

# Vedanta

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361 SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER

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**Nine Means of Devotion**

*Swami Swahananda*

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**Catherine of Genoa: Saint of Love**

*Paul Hourihan*

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## Divine Wisdom

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BANKIM: "Sir, why don't you preach?"

MASTER (smiling): "Preaching? It is only a man's vanity that makes him think of preaching. A man is but an insignificant creature. It is God alone who will preach—God who has created the sun and moon and so illumined the universe. Is preaching such a trifling affair? You cannot preach unless God reveals Himself to you and gives you the command to preach. Of course, no one can stop you from preaching. You haven't received the command, but still you cry yourself hoarse. People will listen to you a couple of days and then forget all about it. It is like any other sensation; as long as you speak, people will say, 'Ah! He speaks well;' and the moment you stop, everything will disappear.

"The milk in the pot hisses and swells as long as there is heat under it. Take away the heat, and the milk will quiet down as before.

"One must increase one's strength by sadhana; otherwise one cannot preach. As the proverb goes: 'You have no room to sleep yourself and you invite a friend to sleep with you.' There is no place for you to lie down and you say: 'Come, friend! Come and lie down with me.' (Laughter.)

"Some people used to befoul the bank of the Haldarpukur at Kamarpukur every morning. The villagers would notice it and abuse the offenders. But that didn't stop it. At last the villagers filed a petition with the Government. An officer visited the place and put up a sign: 'Commit no nuisance. Offenders will be punished.' That stopped it completely. Afterwards there was no more trouble. It was a government order, and everyone had to obey it.

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## Is Buddha Relevant for Us? (cont.)

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Right Effort is the sixth step in the noble eight steps that lead to *Nirvana* as taught by The Buddha. Right effort, or exertion, or striving, is an important factor on the path to liberation. Buddha elaborated what right effort is, and where it comes from. Right Effort is preceded by Right View, and when it is wholesome, it leads to liberation. Right Effort is central in any spiritual practice. Let us remember Buddha did not come to teach merely to 'Be good and do good;' he came to lead us to *Nirvana*. He realized that each soul is potentially divine (Buddha) and the only way to be rid of all suffering is to realise one's divine nature. He taught the noble eight-fold practice for the attainment of *Nirvana*.

The five steps we discussed before are mere preparations for the more intense interior practice. These five steps make the body and mind fit instruments leading to *Samadhi*.

Right effort is an attitude of mind and of great importance. Here we are concerned both with the nature of the effort and also its proper direction. The following illustrates the right attitude of the mind:

"Do you profess to be a husbandman?" asked the Brahman. "Where, then, are your bullocks? Where is the seed and the plough?"

The Blessed One said: "Faith is the seed I sow: good works are the rain that fertilizes it; wisdom and modesty are the plough; my mind is the guiding-rein; I lay hold of the handle of the law; earnestness is the goad I use, and exertion is my draught-ox. This ploughing is ploughed to destroy the weeds of illusion. The harvest it yields is the

immortal fruit of *Nirvana*, and thus all sorrow ends.”

Though Buddha did not speak of God he believed in reincarnation and taught the law of Karma. According to this law what we are now is the result of all the actions we did in the past. We are not born as a blank slate but with all the innumerable impressions we gathered from the beginning of our journey in this world.

Right effort involves many things, the control of the passions, avoidance of evil thoughts, and stimulation of right states of mind. Of these none is more important than our awareness of our subconscious, our biggest problem.

### **The subconscious mind**

The subconscious mind is that part of the mind of which one is not fully aware but which influences one's actions and feelings. We all know the nature of the conscious mind. We think, we feel, we act, and we are conscious of our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

All our conscious experiences are stored in the form of impressions in our subconscious mind. It is these impressions that create our present bodies and minds, and direct our ambitions, actions and reactions. Most of these lie deep in the subconscious and what is expressed is only the tip of the iceberg. We are, however, not aware of these impressions that control us. Unless we become aware of these impressions we will not be able to move forward. A Buddha is a realized soul and is fully aware of the nature of the mind. The subconscious, as many believe, is not all evil; the nature of man is good and divine; evil tendencies are merely a temporary phenomena. The evil impressions can be eradicated through proper training of the mind.

What we call our character is the result of what we

have thought, felt and done, of all these accumulated tendencies; and not merely of this present life only. The subconscious mind carries the record of all our past lives. This record determines and controls our conscious thoughts, feelings, and actions. In short, our actions and reactions in this life are governed by our individual character.

What about free will? In our present state of mind 'free will' is a misnomer, we have very little of free will. There is, however, a certain freedom, which is not of the will or of the mind or of the intellect, but it is a freedom of the spirit within us. Of this the *Bible* says: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." However this Kingdom, at present, is covered by our conscious and subconscious mind. Yoga helps us remove these obstructions and manifest our true nature. This is what the Buddha is teaching us through his noble eight-fold way. In order to manifest this divine nature we must acquire purity of mind by controlling the outgoing senses. We have to practice bringing the senses back from the sense objects, so that our attention may be fastened upon God. Distractions, evil thoughts, and wicked desires are sure to arise in the mind. To overcome these we must struggle hard for a long time, may be for many lives. Swami Brahmanandaji used to say, "Struggle! Struggle! Struggle! If there is no struggle in life, if life goes on smoothly, we remain unawakened!" But we have to struggle in the right way.

Buddha believed that every soul is a potential Buddha. However, if we wish to purge these unwholesome impressions and bring up the helpful and wholesome impressions, we need to be aware of them. Hence the Buddha taught *Vipassana* meditation which can give us insight into the workings of the entire mind. That is where Right Effort comes in.

### The Five Hindrances

There are five hindrances that obstruct Right Effort, so one must recognise and overcome them. They are:

1. Sensual desire.
2. Ill will.
3. Sloth, torpor, or drowsiness.
4. Restlessness and worry.
5. Uncertainty, doubt or scepticism.

The Buddha taught that mindfulness of the body, sensations, feelings and thoughts will help one overcome these hindrances. Then we can practise Right Effort. Right Effort as taught by Buddha consists of four endeavours.

1. The effort to prevent unwholesome qualities - especially greed, anger and ignorance - from arising.

2. The effort to extinguish unwholesome qualities that already have arisen.

3. The effort to cultivate skilful, or wholesome, qualities that have not yet arisen. Awakening to the four noble truths, intense yearning to attain *Nirvana*, awareness, loving kindness, and compassion - these are some of the wholesome qualities one needs to acquire and develop.

4. The effort to strengthen the wholesome qualities that have already arisen.

When Right Effort is practised earnestly and with the right attitude the mind becomes pure, strong and easily turns inwards. This leads one to Right Concentration, the seventh step taught by the Buddha.

(to be continued)  
*Swami Dayatmananda*

## The Power of Purity

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The entire essence of Christianity, as well as of all other religions, has been put into that one sentence: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." No other virtue but purity has been mentioned as the precedent condition for the realization of God. Such virtues as poverty, suffering, meekness, desire for righteousness, mercy, etc., may enable one to enjoy particular aspects of spiritual exaltation; but the enjoyment of God, which is the culmination of all yearning, is reserved for the pure in spirit. As a practical demonstration of this virtue of purity, Christ said: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The best way to understand the state of purity - which by the way, is a negative virtue - is to look at children. Unless all religious aspirants become as innocent, guileless and pure as children, they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, by way of indicating the nature of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Here also one finds that the purity of a child is the passport to the kingdom of heaven.

The strongest weapon of a saint is his purity. He attracts all to him by this virtue alone. One may not find any redeeming truth in the learned utterances of the philosophers, but a word or two from a pure-hearted man can change our entire life. We listen to a learned lecturer; his logic stimulates our mind; his oratory sends a thrill through our entire being, and we are caught in the glamour of his language and rhetoric. But when we have left his presence and try to find out what we have learned from him, we

sadly realize that we have retained nothing very uplifting of his lecture in our memory. On the other hand, we go to a simple man who can hardly speak two sentences correctly; most of his instructions are imparted in silence, but the few words we do hear from him are forever embedded in our mind and they stand as a beacon light in the midst of our confusion and uncertainty. The reason for this is that the one man is endowed with purity, and the other is merely a learned man without this cardinal virtue.

The spiritual power of saints and saviours consists of purity alone. There they tower high above all of us, making us revere them as God or as divine beings.

It is not the immaculate conception, or the many reported miracles, that have made Jesus one of the saviours of humanity; it is his innate purity, his abstention from all unholy desires, that makes us all bow our heads in reverence before him. He was untainted by evil. He never pursued any desire that was low or elemental. His desires never led him astray. He was never ensnared by temptations. There lies the divinity of Christ and of all prophets and saviours. The greatest spiritual force in the world is purity. There are today many founders of cults and religions; but these cults appear and disappear like clouds in the autumn sky, while the religion that is founded on the bedrock of purity, manifested in word, thought and deed, endures forever.

Even if men forget about Christ and Christianity, and even if all the scriptures are drowned in the ocean and all prophets thrown into the limbo of oblivion, still, if that one sentence: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," is preserved and practised by one man alone, that will save humanity.

What is purity? It is hard to define. As we have already said, it is a negative virtue. It is a state of being untainted by evil, of not being led astray by desires and not being allured by temptations. We are not conscious of it when we possess it; but

when we lose it we know that we have been robbed of a great treasure. It is the original state, antecedent to any guilt, or it is the virtue of the child, which has no merit in it and yet is a moral quality of the greatest worth. A child in full possession of purity is not aware of this priceless treasure; but on the threshold of youth, when he is about to make a false step, he hesitates and trembles. With a sort of moral instinct he tries to defend himself from the impending evil, though he does not know fully what constitutes good and evil.

We can try to understand purity by its contrast with morality. A moral man has many-sided experiences in life. Well aware of the meaning of good and evil, he passes through conflicts. His maturity is derived from the richness of his experiences, but at the sacrifice of his innocence. He is no longer guileless as a child. He has now tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree. He is already a partaker of the dualism of the phenomenal world. From experience he chooses certain virtues, based upon expediency, which will steer him between the Scylla and Charybdis of suffering and evil with the least amount of difficulty. A moral man is a man of experience; and his experience is rich in content in proportion to the scope and range of his contact with all things. He is already lost in the labyrinth of life and makes the best use of his experiences to avoid unpleasant and miserable results. His eyes have been opened by coming in contact with everything.

But purity is the antinomy of such an existential morality. A pure soul is innocent, simple and childlike. A pure man, without any effort or previous experience, knows immediately and intuitively what is the right way. He does not reason, but sees. A moral man, burdened with the heavy experiences of the past, hesitates before any new problem; but a pure soul, with his unsullied simplicity, guilelessness and straightforwardness, sees

through heaven and earth, as it were. With an intuitive directness he faces the battle of life and comes out of it unscathed. There is something in the pure which is convincing, irresistible and redemptive. We all feel it in the presence of the child or the childlike holy man. To recover the purity of the child is the aspiration of all struggling souls.

Purity is, and remains, the deepest yearning of our soul, because it is our basic virtue. The fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise is only a story which teaches us how man, by entering into the manifold experiences of the world, has been deprived of his birthright of perfection. During his sojourn in the world of experience, he has acquired for self-protection the traits of concealment, secretiveness and hypocrisy. Because he is impure, he cannot undertake any enterprise without reflection. He cannot make straight for the matter in hand. He employs subterfuge. He has no directness of conduct. The shame of the guilty always pursues him like a shadow. The more he tries to get out of the maze through his logic and reason, the more he creates baffling new situations, more difficult than the previous ones. At last he tires of the whole show of life. In desperation he cuts the Gordian knot with one stroke. He shakes off the complexities of life. This is called renunciation, and is the beginning of spiritual life. Thus is begun the journey to his true home, from which he has been an exile. He recovers his peace of mind only when he attains to his pristine purity. This philosophy of the fall of man is more or less what underlies all religions.

According to the Hindu theory, there is no actual fall. We have forgotten, for the time being, our real nature. It is always there, and we have only to rediscover it. We are now hypnotized by the moral values of the illusory world. The purpose of religion is to dehypnotize ourselves. The nearer a man approaches his goal, the more he recaptures his lost purity. He has less and less

to conceal; secretiveness becomes alien to him. A pure soul is not disturbed by the shame of the guilty. His nudity is not nakedness. A pure soul is often an enigma to the worldly-minded. People are puzzled by the directness of his conduct. The crooked and the cunning cannot understand one who is devoid of these traits. One sees one's reflection everywhere. As an ingenuous person sees ingenuousness everywhere, so a pure person sees everywhere simplicity and absence of hidden motive. As his nature is not intricate and calculating, he takes everything at its face value. Therefore, he is misunderstood. The wise men of his time did not know what to do with Jesus. The British government was puzzled by Mahatma Gandhi. But the pure recognizes the pure at once, and without any difficulty.

Nicolai Hartmann writes in his book on Ethics and says: "As the impure mind has an evil influence and infects with evil, so the pure mind has an influence for good. In this respect, pure-mindedness, despite its originally negative character, shows itself to be an eminently positive and creative energy in life. Nothing perhaps works so powerfully, so convincingly, for good, and so transforms others in their innermost character, as the mere presence of a pure-minded person who pursues the right undisturbed, just as he sees it and understands it in his simplicity. Precisely in his obliviousness to evil, in his failure to understand it and to react to it, he becomes a symbol and attracts the fallen and the morally prostrate. In this and by no means in the very doubtful superiority of the mature man lies the charm of association with a child, the assuaging and liberating effect of childhood upon the experienced and worldly-wise man, the education of the grown-up through the child. This power is the secret of purity, its veritable mystery. Innocence does not resist evil, simply because it does not see it, or, seeing, does not understand and believe. Outwardly it is defenceless; and it is clad

in a coat of mail and is equipped as no other type of ethos is. Its failure to defend itself is not a weakness. It is the guilty man who is powerless against it. He never feels his weakness more acutely than when he encounters the glance of a pure-minded man who does not see the evil in him, or even in seeing, cannot believe it. In that the pure-minded man reacts to him, as if he himself were pure, the guilty sees himself denied in his innermost being, sees himself judged, cast out - as no conscious judgement could censure and condemn."

An absolutely pure soul carries with it a great redemptive spiritual and moral power. Look at the conversion of Mary Magdalene. It is the purity of Christ which rescued her from the bottomless pit of vice. No worldly wisdom or intellectual instruction could have achieved that.

A beautiful incident in the life of Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this point. At one time, Mathur Babu, the disciple and caretaker of the great saint, wanted to test Ramakrishna's purity of character. Mathur arranged the matter with some prostitutes. Sri Ramakrishna was taken to a room, where the girls planned to entrap him with their charms. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw them, with the simplicity of a child, he addressed them as Mother and fell into a state of ecstasy. He did not see their moral degradation nor their ugly design. In his guileless mind every woman was the manifestation of the Divine Mother. He could not see evil in anything. This childlike purity of his soul worked the miracle. The suppressed motherhood in these women was released. They repented their sins and determined to lead a new life.

There is an equally attractive story in Hindu mythology. A young saint, Risya-shringa by name, was practising austerities in the forest. He was untouched by any idea of evil. The king of the country began to tremble before his spiritual power. He and

his ministers conspired with some courtesans, who were commissioned to divert the mind of the young saint from the path of rectitude. Early one morning the saint went to the lake for his daily ablution. The lake was covered with purple and white lotuses. The sun, in all its morning glory, peeped from the eastern horizon. The saint stood in the water pondering over the purity of the creation. Suddenly there was a splash of water, looking about he saw young girls of exquisite beauty smiling charmingly at him. The pure soul of the saint saw in them the beauty of the creator. He addressed them as Mother and in that instant all their evil designs were defeated. Their leader went back to the minister and said, "We have been chastised by the pure look of the saint. He called us Mother, and the purity of the Eternal Mother in us asserted itself. You always looked upon us as the objects of your enjoyment. We were the fire in which you constantly offered the oblation of lust and passion. You wanted to propitiate the devil in us and in your presence we always forgot the God who is our heritage. But had you ever worshipped that divinity you would have received in return the heavenly nectar of immortality. You wanted the clay of our physical charm, and so we were always mere toys in your hands. But the soul of this saint, with his innate purity, has restored our divinity."

The pure soul exerts his redemptive power over the evil-minded not by emphasizing their evil nature, but by directly putting his finger on their essentially divine spark which is never extinguished. Crookedness is unfamiliar to him. He cannot impute hidden motives to anybody. He cannot comprehend the sordidness of the everyday world. This trustfulness is his great power and by it he disarms all equivocation and hypocrisy. Anyone who comes into the charmed circle of the pure soul at once feels his elevating influence. This is more convincing than the study of holy books. Therefore, all religions recommend the

company of holy men as the greatest purifying agent in our life. A pure man is the power of goodness become flesh. This is exemplified in the life of Jesus. At his mere sight or by his mere word, calculation and subtlety were silenced. The Pharisees could never entangle him with their cunning logic. A pure soul goes directly to the heart of things. Neither heaven nor hell can keep its secrets from him. His penetrating insight unravels the mystery of everything. Darkness which may have accumulated for thousands of years is instantly dissipated by a spark of light. So the accumulated sin of ages disappears at the advent of a pure man. The power of purity is positive, whereas evil is a non-existing entity which appears to exist only in our perverted imagination.

The presence of a pure soul in society is its greatest corrective force. Though he does not judge or condemn, yet he is the monitor, a wandering conscience for the impure. A pure soul, by his silent presence, destroys the atmosphere of anger, hatred, envy, resentment and the baser passions and restores the spirit of serenity and calmness. In his presence, the impure soul ready to chastise the impure act of another hears the admonition: "He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone."

Purity is the very bedrock of spiritual life. It is not an abstract virtue, but manifests itself in all of our thoughts and activities. A spiritual man preserves his purity in deed, word, thought, will and disposition. Our deeds, words, and thoughts, when inspired by purity, always bear a special impress. Purity of deed is straightforwardness of action, absence of all subterfuge and freedom from concealment and cunning. Pure words do not admit of any double meaning, ambiguity or offensiveness. When our thought is pure, it means the simple presentation of facts and absence of masked motives and ulterior purposes. The pure in disposition view with sameness love and hatred, admiration and

contempt, goodwill and anger, because they cannot see evil anywhere. A pure person is incapable of envious admiration, jealous love or suppressed rage. He can never be a sneak. The one unmistakable characteristic of purity is that the possessor of it harmonizes his inward attitude with his outward, his unconscious with his conscious. He is incapable of any duplicity. The purity of his will manifests itself in wholehearted and absolute surrender to the end in view. He never undertakes any work in a careless or light-hearted manner. One can trust him in everything.

From the ethical standpoint, purity once lost cannot be regained. It is the state of original innocence and the lack of a manifold experience of life. It is something with which we are born. It cannot be striven after nor actualized in life. We zealously guard it as long as we possess it; once we have lost it, we may yearn for it, but we cannot get it back.

But though we cannot recapture what we have lost, still we can preserve what is left to us. The deeper we sink and the more we lose this saving virtue, the stronger is our desire to see it restored to its pristine glory. But as purity and manifold experience of life are antinomian in character, ethics cannot suggest any way for the fallen and the sinner.

It is the province of religion to resolve this antinomy of values. Religion alone shows us how to rid ourselves of this complexity of manifold experience and the conflicts of life. In ancient times, religion prescribed the ceremony of purification for the wiping away of guilt. Christianity substituted the formula of forgiveness and salvation through the suffering and sacrifice of the divine intervening for man. Purity returns as an act of grace. The method is the simple act of belief. Religion alone shows the way for a Mary Magdalene to become a saint. But this is not any mechanical sort of belief, nor is it a mechanical observance of ceremonies. Such purification arises from a firm conviction that

God is the source of all goodness and purity. A living contact with such a God washes away all dirt and filth. A living faith is absolutely necessary. One who possesses such faith says to himself, "I shall now make my homeward journey." It is the return of the prodigal son to the house of his all-loving father.

According to the philosophy of *Vedanta*, the soul of man is never contaminated. Man may be hypnotized into believing in the reality of worldly experience, but the divine spark of his true nature is never extinguished. The sun may be covered for the time being by a patch of cloud; but however dense it may be, it can never diminish the sun's splendence. Gold may remain buried under the earth for thousands of years, but that cannot destroy its natural brilliance. It has only to be dug out and the golden colour at once reveals itself. Flint may be under water for years, but the moment it is taken out and rubbed against a stone, it produces a spark. The idea of impurity comes when we forget our divine nature. The aspirant must say with all the sincerity he can command, "I am divine;" and instantly he regains his divinity. But it must be done with all the forcefulness of his nature. Nothing in the world can destroy that divine element. The so called sin may hide or cover it, but it can never destroy it.

The different religions of the world may quarrel about dogmas and creeds, but all agree on purity as the one condition of spiritual illumination. The spiritual disciplines enjoined by different religions have only one end in view: to enable the aspirant to lead a pure life. All injunctions regarding self-restraint and self-control are motivated by this ideal alone. The God of dualistic religions, or the Absolute of the *Vedanta*, is the embodiment of purity. In Truth there is no sex. Neither attachment nor taint is associated with Truth. Therefore, those who aspire after It must be free from the ideas of sex, or desire, or attachment.

Religion says to the man who is tired of the complexities of life: "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden and I shall give you rest." The same message is declared in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Give up all ideas of moral duty. Take refuge in Me alone. I shall help you to reach the other shore of life." Or, we read in the *Upanisads*: "He who seeks the pure Truth with single-minded devotion, unto him alone the Lord of Truth reveals Himself." The language may be different, but the message is the same. We must remove this veil of ignorance which conjures up before our vision the snare of the manifold and conceals our absolute nature, which is one with the entire universe. It is not God who makes us do evil deeds or refrain from virtuous ones; we are deluded about good and evil and caught in the net of the manifold simply because of our ignorance. When this ignorance is removed, we realize our innate divinity, which is eternally pure. □

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, August 1966

Now for our belief in warnings, in a general way all of us believe in them. But in coming to practise it in our daily lives, we find it to be a very complex and puzzling affair... So you see, it is not possible to lay a general rule of conduct. We shall have to adapt ourselves to each individual case in deciding. The best we can do under such complex cases is what our Holy Mother said and used to do herself - pray to the Lord and bring yourself to a perfectly unbiased mood and then, thinking over the question, decide to do what flashes in your mind after prayer.

*Swami Saradananda*

## **The Scriptures and Their Purpose**

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

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

There is a very intimate relationship between the scriptures and religion. For the scriptures are nothing but the records of the intuitive experiences of the sages. They have been

verified in the lives of saints and prophets and they are verifiable even today by those who earnestly and intently seek to find Truth. They are like the travelling guides in the chartless ocean of spirituality. They are the compass, the sextant, the rudder, the sounding line, the barometer and the charts of an aspirant's ship in the religious sea. That is why some of the religions that had no scriptures, no books, quickly dwindled out of sight. When there is no authentic document people are likely to interpret and twist the utterances according to the individuals' tastes and pass them off as real stuff so that there remains nothing in them of the original, in content. It becomes a mass of superstition, fabulous, with the grain of truth miserably lost in the mud heap as it were. Within a short time everything gets coloured by the interests and tendencies of the individuals. This happens sometimes even in the case of the written sayings, what then to speak of those which were handed down by word of mouth. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "This eternal yoga, O Arjuna, I taught to Vivaswan and Vivaswan taught it to Manu. Manu taught it to Ikshvaku. Thus traditionally handed down it was known among the Rajarshis. But by the passage of time this yoga was lost in this world."<sup>1</sup> It is to counteract this tendency to corruption and loss that the scriptures are necessary.

A doubt may now be raised whether or not the *Vedas*, which were presumed to have been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, had undergone such mutation. We have several reasons to believe it has not, chief of them being the reverence with which they were held. It made them sacrosanct. Tampering with them was considered blasphemous. Besides, these truths were tested by later saints and sages. If therefore anyone says to the Hindu that what is told in any particular scripture alone is correct and that it is beyond any

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*. IV. 1-2

man's capacity to verify those teachings, the Hindu forthwith gives up that man. For he was taught differently. He was told that given the urge, intensity, time and attention needed for realization, the teachings could be verified and that every one of us could grow into a *Rishi* and sense those teachings as the *Rishi*s of old did. To become a *Rishi* is the only way to liberation says Swamiji, and he adds, until one becomes a *Rishi* one has not become religious. So we see that irrespective of the age in which these eternal truths were discovered, they must be open to probation, testing in every other age. Nay at all times.

### **The Hindu Scriptures**

Now among the scriptures of the Hindus the *Vedas* occupy a supreme position. They are variously called as *Sabda*, *Sruti* etc. That which was first uttered was *Sabda* (the word or the sound). That which was first heard by sages in the depths of meditation, and in the profundity of their being was *Sruti*. There is another class of books, which are called *Smrtis* - that which was remembered or the traditional law. These latter were composed later to govern society for a particular period. The latter have changed as changes in society occurred. The former contain the eternal truths and these truths never change. That is why the *Vedas* are said to be without beginning or end. One beauty of the *Vedas* is that you find in them all the ideas of religion - beginning from God in the far beyond, God as omnipresent and omniscient upto the unity between the creature and the Creator. This has, of course, led to the formulation of several sects, each contending what is to its liking in the *Vedas* as the important part, and others as secondary. But as Swamiji points out, "Each is but a different stage in the journey, the aim of which is the perfect conception of the *Vedas*."

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

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

The apparent contradictions in the *Vedas* have to some extent puzzled seekers. This doubting, this feeling at sea, is not a new phenomenon. We meet with this type of doubt in the *Upanishads* too. When Svetaketu was asked by his father, "Have you known that One by which everything else is known," he was genuinely perturbed. He had never heard of such a thing before. He protests and asks to be satisfied. However, the father leads him slowly, by examples and experimentations, to the highest Truth. To know about the Highest even intellectually is a difficult task. For there we find all contradictions meeting. Let us take an instance from the discussion between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi.

Yajnavalkya while explaining how the individual *jiva*, after shedding its *upadhis*, incrustations, gets merged in *Brahman* like the lump of salt thrown into the water, and cannot be separated from It, says: "After attaining oneness, my dear, there is no more consciousness."<sup>2</sup> This perplexes Maitreyi. She seems to think, "How can this be? He has first said that *Brahman* is Pure Intelligence. Now he says after attaining oneness there is no more consciousness. Why does he talk in this conflicting language?" She asks Yajnavalkya, "Sir, just here you have thrown me into confusion by saying that after attaining oneness the self has no more consciousness."<sup>3</sup> Yajnavalkya then expounds to her that the self that had attained oneness with *Brahman* loses the "particular consciousness" superimposed on the self due to its identification with the body, mind and the like and not the Cosmic Consciousness. And only when thus explained Maitreyi's doubt was cleared.

A similar doubt is being raised by Arjuna in a different context. When Sri Krishna urged Arjuna to fight the battle of Kurukshetra in support of the righteous cause, and simultaneously talked highly of renunciation, the latter got confounded. Arjuna asked: "By apparently contradictory words, it seems as if you are confusing my understanding. Please tell me that one path by which I can attain the good."<sup>4</sup> Sri Krishna in reply says that there are two paths and these are for two different types of people. He further adds that one cannot practise renunciation unless one had rid oneself of all desires. So that was not the path for him. Thus, we see that every great teacher had had to speak not only for one class of people but several, and therefore he had to say things which suited those particular types of people. If

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<sup>2</sup> *Brihadaraniaka Upanishad*, II, IV, 12

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, III, 2

these teachings are taken together, without the idea of the context in which they were uttered, it is natural that they appear to be opposing each other in content.

There is a beautiful story in the *Upanishads* which rightly illustrates this point. It shows how the same syllable conveys different meanings to diverse types of people: Once the three classes of sons of Prajapati - the gods, men and Asuras - lived a life of continence with Prajapati. After sometime the gods requested him to instruct them. Prajapati uttered the syllable "da" and asked whether they had understood what he meant. They replied they had; that Prajapati was asking them to control themselves. After some time the men too having finished their period of probation begged to be instructed. To them also Prajapati said the word "da" and asked whether they had understood. They too said, "Yes, you ask us to give." Lastly came the Asuras and to them too Prajapati repeated the same syllable "da" and asked what they understood by it. The Asuras replied, "You ask us to be kind." To all of them Prajapati had said that they had rightly understood Him. Does it not sound incoherent? No, a little explanation will prove it. In Sanskrit the words, control, give and be kind begin with the letter "da," viz. *damyata*, *datta*, and *dayadhvam*. Now the devas or the gods were too much given to enjoyment, men to hoarding and the Asuras to killing. By living a life of celibacy with Prajapati all these three had understood their own particular defects and when therefore Prajapati uttered the syllable "da" they knew what he wanted of them. The gods were to abstain from enjoyment, men were to give and the Asuras were enjoined to be kind and all this was conveyed by the utterance of that single syllable "da." Does this not show that the scriptures serve the purpose of all genuine seekers?

Similarly in the *Vedas*, which are meant for all, we find apparently contradictory ideas but suiting men of different tendencies. These contrary views are actually only visions of the same Reality from different angles, from varied heights. So, an earnest seeker has only to find out which path and which ideal appeals to his nature, suits his temperament most. But he has to see unity in the diversity. For diversity makes for creation and unity goes back to the source, makes for our own abode. Scriptures, therefore, do not confuse us but tell us everything and we get bewildered because we have not the acumen to grasp their import.

### **Purpose of the Scriptures**

Having dealt with the content of the scriptures, it is not difficult to presume what their intention is. It has already been explained that they do not intend to confuse man. This should be always remembered. Secondly, their intention is to guide mankind on the path of spirituality, to help man upward from whatever level of development he is. Like the scientist who does research with the data already in his possession, the aspirant with the help of the scriptures engages in research in the spiritual field. One can verify one's experience, the results of one's research in the laboratory of the spirit, with the conclusions already arrived at in the scriptures. They are like reference books, where we can compare notes. If one's experiences are not in compliance with the eternal truths, one has missed the way somewhere. But this does not happen when one is under the guidance of a competent teacher.

However, there is every chance of the principles of the scriptures being misinterpreted and misused if they fall into wrong hands. We shall cite an instance here to show how the theory of Karma was tortuously treated by glib talkers: When

Swamiji was staying at Calcutta in 1897, a preacher belonging to a society for the protection of cows had an interview with him. When asked about the object of the society, the preacher said that it was to protect the old, decrepit and diseased cows from the slaughter house and provide infirmaries for them. Swamiji while commending their work asked the preacher what help his society - which had enough resources - had rendered to the people in central India, where due to famine nine lakhs of people had died. The preacher's nonchalant reply was that the famine had broken out as a result of men's Karma, their sins. Can perversion of the principles go any further? Swamiji who was furious with indignation at such indifference of the preacher towards humanity, suppressing his feelings said that he had not the least sympathy with associations which did not feel for men even while they were dying of starvation. Let us beware of such misguided people who make a travesty of truth.

### **Extent of the usefulness of the Scriptures**

As already stated the scriptures can help you, guide you, but they cannot take you to the goal. Records of other peoples' realization cannot make you realize. You can tread their path, feel their way but you have to struggle for yourself to reach the goal. All effort is yours. The books cannot ferry you across the ocean of life. No one can do that; even the teacher can only guide you. Sri Sankara referring to mere scriptural knowledge, in an exquisite couplet in Sanskrit, says: "If the highest Truth is not known all study of the scriptures is in vain. When, however, the highest Truth is known, then also the study of scriptures is futile."<sup>5</sup> Does he then discourage scriptural studies? No one can make this allegation against Sankara. For we meet in his commentaries on the *Upanishads* very often, the statement, "Atman is to be pursued

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<sup>5</sup> *Vivekachudamani*, 59

vigorously through the teachings of the scriptures and the Guru." What he tries to convey to us is that if the knowledge of the scriptures is not utilized, not put into practice, then that knowledge is acquired in vain. Again, once the Highest is realized all further study of scriptures is useless, for all of them are only as a means to attain the Highest, and not for their own sake. Once the purpose, the attainment of God, is fulfilled, there remains nothing more to be gained.

Sri *Ramakrishna*, deprecating too much of studies said, "Suppose you have received a letter from your home asking you to buy certain things. And suppose you have mislaid it. If the contents of the letter are known to you, will you worry about the letter or try to collect the things stated therein?" Another time he exhorted one of his young disciples: "What is there in the *Vedanta* that you study it so much. Is it not that '*Brahman* alone is real and all else illusory?' Work for its realization."

Swamiji remarks in one place, "Books cannot teach God, but they can destroy ignorance; their action is negative." Even the *Vedas* cannot show you God, cannot make you realize your true self. "By what can you know the knower?" say the *Upanishads*. Your essential being is the self-luminous consciousness. What is required is to dispel the ignorance that has cloaked it. Remove the covering and you see the light. If we are in a dark room we will have only to throw open the doors and windows to see the sun. We do not require another light to see the sun. He is self-luminous. When he rises we see him. Not only can we see him but we can also dispense with all other lights which we might have lighted to see other objects inside or outside our dwellings. And this *Atman*, or *Brahman*, which is the essence of every creature, everything that is in the universe, is the source of all light, even of the sun, moon, stars and all.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Katha Upanishad*, V, 15

## Conclusion

Too much study of scriptures makes man vainglorious. It leads him away from the goal. The goal of life is God-realization. All the scriptures tell us that God alone is real and all other things are transient. They also show us the way to God. What we have to do after knowing the purpose of the scriptures is to work for its realization. Or as Sri Ramakrishna says, what is required is to dive deep into ourselves and make our life fruitful by the realization of our true nature, like the mythical pearl-oyster which after collecting the rain drop, when the star Svati is in the ascendant, dives down to the bottom of the sea to produce the beautiful pearl. □

Reprinted from *Vedanta Kesari*, December 1963

The great incarnations like Christ, Krishna, Buddha were perfectly clear mirrors which gave us a perfect reflection. They did not bring us anything new. Truth is always existent. Christianity existed before Christ. Christ was only the mouthpiece. Mohammedanism existed before Mohammed. Mohammed was only the mouthpiece. Each one was a reflector of eternal Truth, but one man catches the light from Christ, and he says, "Christ has given me the Truth. I belong to Christ. I am a Christian." Another sees the light through Mohammed and says, "I am a Mohammedan." A third says, "Buddha is Truth. I belong to Buddha." So each great teacher has his followers who believe that the Truth can come from him alone; but all teachers reflect the same Truth.

*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

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

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### *Brahman - Its Nature and Causality*

Shankara holds that *Brahman* is the ultimate reality, and as such it is not an effect but eternal, being birthless (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV. iv. 25). It is mere existence without any distinction, existence in general, and as such It cannot be the effect of any particular thing; for we see in the world that only particular things are produced from the general, as, for example, pots from clay, and never vice versa (II. iii. 9). This *Brahman*, which is the object of the enquiry (I. i. 1), is defined as the "origin, etc. of the world" (I, i 2). The *Sruti* text referred to is *Taittiriya Upanishad* III. i. It seems from this definition that *Brahman* is differentiated and has attributes. But Shankara says that: this definition aims at a non-differentiated, attributeless *Brahman*. It defines *Brahman* per accidens, even as when we say that that which is the snake is the rope, the snake indicates the rope owing to the illusory connection between the two. Shankara says that the sense of this passage, viz. *Taitt. Up.*, III, I, is to be determined from *Taitt. Up.*, III. 6, where Bliss is said to be the origin, etc. of the world (I. i. 2). This Bliss, which admits of no difference is the Infinite (*Chandogya Upanishad.*, VII. xxiii. 1 and VII. xxiv. 1), the *Brahman* defined in Its pure essence as "Existence, Knowledge, Infinity is *Brahman*" (*Taitt. Up.*, II. 1), and it is from this *Brahman* that the world is produced, so understood Varuni. These three words, Existence, etc., though they have different meanings in ordinary parlance, yet refer to one indivisible *Brahman*, even as the words, father, son, husband, etc. refer to one and the same person according to his relationship with different individuals.

But the Scriptures describe *Brahman* as being both qualified and unqualified, differentiated and non-differentiated. So both must be true according as It is or is not connected with the *Upadhis* (adjuncts). Shankara refutes this and says that such contradictory descriptions of one and the same entity cannot be true, nor can Its nature be changed by connection with another; for such a change would mean its destruction. *Brahman* is without attributes, for the Scriptures throughout describe It as such, to the exclusion of Its loftier aspects (III. ii. 11). They do not inculcate the connection of *Brahman* with forms, for wherever they describe a form of *Brahman*, the Scriptures explain at every instance that the form is not true and that behind the *Upadhis* there is one formless principle (*Brh. Up.*, II. v. 1) (12). The scriptures condemn those who see difference [*Katha Up.*, II. iv. 11 (13)]. *Brahman* is only formless; forms are due to *Upadhis* and are meant for practising meditation, and are not intended to establish It (14-15). *Brahman* is pure intelligence, homogeneous, and formless; the various forms are like reflections of the one sun in water, and as such are not real (III. ii. n-18). In *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, II. iii. 6 the words "Not this, not this" deny the two forms of *Brahman* given in *Brh. Up.*, II. iii. 1. *Brahman* can be described only as "Not this, not this," i.e., It is something different from all this manifested world that we experience. It is "the Truth of truth," the only reality that exists behind this world, which is illusory. But this negation does not launch us into a nonentity, denying even *Brahman* Itself, for without It we could not comprehend even this nonentity. Though unmanifest, It exists, for It is realized in perfect meditation (*Samadhi*) when the self attains identity with It, the Infinity (III. ii. 22-24, 26).

*Brahman* is the origin and also the place of dissolution of the world (I. i. 2), and so It is both the efficient and the material cause of the world. It is the efficient cause, because besides It there

was nothing else at the beginning of the creation (*Ch. Up.*, VI. ii. 1). It is also the material cause, for in that case only can the enunciation that by the knowledge of the One (*Brahman*) everything else is known, held true, even as by the knowledge of one lump of clay all things made of clay are known (*Ch. Up.*, VI. i. 3-4). Moreover, the Scriptures, in texts like *Taiti. Up.*, II. 7, say that It created Itself by undergoing modifications (I.iv. 23, 26).

(*To be continued*)

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, February 1953

[To a man mourning his son's death:] In the Gita, the Lord says: "Anyone born must surely die, and anyone dead must surely be reborn. So you must not lament for something that is inevitable." Death being inevitable for anyone coming to this earth, He forbids us to lament. Can you tell me what is the purpose of human life? The only purpose of life is to realize God - no matter whether sons and wife remain or go. Each soul reaps result of what it had done. Your son had good deeds in store; so he has achieved a virtuous destiny. Now, it is your turn to act in a way that will ensure your own high destiny. Tell your wife, also, to do accordingly. Mere talk will not do; one has to act. With firm determination, one has to strive for God-realization. Make a start from this very day; for life is fleeing every moment. Nobody can say when one will have the call for departure, so don't waste a single day. Those who think that these things can be put off for the future never do anything. They will be tossed to this current of birth and death for infinite ages.

*Swami Shivananda*

## Catherine of Genoa: Saint of Love

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If we really believe that God exists, that He is waiting for us, that His love and power and truth will give us all the strength and inspiration we need, why don't we fly to Him? If we sense that He alone exists and that our stay on earth is divinely ordained, why don't we immediately renounce everything and, straight and unwaveringly, go to Him? It is the great achievement of Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) that she did exactly that, and with no prior qualifications that were visible.

There have been saints whose lives in their worldly and spiritual chapters have been marked by their divergence, but it is doubtful if any major spiritual figure ever grew out of more unlikely soil as that which made up the first twenty-six years of Catherine Adorna's life. In her early life, there was, above all, no sign of strength in any direction whatever, such as there was in the lives of many saints before their awakening, a strength for wickedness or worldliness perhaps, but still a strength of will and character of some definable kind, which they were able to put to advantage when the direction of their lives was altered.

And yet, few saints have ever experienced such a complete and instantaneous conversion from a life of worldly mediocrity to one of absolute devotion to God; whose transformation was so swift and so total, and out of material traditionally the most unpromising for the making of future saints.

The material in her case was that of a vacillating, colourless woman, who for twenty-six years lived a commonplace and rather desperate existence, married unhappily, weak in will, weak in sinfulness, weak in faith, weak in everything; a woman who

never knew her own mind, never discovered what she wanted out of life - a chronic drifter, a pining recluse inclined to mysterious illnesses and moods of self-pity, during which she shut herself away from everyone and emerged from them unchanged. Yet, out of such inauspicious material, a will power of astounding resolution was forged.

A sketch made of her in middle age suggests what she looked like in her youth. Her face was long and delicately moulded, the features aristocratic, the mouth thin and sensitive, yet firm; the general countenance suggesting a reticent and yet ardent nature; a love of beauty, an aura of refinement is markedly evident. She was tall and slender, and had long, dark chestnut hair. She was of an intense temperament, lacking wit or humour - all her life she took everything literally. (This was a serious handicap in her dealings with the worldly, but it became a mighty weapon when she discovered that a divine and omnipresent Love dwelled in everyone.)

Her biographers have sought in her childhood for incipient signs of piety, but the fact is that there were none that were outstanding. She was brought up in a rather devout family of five children, three of them boys, Catherine being the youngest child, and some of the religious atmosphere of the home clung to her. But as an individual, she seemed no more pious than the average Genoese girl of her time. She had an older sister who became a nun; and when she was thirteen, Catherine expressed a desire to follow her calling, but it seems that no one paid serious attention to her, since thousands of girls made this kind of gesture at a similar age.

It was not long before Catherine herself seemed to forget about it, and, indeed, she never reverted to the idea at any stage of her life. Moreover, if her girlhood had been of a genuine spiritual character, as some believe, one is at a loss to account for

her gloomy behaviour during the ten years of her marriage, a marriage which, paradoxically, gave whatever spirituality was latent in her an ideal opportunity to flourish. Her behaviour during those years suggests that prayer and spiritual devotions were secondary in her scheme of things.

At sixteen, she had been married to a young nobleman a few years older than her, the complete antithesis of her in character and taste, one Giuliano Adorna, the scion of a rival family in Genoa. This Giuliano was a gambler, a libertine, and a drinker; an aggressive and spendthrift youth devoid of any sense of scruple or self-control. The strange match had been arranged by their families for political reasons, and it never occurred to Catherine to object, brought up as she was in a tradition of obedience to family authority. It was hoped that the marriage would pacify a long-standing feud between the two families, both of whom were still powerful and wealthy, as well as venerable, in the Genoa of that time. (Catherine's, the Fieschis, had given warriors and statesmen to the State during its long history, as well as two Popes to the Church.)

Soon after the marriage, Giuliano began to spend his way through his sizeable patrimony, passed most of his time away from the mansion he had inherited, and was frank to inform his wife of his affairs with other women. Catherine's retiring tendencies evoked only ridicule from her husband. Often, he was drunk in the house and was in the habit of bringing home companions of both sexes who shared his dissolute tastes.

As time went on, Giuliano was constantly away from the house, which must have gratified Catherine. More than ever, she found herself dwelling alone in the spacious rooms, and if there was any obvious spiritual bent in her nature, now was the chance for it to emerge. But mostly she mooned about the house or lay sick in bed. Frequently, she would call on God in prayer for

comfort and understanding; but her prayers were listless, and they brought her no compensation. In the same half-hearted, sporadic manner, she went to confession and received Communion.

At the end of five years of marriage, she seems to have lost most of whatever interest in religion she had had at first. This is the assumption one must make from her decision to discontinue her solitary mode of living and to step out in the world. Undoubtedly, she had made some attempt to find solace in prayer and spiritual exercises during this first period, had found none that satisfied her, and so decided to turn to the world as an alternative. Giuliano's outright desertion of her at this time, and sudden disappearance from her life altogether, was the particular prompting of her decision.

Her illustrious name and the two mansions she and Giuliano had inherited, as well as an amiable disposition, brought her into contact with all sorts of people, and this mode of living lasted for another five years. Those years are passed over in silence by her biographers, and Catherine herself never alluded to them later. This was due, very likely, less to great sins committed than to the fact that worldly living had simply bored her, that those five years were the most barren and purposeless she had known - though one may also suppose that her worldly efforts were characterized by the vagueness that had marked all her actions hitherto.

Still, the period lasted for five years; and at the end of it, when the experience of the world had proved as unsatisfying as the previous five with her husband, she reached the lowest mental and emotional point of her life and in desperation went to seek the advice of her sister, the nun. She, quite logically, advised Catherine to go to confession there in the convent.

What tipped the scales of the precarious balance she had maintained was probably a combination of gradual, accumulating strain, her increasing discontent with herself, the vanity of worldly living, and her own inability to cope with life on any level - marital, worldly, or spiritual. One thing is clear: what distressed and terrified her more than anything else was the realization that she had lost, or was on the verge of losing, her religious faith entirely. This realization had plunged her into a profound gloom and remorse, mingled with a train of other harrowing sensations that day after day clung to her - guilt, confusion, an increasing fear of the world, a haunting sense of sin and worthlessness, and a complete lack of self-confidence. In the midst of this desolation, she had prayed to God to make her sick for three months.

After talking with her sister, Catherine went to the convent chapel to make her confession. She knelt down in front of the altar; the priest was called away just then; and as she knelt there, alone for this short priceless interval, plunged in an abyss of hopelessness, and a desolate sense of her own unworthiness, the great moment of her life rushed in upon her overwhelmingly and shattered her: she was illuminated with a sudden, blinding, and utterly convincing vision of God as Love. Simultaneously, she had a terrible understanding of her sins and of the wasted, squandered life she had lived up to then. She fell into an ecstasy, murmuring to herself, over and over: "No more world! No more sin!" The convent priest returned to the chapel just then and saw her there, unconscious of the world, impaled upon a "wound of Unmeasured Love," - enveloped, he said afterwards, in a circle of light. When she rose to her feet, her face was transfigured with joy and power. Haltingly, she said she could not make her confession, and fled from the room, still murmuring: "No more world! No more sin!" ... "and she felt that if she had in her possession a thousand worlds she would have cast them all away."

Catherine Adorna lived for thirty-six more years, and there is no evidence that she ever deviated from the knowledge that had come to her that day. She never hesitated, never doubted; she lived an absolutely dedicated life thereafter. She who had been a woman of weak and undisciplined character was filled with a sudden, tremendous strength that grew as the years passed. All she had needed was that single, obliterating moment. All that had preceded it proved to be nothing. The power of the world, the burden of her sins, her long habit of weakness and vacillation, and her rooted lack of self-confidence - all were as nothing. All that followed was simply an unwavering and utterly logical carrying out of the transcendent truth that had been vouchsafed her: God is Love.

When she returned home, she locked herself away from the servants until she had charted her course. With burning tears and sighs, she wept and prayed ceaselessly for three days, crying: "O my Beloved! Can it be that Thou hast called me with so much love, and revealed to me in one view what no tongue can describe?" During that time, she had a strange, powerful vision of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, after which she saw blood flowing everywhere in the house. This was the first and last Christ-centred experience for Catherine. Unlike most Catholic women saints, her yearning and orientation were not so much for Christ as for the supreme Love, the blissful and immanent Godhead that had revealed itself to her that day in the chapel, and to which, ever after, she sought exclusively to attach herself. It was the Source of Life itself that she sought.

After the three days of intense prayer, she entered upon a purgative and penitential period that lasted four years. Every morning she went to Holy Communion. She walked with her eyes on the ground. She spent six hours a day in prayer. She wore a hair shirt. At night she slept on thorns. She gave up meat and fruit

She spoke seldom and only when absolutely necessary. And she began the tremendous fasts during Lent and Advent, which were to continue for the rest of her life during which, it was noted, she enjoyed exceptionally vigorous health.

Throughout this first period, she was wholly self-taught, receiving help from no one, and went through the four years practically unknown. Neither now nor at any time, in fact, did she have the benefit of a teacher. Who taught her, then? Her Love taught her, guiding her steps from the beginning. "If I attempted to lean upon anyone, Love immediately caused me such great mental suffering that I was forced to desist, saying, 'Oh Love, I understand thee.'" Nor was this inward instruction a vague and uncertain thing. "After her early purgation period," says her biographer, "during which she was haunted by a constant sense of sin, and occupied by incessant mortifications, all thought of such mortifications was in an instant taken from her mind: in such a manner that, had she even wished to continue them, she would have been unable to. ... The sight of her sins was now taken from her mind, so that henceforth she did not catch a glimpse of them: it was as if they had all been cast into the depths of the sea."

Coincidentally, Giuliano Adorna had come back from his wanderings the summer after Catherine's convent experience: bankrupt, penitent, without hope or substance, having wasted his own and Catherine's inheritance. Without a moment's hesitation, she not only welcomed him back, but made a home for the illegitimate daughter he had fathered somewhere. The impoverished couple were soon forced to leave the family mansion and move into a small house, in a poor section, near the hospital which was to figure importantly in her life. They took one devout servant with them, and Giuliano's child, and lived together henceforth as brother and sister.

Such was the power which she already exerted that Giuliano agreed, readily enough, to this condition - which, considering his character as it had flourished for ten years, was a truly remarkable performance. (Furthermore, in a year or so this same spendthrift and rootless young man was accepted into the foremost lay religious order of Genoa, the Third Order of St Francis, and for years thereafter, until his death in fact, devoted himself to good works in and about the city.) This phenomenon - the way Catherine possessed the minds and hearts of people - was repeated often in the years that followed. Her humility and purity seem to have awed everyone, and the love that went out from her enfolded all who came into her life. In her own lifetime, she was regarded as a saint by great numbers of people in Genoa, and those who made up the mystical lay circle that later gathered around her felt that her most casual remarks were divinely inspired.

Even during the period of her penances, she had begun to offer her services at the nearby hospital and to seek out indigent people who needed help. When a plague epidemic swept over Genoa, she threw herself into nursing and tending of the diseased victims. One incident illuminates her character vividly: A certain aged woman, dying of the plague, lay speechless day after day. Constantly, Catherine visited her, urging her to "Call Jesus." In vain the old woman tried to move her lips, calling him as well as she could ; and Catherine, seeing her mouth filled with the name of Jesus, was overcome with compassion, and could not restrain herself, at the last moment of the woman's life, from impulsively kissing her on the lips, thereby contracting the plague fever herself. But she soon recovered, and was back again at work among the dying.

During her first years at the hospital, she was in the habit of submitting herself to everyone, including the menials, but the

directors of the hospital recognized her services and asked her to superintend the care of the sick in their institution. Catherine accepted, and she and Giuliano took a small house still closer to the hospital, where they passed the rest of their days. Catherine still prayed long hours every day, often experiencing raptures and ecstasies, and gradually her reputation brought to her a number of spiritual seekers, including a few priests, who gathered regularly in her house to listen to her words. But her ministrations to the sick never abated during her active years, nor her frequent visits to the hospital of St. Lazarus, which harboured incurable lepers, horrible to sight and smell, many of them ill-tempered. Cheerfully, Catherine bore their rebukes and tended them with love, bringing their soiled clothing back to her own house to wash and iron them.

Eventually, she was appointed rector of the hospital and invested with unlimited authority. At once, Catherine took up the task of administration as if she had done it all her life. With an important responsibility suddenly thrust upon her, she, like many another mystic, in spite of a naturally contemplative nature, showed a remarkable practical efficiency in worldly affairs.

In this manner, she spent the rest of her active life. Her external activities continued, and her reputation for selfless service spread throughout Genoa, but Catherine herself remained primarily occupied with the increasing purification of her own mind, the steady and relentless purging of every fibre of self-will from her heart and life. The constant meetings with those who came to her seeking strength, the endless giving of her time and words to God-seekers drawn to her, as well as all the services in asylums, hospitals, and impoverished homes, performed with a calm and sureness, a patience and strength of forbearance that caused others to marvel, were a natural expression of the inner current of spirituality and burning, all-consuming love of God,

which from the beginning, from that day in the chapel, had been her whole existence - that which gave meaning and radiance to her every act in the outer world.

"Every day I feel that the motes are being removed, which this Pure Love casts out. Man cannot see these imperfections; indeed since, if he saw these motes, he could not bear the sight, God ever lets him see the work he has achieved, as though no imperfections remained in it. But all the time God does not cease from continuing to remove them."

"The creature is incapable of knowing anything but what God gives it from day to day. If it could know (beforehand) the successive degrees that God intends to give it, it would never be quieted. ... When from time to time I would advert to the matter, it seemed to me that my love was complete; but later... I became aware that I had had many imperfections. I did not recognize them at first, because God-Love was determined to achieve the whole only little by little, for the sake of preserving my physical life, and so as to keep my behaviour tolerable for those with whom I lived. For otherwise, with such other sight, so many excessive acts would ensue as to make one insupportable to oneself and to others."

When her disciples expressed wonder at the long fasts she undertook twice a year, she told them: "This non-eating of mine is an operation of God, independent of my will; hence I can in no wise glory in it; nor should we marvel at it, for to Him such an operation is as nothing."

Her self-surrender to the Lord was total. "Since Love took over the care of everything, I have not taken care of anything, nor have I been able to work with my intellect, memory, and will, any more than if I had never had them."

"Let none be astonished when I say that it is impossible for me to live with myself. It is necessary for me... to live separate

from the self or Me; that is to say, it is necessary for me to live without any self-originated movement either of the understanding, affections, or will. This is what I must be; and this, by the grace of God, is what I hope I am."

St. Catherine was one of the "pure" saints - absorbed more in God than in humanity, more in self-transformation to the highest possible degree than in transforming others, longing for a maximum knowledge and love of God in this life without relying on the hope of the next.

"The holy soul desires to possess God as He is; just as He is; pure as He is; and all that He is."

"If man could but see the care which God takes of the soul, he would be struck with stupor within himself ... If he could only understand how deeply he is the object of divine love, he would be overwhelmed with confusion and astonishment."

"I stood so occupied in contemplating this work of Love that if He had cast me, body and soul, into hell, hell itself would have appeared to me all love and consolation."

"I am so placed and submerged in His immense love that I seem as though in the sea, entirely under water and could on no side touch, see, or feel anything but water."

She lived to be sixty-three. In her last ten years, she experienced a number of physical sufferings that forced her to discontinue her hospital work and outside activities. During this last period, a Genoese priest, Don Marobotto, became her confessor and closest friend. She welcomed him into her life to provide a source of human strength which, in her failing health, even she needed; but he was never a guide or teacher - in fact, he looked upon everything that happened to her as a divine manifestation, and did not distinguish between her spiritual and physiological seizures, an error which Catherine herself never fell into. Once when they were alone, as she lay in a trance-like

condition, he questioned her apprehensively, for often she had spoken of longing for death to take her.

"If only one drop of what I feel were to fall into hell," she said, hell itself would be transformed into eternal life."

Don Marobotto was the one who noted down her words during her last years, collected all the scattered notes made of her earlier discourses, and after her death wrote her biography. Her remarks already quoted, and all her sayings copied down by disciples over a long period (she never wrote anything herself), bear the stamp of one who had experienced what she talked about, who had actually lived the greater part of her life in intimate communion with the divine Being. In spite of her love for humanity, she remained to the end a lonely and mysterious woman, whose only companion was the Lord Himself; and all her love, in a final analysis, was for Him alone.

"There is no creature that understands me," she prayed. "I find myself alone, unknown, poor, naked, a stranger, and different from the rest of the world."

On this note, let us leave the remarkable Catherine of Genoa, Saint of Love. The lesson of her story, one of the most extraordinary in the annals of religion, is plain: God seizes the human heart at any time - like a thief in the night He will come to us. And then, and only then, we will have the power to remake our lives, as Catherine so unforgettably did. □

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1959

## Nine Means of Devotion

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The *Bhagavata* (VII. 5. 18) speaks of nine aspects of *bhakti* in a well-known verse. They are : 1. Hearing the names of God or His Incarnation chanted or sung by others, or songs in praise of, or the narration of, His charms, pastimes and attributes. 2. Chanting or singing His names, narrating or singing His charms. 3. Remembering or thinking of His names and charms. 4. Showing respect to Him by visiting the sacred places associated with His pastimes, looking at His images or pictures depicting His pastimes, serving and keeping company with His devotees and showing respect to things connected with His memory. 5. Worship of Him in images by offering flowers, sandal paste, food, etc. 6. Bowing down before Him or His images at the place of worship. 7. Serving Him in the attitude of a devoted servant. 8. Comradeship - to think that one is His loving and intimate friend and He too is such, and to behave towards Him accordingly, generally through His images. 9. Resignation to the Lord - devoting oneself entirely to His services. According to the devotional schools these steps belong to *vaidhi* or scriptural devotion. Through their practice an intimate feeling for God generates, which leads to *Prema bhakti*.

The *Adhyatma Ramayana* which is sometimes described as a *Bhagavata Ramayana*, speaks of nine other means of devotion. Whereas Sri Rama is the Incarnation in the *Ramayana*, Sri Krishna is so in the *Bhagavata*, about whose glory these books speak of. Contemplation of God and these Incarnations are of the same value, is the considered opinion of the scriptures. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* is based on the non-dualistic philosophy and so considers *jnana* mixed with *bhakti* as the most profitable spiritual

discipline. It gives high priority to devotion as a *sadhana*, which ultimately leads to knowledge and release. These nine steps to devotion have been given as the advice of Sri Rama to Tapasi Sabari who said that she was quite unfit to have His *darshan* being only a low-born maid. Sri Rama then replied (III. 22-30): "Manhood or womanhood, caste or station in life does not give the fitness to worship Me; devotion alone is capable of doing so. Even with sacrifice, gifts, austerity or study of the *Vedas* and performing rituals, men are not able to see Me, if they are not devoted to Me. So I shall tell you in brief the means of that *bhakti*. Contact of holy men is said to be the first *sadhana*. The second is talk and discussion about Me. The third is repeated thinking about My qualities. Explaining the scriptures dealing with My words is the fourth *sadhana*. Unreservedly to worship the Teacher as Myself is the fifth. Pure nature, *yama*, *niyama*, etc. and steadfastness in My daily worship constitute the sixth *sadhana*. Repeating of My mantra with other accessories is the seventh. Reverencing good devotees, seeing Me in all beings, detachment in external things along with *sama*, etc. are the eighth. Discrimination about Truth is the ninth.

"These are the nine means of *bhakti*. Whoever, man, woman or other creatures, are endowed with these means of devotion will have *bhakti* along with *Prema*. As soon as this loving devotion is generated there is the realization of My Nature. Whoever realizes My Nature gets released in this life itself. Hence know *bhakti* to be the first means of *Mukti*. Those who are first endowed with the means of *bhakti*, gradually perform the other means too. So they can have *bhakti* and then *Mukti*."

The scheme of *bhakti* prescribed in the above verses is in line with the well-known views of scriptures and saints. *Sadhu-sanga* or contact with holy men is very important to generate detachment and devotion. By their association alone, the

amorphous spiritual ideas of an aspirant become crystallized. When study, ritual and the like cannot satisfy us, it is the advanced *sadhakas* who can transmit a little of their conviction, zeal and steadfastness to us. About its importance, this *Ramayana* says in the words of Agastya: "Contact of holy men is the root of Release. . . . For by holy company a taste develops in hearing about Him; from it arises devotion to the Eternal God; from devotion clear knowledge, and from the latter Release arises. This is the path followed by the wise." (III, 3. 36 & 39-40)

The second means is talking and discussing about God and His Incarnations. The exploits of Sri Rama in the *Ramayana*, of Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavata* are all very inspiring and ennobling. We get clear ideas about spiritual verities through them. When virtue declines and vice prevails, the Incarnations come down to the world to regenerate and reinstate the religious values. By constantly handling these ideas we become convinced and one-pointed attention develops. About the importance of hearing and discussing about the exploits of the Avatara, Sri Krishna says: "He who thus knows, in true light, My divine birth and action, leaving the body, is not born again: he attains to Me, O Arjuna." (*Bhagavad Gita* IV. 9)

The third means is repeated thinking about the qualities of God and His Incarnations. The *Atman* is repeatedly to be heard, thought upon and contemplated, says the *Upanishad*. After a theoretical understanding of the real nature of God, man and things, it should be imprinted on our mind by deep reflection to remove the hoary hold of *Maya*. As you think, so you become, is the principle. By repeated thinking of the *sattvic* qualities we moreover imbibe those qualities which are essential for spiritual progress. Patanjali the great scientific writer of yoga says that the Highest can be realized, samadhi can be obtained through contemplation of God.

The fourth *sadhana* is explaining the scriptures dealing with the words of God and His Incarnations. Studying the scriptures oneself and explaining them to others have been the recognized methods even from the *Upanishadic* age. In trying to explain, things become clearer.

The fifth means is the worship of the Guru as God Himself. This idea has been accepted by all the systems and more strongly by the devotees. The *Vedas* declare that knowledge must be received from a Guru. No amount of study is of any avail. And to make the Guru's words most fruitful there must be great faith in his words of wisdom. About the importance of the Guru, Swami Vivekananda says: "This insufficiency of books to quicken spiritual growth is the reason why, although almost every one of us can speak most wonderfully on spiritual matters, when it comes to action and the living of a truly spiritual life, we find ourselves so awfully deficient. To quicken the spirit the impulse must come from another soul. The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the Guru - the teacher; and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the Sishya - the student.

The sixth *sadhana* consists of a pure life, daily worship and practice of the eightfold yoga. This yoga has been forcefully presented by Patanjali, which has been incorporated by almost all the systems in their discipline. *Yama* and *niyama* are external and internal cleanliness, *asana* is steady posture necessary for long meditation forgetting the body and *pranayama* is control of vital breath for physical and psychical purification and strengthening. The next three steps constitute concentration. *Pratyahara* is trying to gather the mind, *dharana* is focussing on a point or the chosen Deity and *dhyana* is to remain in the thought without break, and *samadhi* is the mastery of the mind and its complete mergence. To bring the mind under control elaborate formal worship has been

prescribed. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* in a different chapter gives a detailed description of it and this method is even now prevalent.

The seventh means consists of repeating the mantra bearing the name of the chosen Deity. This has acquired the greatest importance in most of the disciplines. The Divine formula received from a Guru has special potency and by repetition of it all spiritual benefits are derived. Many are the sayings regarding its supreme efficacy. A well-known verse asserts that it is by *japa* alone without doubt, that spiritual success is achieved.

The eighth *sadhana* according to this book consists of a few things. Showing respect to good devotees of God has been accepted as part of the spiritual discipline, for by this and by contacting them we imbibe the divine qualities they possess. Seeing God in all beings is an advanced stage of *sadhana*. The *Gita* points out that the same-sighted yogi sees God in everything. When all creation is His or He manifests Himself as all beings, it is quite in the fitness of things that this recognition itself should be a part of *sadhana*. Detachment of external things or *vairagya* is an equally important discipline. This is the other side of seeing God in everything. *Vairagya* and practice are the methods by which the Highest is achieved, says the *Gita*. *Sama*, *dama*, etc. also are included in this *sadhana*. The *Advaita* system speaks of six treasures of *sadhana*, viz. *sama*, *dama*, *uparati*, *titiksha*, *sraddha* and *samadhana* - controlling the internal and external organs, withdrawing from the senses, bearing all sufferings without any reaction, faith in the words of the Guru and the *Vedanta* and concentration of the mind on the Goal.

The ninth means of devotion consists of discrimination about Truth. It is an important discipline according to *Vedanta*. In fact, according to some this is the only *sadhana* that is necessary.

These are the nine-fold means of *bhakti*, says the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. By practising these, *bhakti* is perfected and from

## Nine Means of Devotion

samadhana *Vaidhi Bhakti*, the aspirant passes to *Prema Bhakti*, full of love and void of motive. As a result, *Brahma-jnana* dawns, showing that *bhakti* is the root of *Mukti*. Thus in the above-quoted verses, the *Adhyatma Ramayana* harmonizes the claims of the followers of knowledge and devotion, of discrimination about the real nature of things and worship of the Deity, as also of the Impersonal and the Personal. Pure knowledge and pure devotion are the same, said Sri Ramakrishna, and by the realization of the one the other also is realized. The modern prophet of harmony thus substantiates the position of the author of the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. By satisfying the intellectual and emotional elements in our nature, it is sure, this nine-fold discipline will be able to give the maximum spiritual benefit. □

Reprinted from *Vedanta Kesari*, June 1961

There comes a time when the spiritually advanced man wants to devote himself solely to meditation and prayer. When that time comes, work drops away from him of itself. However, this happens only when the mind is spiritually awakened. If one who is not thus awakened should attempt to lead a life of exclusive spiritual practice by sheer effort of will, it can last only for a few days; then comes monotony, sometimes followed by madness. Again there are others, who follow the spiritual path in a haphazard way and at the same time keep their minds busy with worldly things. That is not good. Give up this easy-going life, otherwise it will be impossible for you to perform your spiritual practices properly. No matter what work you do, do it with your whole heart.

*Swami Brahmananda*

## **Programme for September - October 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](http://www.vedantauk.com)

Sep 4	Raja Yoga 1	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 11	Raja Yoga 2	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 18	Raja Yoga 3	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 25	Day Retreat	
Oct 2	Durga Puja	
Oct 9	Selection from the Upanishads 23	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 16	Selection from the Upanishads 24	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 23	Selection from the Upanishads 25	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 30	Raja Yoga 4	Swami Shivarupananda

### **Day Retreat**

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda  
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 25 September from  
10.00 am until 7.00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

### **Durga Puja**

Sunday 2 October  
at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

### **Vedanta Study Circle in Cheshire Area**

October 16 at 11.00 am

The Evolution of the Universal Person *Swami Shivarupananda*

For information contact Mr Aswani (tel: 01625 527075)

between 9.30 pm - 10.30 pm

*continued from the front cover*

*"Likewise, if God reveals Himself to you and gives you the command, then you can preach and teach people. Otherwise, who will listen to you?"*

*The visitors were listening seriously.*

*MASTER (to Bankim): "I understand you are a great pundit and have written many books. Please tell me what you think about man's duties? What will accompany him after death? You believe in the hereafter, don't you?"*

*BANKIM: "The hereafter? What is that?"*

*MASTER: "True. When a man dies after attaining Knowledge, he doesn't have to go to another plane of existence; he isn't born again. But as long as he has not attained Knowledge, as long as he has not realized God, he must come back to the life of this earth; he can never escape it. For such a person there is a hereafter. A man is liberated after attaining Knowledge, after realizing God. For him there is no further coming back to earth.*

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, December 8, 1884*

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## 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](http://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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Teach yourselves, teach everyone his/her real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

*Swami Vivekananda*



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