastern and Western philosophies, and was well versed in history, literature, astronomy and science. Besides, he had read the biographies of a fifteenth century saint, Sri Chaitanya. He also had read the New Testament, and in fact, he remembered many of the lines of the

Bible by heart. Long after M. had met Sri Ramakrishna, a Christian minister was amazed at the depth of M.'s knowledge of the Bible. M. told him, "Sir, we lived with Christ (meaning Sri Ramakrishna), so we understand his teachings a little."⁵ The following incident would illustrate his knowledge and understanding of the Bible. To appreciate this narration, a little background would be necessary.

It was Tuesday, July 28, 1885. Sri Ramakrishna had come to visit a very pious devotee, Balaram Basu, in the morning at his house in Kolkata. In the afternoon he was to go, as promised to visit Nanda Bose, an aristocrat. Nearby lived a Brahmin woman devoted to the Master. Her only daughter had recently died and for that reason she was in deep sorrow and grief-stricken. She, too, was very anxious and eager to have the Master at her house, to which the Master had agreed. Nanda Bose being a rich man had also invited many friends from the neighborhood to see the Paramhansa and listen to his sweet words. The Master stayed at Bose's house for an hour and the Brahmin lady was restless awaiting his coming to her house. She went to Bose's house and found the Master still busy talking with people that made her sad. At last, the Master arrived at her house, which was filled with many people, some standing on the windows to have a glimpse of the Master.

The Brahmin lady had a sister; both of them were widows. The sister came to the Master and after saluting him told him that her sister had gone to Bose's house to see if he was still there, and if he was coming to her house at all. A few minutes later the Brahmin lady came and saluted the Master; she was beside herself with joy. In a half-choked voice she said: "this joy is too much for me. Perhaps I shall die of it like a laborer who had won a lottery. Tell me, friends, how shall I be able to live. ... I did not feel such

⁵ *They Lived with God*, Swami Chetanananda (Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1989), 192.

a thrill even when my daughter was alive.” She was so overwhelmed with the presence of the Master that she could not take her eyes off from him or the devotees. In the meantime her sister came and said: “Come down, sister! How can I do everything by myself if you stay here?” But the Brahmin lady was completely overwhelmed. After a while she respectfully took Sri Ramakrishna to another room and offered him refreshments. Other devotees were served on the roof. (The Gospel, 822)

Back at Balaram’s house later that evening, when the Master was alone with M. in the room, he talked about the Brahmin lady and her relatives: “Ah! How happy they were!” Implicitly the Master was impressed by the Brahmin lady’s sincere devotion for the Master. M. said, “How amazing! A similar thing happened with two women in the time of Jesus. They too were sisters, and devoted to Christ. Martha and Mary.” The Master was very eager to hear the story. M. began narrating the story from the Bible. He said that Jesus Christ went to their house with the devotees. At the sight of Jesus, one of the sisters, Mary, was filled with ecstatic happiness. That joy reminded M. of a song about Gauranga (Chaitanya):

My two eyes sank in the sea of Gora’s heavenly beauty
And did not come back to me again.

Down went my mind, as well, forgetting how to swim.

M. continuing the story of Martha and Mary said that while Mary was talking joyfully with Jesus, Martha was busy arranging the food for him. She complained to Jesus, saying “Lord, please judge for Yourself - how wrong my sister is! She is sitting in Your room and I am doing all these things by myself.” Jesus said: “Your sister indeed is blessed. She has developed the only thing needful in human life: love of God.” (Luke: 10.38-42.) With delicate ambiguity Jesus rebuked Martha’s choice of values;

a simple meal (one dish) is sufficient for hospitality. Jesus approved Mary's preference for listening to his teaching.

Sri Ramakrishna was very happy to hear about the story from the Bible and asked M. what did he feel after seeing the behavior of the Brahmin sisters? M. said that after seeing all that he felt that "Christ, Chaitanyadeva, and yourself - all are one and the same." The Master was happy to learn M.'s understanding and devotion. (The Gospel, 825) As a matter of fact, Sri Ramakrishna always impressed on his devotees, including M., to reduce their activities and spend more time in the contemplation of God. On the other hand, this narration reflected M.'s great intellectual acumen for being able to connect various nuggets of history, spread over hundreds of years apart from each other, and make them into a garland of a scripture as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is.

(To be continued)

Just as you are giving your entire attention to your work as a physician, give it to God. You will see the results: you will get his vision at once. The Master used to say, One should turn the cornet. That is to say, one should canalize the same energy in a different direction. Take your mind from your profession of doctoring, and call on the Lord. That is extreme dispassion ... In your mundane work you enjoy success. If you can turn your mental current to another plane, you will attain success there in the same way. Surely you will reach your goal.

Swami Turiyananda

Gnana Marga

The pathless path

Anyone who tries to understand what the *sadhana* for non-dual experience is, is likely to be disappointed at the absence of details regarding the actual techniques in the books. It is obvious that neither Shankara nor his followers intended *Advaita* to be a mere system of speculative philosophy; yet, if you open any treatise on *Advaita*, you will find most of its pages devoted to discussions on *maya*, cosmology, refutation of the theories of other schools, and gloomy pictures of the phenomenal world. Occasionally one may come across some exultant statements about the author's experience of non-dual Reality, but how he attained that experience he seldom explains. In his great commentaries Shankara discusses with thoroughness dualistic meditations and rituals but has little to say about the exact practical method of getting non-dual experience.

Swami Vivekananda too is more or less silent on this point in his famous lectures on *Jnana Yoga*, although it is well known that Swamiji had the highest *nirvikalpa* experience on several occasions and has given expression to that experience in a few places especially in his "Song on *Samadhi*."

What is the cause of this paucity of details on *Advaita sadhana*? It cannot be accidental. More probably, it must have been caused by certain intrinsic features of the *sadhana* itself. The question naturally arises: Is there really such a thing as *Advaita sadhana*? Is the very word *sadhana* admissible within the parameters of *Advaita*?

Etymologically, the word *sadhana* refers to an act by which an end (*sadhya*) is attained (by a striver, *sadhaka*). This would

imply a three-fold division in Reality and movement in time and space, all of which *Advaita* regards as illusory. In non-dual experience there is no distinction between the seeker (*sadhaka*) and the end sought (*sadhya*). Therefore *Advaita sadhana*, if such a thing exists, must be devoid of the *sadhaka-sadhana-sadhya* trichotomy.

In the introductions to his commentaries on *Kena Upanishad* and *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and in various other contexts Shankara has spoken of two different approaches to Reality. The first one involves the *sadhaka-sadhana-sadhya* trichotomy; it includes ritualistic karma (the ultimate result of which is the attainment of the world of manes) and *upasana* (the ultimate result of which is the attainment of the world of gods). The second approach is devoid of the trichotomous division and leads directly to the realization of the impersonal Absolute. This direct experience of *Brahman* is an ontological fact which is independent of human effort.

1 For the realization of *Brahman* no effort is needed other than the removal of ignorance.

2 And this removal of ignorance is not an act, a karma, but an ontological truth implied in the highest experience. Says Shankara, "For the acquisition of non-dual knowledge no effort is required; all that is needed is to stop superimposing the non-Self on the Self, or stop identifying the Self with the non-Self."

No doubt, non-dual realization is also a form of cognition. But then, there is a basic difference between *advaitic* experience and the experience produced by dualistic meditation (*upasana*). Shankara says: "Non-dualistic experience demolishes the cognition of such differences as the agent, instrument, action and results, which are superimposed upon the actionless Self... whereas in the experience produced by meditation these differences persist." From the foregoing discussion it is obvious

that Shankara's main purpose was to establish a direct path of realization entirely different from the paths of *upasana* (meditation) and ritualistic worship which are time-bound, goal-oriented efforts. This new path in which there is no distinction between the end and the means is indeed a pathless path. It is this pathless path that Shankara has termed *jnana*. What he meant by it is probably something like the "sudden enlightenment" described in books

It is a form of self-revelation which takes place spontaneously when certain interior conditions are fulfilled. *Jnana*, as Shankara conceived it, is not knowledge which has to be acquired but an ontological fact of existence. It is not knowing but being. Any form of dualistic "knowing" is merely *ajnana*, "not-knowledge." The *Upanishads* express this truth in the form of a paradox: "It is unknown to those who know, and known to those who do not know."

Why did Shankara attempt to establish a new, independent path? Are not the traditional paths of *upasana* (meditation) and ritualistic work capable of producing non-dualistic experience? Shankara bases his stand on the fundamental thesis that unreality cannot lead to Reality. The Real and the unreal are entirely different and opposed to each other like light and darkness. Falsehood can never lead to truth. If a person mistakes a rope for a snake and holds on to that belief, he can never know the truth of the rope. Only by correctly seeing the rope, will his mistaken notion go. This correct perception is a new experience totally different from the earlier wrong perception. As long as a person persists in retaining the old wrong knowledge, he cannot have correct knowledge. Truth is not a prolongation of error but a break from it. According to Shankara, ordinary meditation and ritualistic worship are based on certain preconceived notions about the ultimate Reality which are not

ultimately true and so, through those methods, one cannot realize the true absolute *Brahman* beyond all attributes. For the realization of the latter we must break away from those methods based on error, and strike out a new path, the "pathless path."

Though Shankara blazed a new trail, he did not leave behind elaborate details of that trail in his works. Many of these details may have remained as an esoteric tradition among his disciples and early followers. Much of this oral tradition seems to have been lost. When we study post-Shankara treatises we find that several of them (e.g. *Vedantasara* of Sadananda and *Aparokshanubhuti*) have frankly adopted Patanjali's system of *Yoga* as the practical means of realizing *Brahman*. It is therefore difficult now to state what exactly was the original *Advaita sadhana* taught by Shankara.

Classification of meditation techniques

The English word "meditation" is a general term which covers various types of mental exercise. Most of these mental exercises are forms of cognition, though they are often supported by feeling and willing also. Cognition has three parts - a subjective part as the knower, an objective part as the known, and the process of knowing which connects the other two parts. Meditation is a state of concentration of mind in which consciousness is focussed on one of these three parts. Depending on the direction of the focus of consciousness, meditation techniques may be divided into the following four types.

1. Objective meditation. In this type concentration is achieved by focusing consciousness on an object, usually the image of a deity or on a mystic formula known as *mantra*. Patanjali's technique of *dhyana* and *Vedantic* techniques of *upasana* belong to this category.

2. Subjective meditation. In this type consciousness is focused back upon its own source, namely, the Self. This can be done in several ways. The process of enquiry into the nature of the self, meditation on *asmita* mentioned in Patanjali's *Yoga-sutra*, the *pratibodha* technique taught in *Kena Upanisad* - all these are subjective meditations.

3. Reflective meditation. In this type consciousness is fixed neither on the self nor on a definite object but on knowledge or the knowing process itself. This takes place when one practises *manana* or reflection on the meaning of a scriptural statement or on a metaphysical concept. In Christian spiritual tradition the word "meditation" really refers to this kind of reflection. In Catholic monasteries "meditation" on various Biblical passages is the major spiritual technique practised, especially by novices. Reflective or conceptual meditations are also practised by Buddhist monks, especially by those of the Theravada school.

Manana as a spiritual discipline was very popular in *Advaita* circles during the Middle Ages, but is no longer so. Nowadays people read and hear a lot but are becoming less and less capable of independent systematic, self-directed, deep reflection. It is of course true that all Indian schools of thought hold that *manana* can produce only indirect knowledge of Reality. But, as Vidyaranya has pointed out, this indirect knowledge is not only not erroneous but a great help in the practice of other types of meditation which produce direct experience of Reality. It is therefore good to know a little more about what *manana* really means. *manana* is always done on the basis of *sravaṇa*. The word *shravana* is usually translated as 'hearing.' But *Advaita* teachers point out that *sravaṇa* really means determining, with the help of six marks the true import of scriptural statements. Therefore it would be more correct to translate *sravaṇa* as "study" of scriptures.

What then is *manana*? *Manana* is the application of the knowledge of the scriptures in one's own life, even though it is indirect knowledge. According to Suresvaracarya, *manana* is the logical process of *Anvaya -vyatireka* by which one gains an indirect knowledge of one's true nature as *Brahman*. *Anvaya*, "identity," is a positive method; *vyatireka*, "difference," is a negative method. Both are necessary to gain correct knowledge. Suresvara explains it as follows. Suppose there is a post which one misunderstands to be a man. The method of *Anvaya* conveys the true nature of the thing - that it is a post. But by merely saying, "This is a post, this is a post" does not remove the illusion that it is a man. To remove that misconception we have to add, "This is not a man;" this negation represents the *vyatireka* method. Similarly, merely stating "That thou art" (*tat tvam asi*) is not enough; it should be complemented by the statement, "Thou art not a bound, sorrowful, mortal being."

Thus through *manana*, consisting of the double process of *Anvaya vyatirekat* we gain a correct understanding of scriptural truths.

4. *Ahamgraha* meditation. Unlike the other three types, here consciousness is not focused on anything; instead, consciousness is simply allowed to expand. In actual practice this means that the self identifies itself with larger and larger dimensions of Reality. Here "identification" does not mean a subject-object relationship (as exists in the objective meditation mentioned above) which is called *samyoga* or union. *Ahamgraha* is a "self-self identification known as *tadatmya*. The effect of this meditation is a progressive expansion of self-awareness. Many of the *vidyas* found in the *Upanisads* belong to this type of meditation.

Meditation techniques in *Jnana-marga*

Jnana-marga is not the exclusive preserve of *Advaita* alone.

The ancient meditation traditions of the *Upanisads* and the *Yoga* system of Patanjali may also be said to follow *Jnana-marga*. Even in the *Advaita* system various meditation traditions exist.

Thus *Jnana-marga* comprises quite a large number of meditation techniques. They can all be classified under the four main types discussed in the foregoing section. Let us now study briefly some of these meditation techniques individually.

Upasanas

Upasanas represent some of the oldest forms of meditation which had their origin in ritualistic worship. They are objective meditations and are practised in the path of devotion as well as in the path of knowledge. Here we are concerned only with the *upasanas* of *Jnana-marga*.

Two questions are to be answered before we can proceed further. Meditation can be done only on an object and that too only on an object which has cognizable attributes. But *Nirguna Brahman*, being the eternal Self, cannot be objectified and, being impersonal, is devoid of attributes. How, then, can we speak of *upasana* with regard to *Brahman*? The answer given by the majority of *Advaita* teachers is that *upasana* can be practised directly on *Saguna Brahman* (Personal God) alone. Sadananda, for instance, defines *upasanas* as "mental exercises pertaining to *Saguna Brahman* such as *Sandilya Vidya* etc." Vidyaranya, however, emphatically asserts that *upasana* can be practised on *Nirguna* (attributeless) *Brahman* as well. He argues that since *Brahman* is knowable it can be meditated upon too. According to him, those who are unable to practise *vichara* (enquiry) should practise *upasana* on *Nirguna Brahman*. Although he does not indicate clearly how attributeless *Brahman* can be directly meditated upon, he implies that such a meditation can be done indirectly, that is, through symbols (*pratika*).

The second question is, what is the ultimate result of *upasana*? Here again the majority of *Advaitins*, including Shankara, hold that *upasanas* lead directly to the realization of only *Saguna Brahman*. But since the realization of *Saguna Brahman* may in due course, in the higher worlds, lead to the realization of *Nirguna Brahman* (this course is called *krama-mukti*), *upasana* may be said to lead indirectly to *Nirguna Brahman*. Says Shankara: "Like ritualistic karma, meditations too produce results in this world or in the next world. Some meditations produce true knowledge and, through that, *krama-mukti*. However, Vidyaranya confidently declares that *nirgunopasana* can lead directly to attributeless *Brahman* and, if a person fails to achieve this result, he is sure to get at least *krama-mukti*."

Upasanas have been divided into three types: *angavabaddha*, *pratika*, *vidya* (*ahamgraha*). Of these *angavabaddha* is the lowest of *upasanas*. It refers to some ancient meditations which were associated with certain Vedic rituals like the *Jyotistoma*, and are no longer in vogue. The highest type of meditation is represented by the *Vidyas*; these will be dealt with in the next section.

The second type, *pratikopasana*, represents the *upasana* proper. To avoid confusion, only this type of meditation should be called *upasana*. In it a single thought-current is directed towards a definite object which is invariably regarded as a symbol of *Brahman*. Since these symbols serve as frames of reference in understanding *Brahman*, these meditations are also called *tatastha-upasanas*.

Pratikas are of two types: *nama* (name) and *rupa* (form). The most famous of the sound-symbols is *Om*. How meditation on *Om* leads to realization of *Brahman* has been described by Gaudapada in the first chapter of *Mandukya-karika*. As regards form-symbols, several of them are mentioned in *Aranyakas* and *Upanisads*. Obviously, in the Vedic period, *Surya* (sun), *Agni* (fire),

Dyau (sky) and other cosmic objects were widely used as symbols by the Vedic people in the practice of meditation. In modern times most of these pratikas are no longer in use and have given way to anthropomorphic images of various gods and goddesses.

Vedantic *upasana* is to be distinguished from Patanjali's technique of *dhyana* which also often employs impersonal symbols such as 'sorrowless light' as objects of concentration. The *samyama* techniques described in the third chapter of the *Yoga-sutras* also belong to an entirely different class of meditations. The difference between Vedantic and Patanjali's techniques is this: the former is meditation on *Brahman* whereas the latter is meditation on *Prakriti*. The symbols used in *upasanas* are *brahmasraya* (based on *Brahman*) whereas the symbols used in *dhyana* are *prakrtyasraya* (based on *Prakriti*).

Vidyas

Though *vidyas* are often classed under *upasanas*, the two are quite different techniques. Whereas *upasanas* are symbolic meditations, *vidyas* are analogical meditations. In *upasana* the main effort is to concentrate the mind on one specific *pratika* or symbol. In *vidya* attention is directed towards certain attributes or qualities of the ultimate Reality with the help of an analogy. *Vidya* is a technique of "grasping" the whole of *Saguna Brahman* by identifying one's inner self with It. This shows that a *vidya* is an *ahamgraha* type of meditation (unlike *upasana* which is an objective type of meditation). The immediate effect of *pratikopasana* is the transformation of consciousness, whereas the immediate effect of *ahamgrahopasana* (i.e. *vidya*) is the expansion of consciousness.

The difference between the two may be clearly seen in the following two examples pertaining to the sun. The *Chandogya Upanisad* speaks of an *Aditya-upasana*. As Badarayana has pointed

out, here the sun is to be regarded only as a symbol of *Brahman* and should be meditated upon as an object without making any attempt to identify the self with it. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* speaks of an *Avitya-vidya* in the following terms: "Of this Person in the solar orb, *Bhu* is the head..., *Bhuva* is the arms..., *Sva* is the feet..." Here the sun stands for *Virat*, not as a symbol but as an analogy. The aspirant is not to concentrate his mind on the sun; instead, he is to identify his self with the Person-in-the-sun who stands for *Hiranyagarbha*, the sun serving only as a background for this identification. *Aditya-upasana* is meant for concentration of the mind, whereas *Aditya-vidya* is meant for the expansion of the self. Evidently, the latter is a higher form of meditation than the former.

A number of *vidyas* like *Sandilya Vidya*, *Dahara Vidya*, *Madhu Vidya*, *Paiicagni Vidya*, etc. are mentioned in the *Upanisads*. According to one account their number is thirty-two but many more must have existed in the Vedic period. Most of these meditation traditions had become extinct centuries before Shankara wrote his great commentaries. In the absence of *guru-parampara*, it is now difficult to know the real import of many of these *vidyas* and how to practise them.

However, some kind of new *vidya*-like meditations for *advaitic* experience must have been developed during the Middle Ages and practised by *sannyasins*. Sri Ramakrishna has spoken of some of these meditations which he heard from his guru Tota Puri (whom the Master used to refer respectfully as *Nangta*, "the Naked One"). While talking to Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar at Shyampukur, Sri Ramakrishna once said: "*Nangta* used to tell me how a *jnani* meditates: Everywhere there is water; all the regions above and below are filled with water; man, like a fish, is swimming joyously in that water. In real meditation you will actually see all this.

"Take the case of the infinite ocean. There is no limit to its water. Suppose a pot is immersed in it: there is water both inside and outside the pot. The *jnani* sees that both inside and outside there is nothing but *Paramatman*. Then what is this pot? It is the I-consciousness. Because of the pot the water appears to be divided into two parts; because of the pot you seem to perceive an inside and an outside. One feels that way as long as this pot of the I exists. When the I disappears, what remains. That cannot be described in words.

"Do you know another way a *jnani* meditates? Think of the infinite *akasha* and a bird flying there, joyfully spreading its wings. There is the *Cidakasha*, and *Atman* is the bird. The bird is not imprisoned in a cage; it flies in the *Cidakasha*. Its joy is limitless."

What Sri Ramakrishna has so vividly described here are *ahamgraha* meditations. Even if they are not regarded as vidyds, they are intelligible and of immense practical value to modern people.

(to be continued)

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, August 1986

He who fears and doubts cannot make any progress either in the spiritual or worldly sphere. The mind is cramped. He alone is a hero, he alone attains greatness, who moves forward to realize the truth without caring whether the world is real or not.

Swami Adbhutananda

A Comparative Study of the Commentaries on the Brahma-Sutras (cont.)

Though *Brahman* and the world are of different natures, yet they can be related as cause and effect; for, to establish such a relation, they need not be similar in all respects, in which case they would be identical and not subjects of different designations. What is necessary is that some of the qualities of the cause must be found in the effect also, and we do find two qualities of *Brahman*, viz. existence and intelligence in the world also, for everything exists and is lighted by intelligence (II. i. 4-6). At the time of cosmic absorption or dissolution *Brahman* is not affected by the defects of the world; for absorption means that all the qualities of the effect do not continue to exist, even as when a pot is absorbed in its cause, the clay, its shape does not continue to exist. It is the effect that is of the nature of the cause and not vice versa (II. i. 9).

This non-difference of the cause and the effect, of *Brahman* and the world, does not obliterate the difference between the experiencer and things experienced; for such difference in non-different things is possible owing to name and form. For example, though waves and foam are non-different as sea-water, yet, as waves and foam they are different from each other (13). Thus far Shankara thinks the author of the Sutras accepts the *Parinamavada* (the doctrine of actual modification) of the Sankhyas as a workable basis, but refutes their theory of *Pradhana*, an independent entity, as the cause of the world, and establishes *Brahman* as the First Cause. But in II. i. 14 the author establishes the true nature of this causality according to his own view.

The difference due to name and form referred to in *Sutra* 13 is not possible in a non-dual *Brahman*. Difference - and non-difference, being contradictory, cannot exist in one and the

same thing. The ultimate reality is only non-duality, and Sutras 14-20 declare the true significance of this non-difference of cause and effect. Non-difference does not mean identity, for that is not possible between *Brahman* and the world. It only means that there is no essential difference between them, i.e. the effect, the world, has no existence apart from *Brahman*, the cause; in other words, it is not real. The denial of identity does not establish difference between the two but establishes the apparent identity or the illusory nature of the world. The modification, pot, is only a name arising out of speech, but the truth is all is clay (Ch. Up., VI. i. 4). The pot, etc. are not different from clay, but are mere modifications or different conditions of the clay (14). They are not experienced without clay and so are unreal (15). But clay is realized even apart from name and form and is therefore real. Hence *Brahman* is non-dual.

Brahman together with *Maya* is the cause of this world; the former through *Vivarta* (apparent modification), the latter through *Parinama* (actual modification) and the qualities of both are found in the world. There are five elements in the make-up of everything in this world, viz. *asti* (existence), *buddhi* (intelligence), *priya* (bliss), *nama* (name), and *rupa* (form): the first three have *Brahman* for their material cause corresponding to Its three factors, Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss and the last two are due to *Maya* and are unreal. The effect exists in the cause as one with it and is only manifested at creation. Otherwise everything could have been produced from all things (18). It is like a piece of cloth folded and spread out (19). The five *Pranas* (vital forces) when controlled get merged in the chief vital force in the mouth, and are manifested again when the control is released which shows the effect is non-different from the cause. Hence the world is non-different from *Brahman* and the above-mentioned enunciation holds good (20). *Brahman* though without extraneous aids yet

creates this world, even as milk turns into curd (24). Through Its infinite inherent power It produces the world even as gods create through mere volition (25). Thus *Brahman*, though immutable, yet undergoes change and produces this diverse universe, for the Scriptures say this and therefore it has to be accepted, since they are the only authority with respect to It. Nor is this against reason, for in the dream state we do find in the soul diverse creation, which exists without marring its indivisibility. So also the world springs from *Brahman* which yet remains unchanged, and therefore like the dream world this world is also unreal from the transcendental standpoint (26-28).

Bhaskara interprets *Sutra* II. iii. 9 differently from Shankara. *Brahman* is eternal and never created, for the Scriptures declare it in texts like *Svet. Up.*, VI. 9. Therefore a doubt as to whether *Brahman* is created or not cannot arise. So he finds a different topic in this *Sutra*, viz. whether the qualities of the elements which are created are also created or not and concludes that when it is declared that the elements are created, it is taken for granted that their qualities are also created. In *Sutras* III. ii. 1.1-21 Bhaskara does not deal with the question whether *Brahman* is differentiated or non-differentiated; for *Brahman* is both, as is known from the Scriptures, though the latter aspect is Its true nature and the former is only a manifestation and therefore adventitious which is again absorbed in Its true essence. The question therefore is which aspect is to be meditated upon and he says that it is only the non-differentiated, formless *Brahman* in the causal state which is mere Existence and Pure Consciousness that is to be meditated upon. Thus though he interprets these *Sutras* like Shankara, it is with reference to the above topic and not to show that *Brahman* is attributeless only, and that Its other aspect is unreal or illusory (11-14). *Brahman* is mere Existence and Pure Consciousness. Even as a piece of salt is salty through and

through, so is *Brahman* nothing but consciousness (16). This *Brahman*, which is one, appears different in different bodies owing to *Upadhis*, as the one sun reflected in different sheets of water appears to be many (18).

Sutras 22-30, according to him, do not deny the world of forms as unreal and establish that *Brahman* alone is real. According to him the first "Not this" of the *Brh. Up.*, II. iii. 6 denies the gross and subtle forms of *Brahman* declared in II. iii. 1, and the second "Not this" denies the subtle body of the soul consisting of the impressions (*Vasanas*) of objects. Thus by the double denial the self is cleansed of all material form, the non-self, and its pure nature as identical with *Brahman* is taught by the Scriptures. *Sutra* 22, therefore, teaches the pure nature of *Brahman*, which is Existence, Knowledge, and Infinity. These are qualities of *Brahman* and so do not refer to different entities, for a thing does not become different on account of its qualities. Being qualities they are non-different from *Brahman*, and neither can exist without the other (22). The rest of the Sutras he interprets like Shankara, but as connected with the above topic.

Bhaskara agrees with Shankara in so far as he says that *Brahman* is both the efficient and the material cause of the world and the effect, the world, is non-different from its cause, *Brahman*: but he differs from Shankara when he says that the world for that reason is unreal. He interprets Ch. *Up.*, VI. i. 4 differently as follows: Speech is based on two things, the object (form) and name, which serve our practical purposes, as when we say "Bring water in the pot." But if the effect is meant to serve a practical purpose, then the cause and effect, the clay and the pot, would be different. That is why the *Sruti* says, "The clay alone is real." The cause alone exists as the effect, the pot, which is also seen to be made of clay. At all times the effect is dependent on the cause and is never experienced as different from it. It is only a state of

the cause - both different and non-different from it, and as it comes and goes, it is said to be transient and not true, while the cause is permanent and remains the same, the basis of all modifications; therefore it is said, "The clay alone is real." When the effect is seen from the standpoint of the cause, it is not experienced as anything different, for it gets merged in it. But effects, for this reason, are not unreal (*Mithya*) or illusory, for the *Sruti* affirms their reality in *Brh. Up.*, II. iii. 6. "There is no difference whatsoever here (in *Brahman*)" (*Katha Up.*, II. iv. 11) denies difference in the cause, and not that the effects are unreal.

The world is a state or mode of *Brahman* and is also real (II. i. 14). *Brahman*, which is omniscient and omnipotent, of Its own will transforms Itself into this world of diversity through Its powers (*Shakti*) which are numerous, just as milk turns into curd. The fact of having parts is not an essential cause of the modifications; (for in that case water, too, could be turned into curd, but this is not possible. So the modification of the milk into curd depends on its inherent power and not on its having parts. So also *Brahman*, which is without parts, transforms Itself at will into the world through Its various inherent powers (*Svet. Up.*, VI. 8), and at the same time remains unchanged in Its essence (II. i. 24 and I. iv. 26). By one of these powers It becomes the world of enjoyable objects and by another It becomes the enjoyer. As the sun sends out its rays and again withdraws them, so also *Brahman* through Its powers manifests this world of diversity and again absorbs it (II. i. 27). It is nothing to be wondered at that a thing without parts should be modified into effects without losing its essential nature: for in the dream state there appears diversity in the indivisible soul (II. i. 28).

(*To be continued*)

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, February 1953

Cultivation of Strength and Fearlessness

How to Accept Life's Challenge

Life is a challenge. What we are going to get out of life will largely depend on the quality of our individual and personal acceptance of that challenge. There is no limit set to what a human being can become. Do you speak of circumstances? Well, in an ancient Hindu scripture, it is said: "A man is born in the world of his own making." And we are remaking our world of being every day by what we think and do.

Therefore circumstances can be changed. We are truly the makers and unmakers of our destiny, notwithstanding our various limitations. What we are going to become in life will depend on our own strength, individually speaking. The stronger we are, the more we will be able to wrest out of life. Strength is the secret not only of all worldly achievements but also of all spiritual attainments.

Coming to religion does not mean settling down to mope and wail, cringe and cower before the forces of the world. It means deciding to assert our inherent might against situations inner and outer, and attain that victory which is never again defeated.

Do you say you are beset with problems? Someone is suppressing you, or oppressing you: is that your complaint? Do you feel miserable? Do you feel like a sinner?

Then turn round and attack your situation, however hopeless it may appear to be, with that one idea of strength coursing through your veins, and you will be surprised to see how soon your problems are solved. Swami Vivekananda declares: "It is weakness, says the *Vedanta*, which is the cause of all misery in this world. Weakness is the one cause of suffering.

We become miserable because we are weak. We lie, steal, kill, and commit other crimes, because we are weak. We suffer because we are weak. We are miserable through delusion. Give up the delusion, and the whole thing vanishes. "So, this delusion of weakness must go. It must be destroyed root and branch. If the oppressor were strong, he would not oppress. It is his weakness that drives him to oppress. If the oppressed were strong he would not suffer the oppression. If the starving man had strength he would refuse to starve. He would secure food from God's plenty and live. He would change such political or economic situations which tend to perpetuate his misery. If the tempted man had real strength, he would not yield to the temptation.

It is the weak body that falls a prey to any and every romping bacillus. It is the weak mind that becomes a hovel of all sorts of maladies. With our weaknesses gone at the influx of strength we would not lie, steal, kill, commit other crimes and sins. We should then know how splendid life can be, not in any shallow sunny sense, but in the sense that the captive released from a dark cell, after years of stay there, finds the blue of the sky splendid.

To derive the utmost out of life, what anyone requires, any time, anywhere, more than anything else is strength and more strength. With more strength this moment, the next moment a man is a better, purer and happier person. Not that when we are stronger persons life's trials and tribulations will cease to visit us. As stronger persons we may even attract more problems and troubles. But with strength in our sinews, vigour in our minds expressing themselves also as indomitable wills, we shall enjoy wrestling with them and wrestling life's prizes from it's reluctant hands. The timid and the weak are afraid even of shadows and the rustle of leaves. Hence Vivekananda says: "The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in all other matters, discard

everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it. Infinite strength is religion and God. Avoid weakness and slavery."

These words of Vivekananda are to human life what a compass is to a storm-tossed ship. Possess them firmly in your understanding and you will sail in the right direction.

This, now, we understand very well, that we require strength and more strength. But wherefrom do we get this strength? The answer comes like a thunderclap from Vivekananda's teachings: "All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves. Therefore, make your own future. 'Let the dead past bury its dead.' The infinite future is before you, and you must always remember that each word, thought, and deed, lays up a store for you and that as the bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon you like tigers, so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever."

What a life-giving and inspiring message: All strength and succour is already within yourself! There is nothing which God has not given us as potency. The gold mine is in the backyard. Dig the mine and take the gold. Fallow lies the field of life. Cultivate it and a golden harvest is yours.

The strength that is already within will have to be manifested. That is the real task of spiritual life. Other things will follow as a matter of course. It is, therefore, a question of cultivation. So it comes to this: Anyone seeking to manifest strength and more strength will have to do all the reckoning with himself. What stands in one's way is nothing but one's own indecision and want of self-application.

The first question is: Are We determined to gain more strength? If we are, we are going to get it But only verbal announcement will not do. Determination of the will is necessary.

When the head and heart are equally persuaded, then determination will come. That kind of determination itself is a degree of attained strength.

Methods of Cultivating Physical Strength

Coming to actual cultivation of strength we must remember that human personality is a complex. Man has a body, mind, and soul. The soul or *Atman* is the core of man's being, and that is clothed by body and mind, so to say. Proper cultivation of strength will have reference to man's entire being. When we fail to do this cultivation of strength, being lopsided may very well lead to problematic results. In actual cultivation of strength first comes the question of physical strength.

A physically weak man or woman is a picture of pathos. We are not speaking of those who due to illness or advanced age have become weak in an inevitable natural process. We are speaking of those who through harmful self-neglect have become weak untimely and unnecessarily. A Strong and healthy man or woman is a thing of beauty, expressing a special grace of God as it were. In their association even a weak person feels strong.

A physically weak person generally tends to become weak in all spheres of life, though it is not an absolute rule. If we have one weakness, it is easy for us to acquire a second one. And when we have two weaknesses, it almost looks impolite not to have a third one!

The Hindu seers saw this basic factor so clearly that they went to the extent of saying: "The body is verily the primary instrument for acquiring *dharma*."

Proper care does not mean coddling the body, but harnessing it judiciously in order to bring forth its maximum strength-potential into operation.

When Swami Vivekananda said, "You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the *Gita*," we can well imagine how shocked his Indian audience was.

But then he himself explained what he meant. He said: "You will understand the *Gita* better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little strong blood in you. You will understand the *Upanishads* better and the glory of the *Atman* when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men." This truth applies equally forcefully to women too. There is no distinction between man and woman from the standpoint of the *Atman*.

Some of the words of Swami Vivekananda most often quoted in India which have charged the whole nation with a sense of inner strength, which finally brought independence to the country, are: "What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and the secrets of the universe, and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face."

When Sri Ramakrishna accepted some of his disciples he had an eye on their physical strength. Naren, Rakhai, and Niranjan were athletes. So were Sasi and Sarat. So much importance was given to physical strength by the world-forgetting Sri Ramakrishna.

The cultivation of physical strength has two aspects: negative and positive.

Negatively speaking, cultivation of physical strength means stopping the avoidable wastage of physical energy. Physical energy is wasted in various ways. For instance:

1. Irregular and disorganized ways of living.

2. Want of adequate nourishing food.
3. Idling about and want of useful occupation.
4. Illness and want of proper rest.
5. Immoral habits.
6. Use of intoxicating drinks, drugs, or narcotics.
7. Living in unhealthy surroundings.
8. Mental disquiet and turmoil.
9. Overwork and useless work.
10. Habit of unnecessary talking.

To cultivate physical strength, first, we must find our ways to stop the wastage of physical energy through right means. It may appear that some situations of life which cause the drainage of physical energy are beyond our control. The most important point to remember is that to the man who has no self-control, the whole world stays out of his control.

When we begin to exercise self-control, on examination, it will be found that there is nothing immutable in what are called 'circumstances;' in fact they always keep on self-changing. Circumstances have not always to be changed; very often they have only to be understood, and worked with.

Positively speaking, cultivation of physical strength will depend on:

1. Regular ways of living.
2. Nourishing and proper food.
3. Regular work, rest, and recreation.
4. Proper physical exercise.
5. Moral habits.
6. The quietude of the mind.

Many of us, though always very body-conscious, strangely enough utterly neglect our own bodies. Some of us think that by eating good food they have done all that is needed for the body. And the result is they grow so substantial as to cause

consternation to the ever-generous hearts of the anti-coronary people. Again, there are others who, for fear of looking uninspiring, would not even take the necessary amount of food. They want to stay slim to desperation, so that they may be a kind of very sought-after actors in the theatre of the absurd in a world of cultivated despair and brilliance. But microbes, very unpoetical creatures as they are, have an extra fondness for people of weak vitality. And hence it is wisdom to eat the required food. Overeating is stupid. Under-eating is foolish. The idea is to get a supple strong body to be an instrument for a very high purpose. A judicious and balanced feeding of the body in order to bring out its maximum potential strength is the proper thing to do.

Many of us have no idea about how much strength lies dormant in our uncultivated muscles. We have heard of mythical Hercules. His performances may stagger our imagination. In our times too, people have performed fantastic feats of physical prowess such as supporting an elephant on the chest, stopping a car running full speed etc.

Though there is no particular need of supporting elephants by human ribs, which in all probability were not meant by the Creator for that purpose, such performances indicate to what extent man, through physical exercise, can increase his strength.

Now, physical exercises have to be chosen with circumspection, according to age and physiological considerations. A man of declining age suffering from arthritis need not play rugby for his daily exercise. A vigorous young man should not stay content by driving in an automobile at seventy miles per hour and thinking that he has taken his exercise. All exercises suitable for men may not suit women. Without competing with men in this regard they may take suitable physical exercises and enormously increase their physical strength.

The main point to be remembered on this is that men and women at different stages of their lives have to take such exercises as are conducive to bring forth the latent strength and maintain the manifested strength. Of course old age comes to everyone who lives long enough, making it progressively difficult to take physical exercises, except perhaps walking.

In the affluent society, soft living becomes a pattern of life. President Kennedy was really alarmed when he noticed the state of declining physical stamina of the young people in America. Hence he introduced a programme for improving the situation. It is for the parents to see that their children do not grow like soft butter dolls, but develop something of "muscles of iron and nerves of steel," as Swami Vivekananda wanted.

(To be continued)

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, October 1972

Just as the sea, always full and steady, remains undisturbed by the entry of water from the rivers etc., similarly, although thoughts of desirable things may rise as a result of past tendencies in a man of realization, still his mind is not disturbed at all, just like the full, unagitated sea. Having realized the absolute state of peace, he remains contented in his Self.

Swami Shivananda

Vedanta

357 - 362 JANUARY – DECEMBER 2011

Annual Index

Art and Science of Doing Work and Service	<i>Umesh Gulati</i>	6, 74
God is also Mother	<i>Hans Torwesten</i>	13, 82, 125, 180
What is Super Knowledge?	<i>Swami Swahananda</i>	22
The Best Offering: Nivedita	<i>Swami Ritajananda</i>	27
The Birth of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna	<i>Swami Mukhyananda</i>	35
Book Review		47, 189
Editorial	<i>Swami</i> <i>Dayatmananda</i>	2, 50, 98, 146, 194, 242
Monastic Spirituality: Christian and Hindu	<i>Swami</i> <i>Ranganathananda</i>	54, 103, 161
Leaves of an Ashrama	<i>Swami</i> <i>Vidyatmananda</i>	80, 135
Moulding Our Lives with Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings	<i>Swami</i> <i>Bhuteshananda</i>	64
Discipleship	<i>Swami Vivekananda</i>	89, 116
A Comparative Study of the Commentaries on the Brahma-Sutras	<i>Swami</i> <i>Vireshtwarananda</i>	110, 219, 274
Reminiscences of Swamis Brahmananda and Shivananda	<i>Sri Kalidasadaya</i> <i>Paschima</i>	137
Lorenzo Scupoli	<i>Swami Nageshananda</i>	150
Sannyasa and Brahmacharya	<i>Swami Subodhananda</i>	172
The Power of Purity	<i>Swami Nikhilananda</i>	198
The Scriptures and Their Purpose	<i>Swami</i> <i>Paratparananda</i>	209
Catherine of Genoa: Saint of Love	<i>Paul Hourihan</i>	222
Nine Means of Devotion	<i>Swami Swahananda</i>	234
God Vision	<i>Swami Premananda</i>	246
The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and M.	<i>Umesh Gulati</i>	254
Gnana Marga	<i>Swami Bhajanananda</i>	263

Programme for November - December 2011

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

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|--------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Nov 6 | Selection from the Upanishads 26 | Swami Dayatmananda |
| Nov 13 | Selection from the Upanishads 27 | Swami Dayatmananda |
| Nov 20 | Selection from the Upanishads 28 | Swami Dayatmananda |
| Nov 27 | The Essential Jesus | Swami Shivarupananda |
| Dec 4 | Selection from the Upanishads 29 | Swami Dayatmananda |
| Dec 11 | Day Retreat | |
| Dec 17 | Holy Mother's Puja | |
| Dec 24 | Christmas Eve | |
| Dec 25 | No Talk | |

Vedanta Study Circle in Cheshire Area

November 20 at 11:00 am

An Overview of the *Aitareya Upanishad* - Swami Shivarupananda

For information contact Mr Aswani (tel: 01625 527075)

between 9.30 pm - 10.30 pm

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda at
the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 11 December
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

Holy Mother's Puja

Saturday 17th December

at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

Christmas Eve Celebration

Saturday 24th December

at Bourne End at 5:00 pm

continued from the inside front cover

BANKIM: "Sir, what can we do? We are tied to a cork. It prevents us from diving." (All laugh.)

MASTER: "All sins vanish if one only remembers God. His name breaks the fetters of death. You must dive; otherwise you can't get the gem

(to Bankim): "There are some who do not want to dive. They say, 'Won't we become deranged if we go to excess about God?' Referring to those who are intoxicated with divine love, they say, 'These people have lost their heads.' But they don't understand this simple thing: God is the Ocean of Amrita, Immortality.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, December 8, 1884

Vedanta

is a bi-monthly magazine published, since 1951, by the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire
SL8 5LF, U.K.

Phone: (01628) 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

Subscription rate for 6 issues: £9 or \$17.50 post free.

Editor: Swami Dayatmananda

Assistant Editors: Swami Shivarupananda,

Swami Chidakarananda

Editorial Advisers: Swami Swahananda, Hollywood;

John Phillips

£1.50

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