

# Vedanta

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374 NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2013

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**Hindu View of Christ**

*Swami Prabhavananda*

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**The Drum-Beat of Awakening**

*(A Story)*

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## Divine Wisdom

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X wants to finish studying RajaYoga quickly. But we poured out our very life in this quest. We have been doing this ever since our childhood. Yet even now the mind has not been purified. There is still attachment and hatred in it.... O Lord, make me the servant of the servant of Thy servant!

Egotism is no good; it is extremely pernicious. Egotism is like drinking wine, it leads astray the senses. The Master used to say that water accumulates only in a low land. Only in humility the good qualities of the mind and heart become manifest. Pride always holds the head high. That which is elastic and unbreakable like steel, that indeed is strength. He alone is strong, who can live in harmony with different natures in a spirit of amicable compromise.

Make yourself for ever His, then there will be no more fear. Swamiji (Vivekananda) used to say, 'Since you have been born on earth, leave a lasting mark on it.' At the Baranagore Math he said, 'Let me tell you, our names will be recorded in history.' Swami Yogananda ridiculed him. But Swamiji replied, 'Well, well, you will see, I can convince everyone of the truths of Vedanta. If you will not listen to me, I shall go to the Pariah villages and teach Vedanta to the villagers.'

If you want to preach, you must also give something. Preaching is not merely lecturing to a class or explaining a book. You have to give them something. Therefore you must accumulate spirituality before-hand.... And never pride yourself on your having gained control over the passions. If you do, they will at once raise their heads. Ever pray to him, 'O Lord, save me from them.'

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## Editorial

### Prayers : Are They Answered?

'God is extremely attentive, my boys. He has heard every time you have prayed to Him. He will surely reveal Himself to you some day or other, at least at the time of death'.  
(Sri Ramakrishna)

Are prayers answered? All prayers?

**T**his is a doubt that assails millions of people; it troubles even ardent devotees who pray to be relieved of their distress but (mistakenly) think there was no response from God. The emphatic answer to this doubt is, 'Yes', God answers all prayers. (As someone put it humorously—most of the time the answer is 'NO!'). Every prayer is answered provided we fulfil the necessary conditions.

On being asked whether there is really any efficacy in prayers, Sri Ramakrishna said : "Yes. When mind and speech unite in earnestly asking for a thing, that prayer is answered. Of no avail are the prayers of that man who says with his mouth, " These are all Thine, O Lord " and at the same time thinks in his heart that all of them are his".

Did not Jesus promise, 'Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you'? 'What man is there of you', he asked, 'whom if his son asks bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?'

Sri Ramakrishna spoke similar words: 'He is our Father and Mother, isn't he? If the son demands his patrimony and gives up food and drink in order to enforce his demand, then the parents hand his share over to him three years before the legal time'.

Swami Brahmananda counsels an aspirant : 'Know that he is dearer than the dearest, and then pray to him with a yearning heart for his grace and vision. Cry to him like a child ; he cannot resist your tears'.

What is the proof that prayers are answered? There are thousands of people throughout the world down history who have received help from prayer. Mystics and saints in every age and country have received illumination through it and have strongly advocated it. This fact itself is a proof of its validity.

## Prayers :Are They Answered?

Sri Ramakrishna's life is the proof that earnest and sincere prayers are answered. Though we seldom notice, if we look carefully into our own lives, we too cannot fail to notice that we also do experience many miracles in our own lives.

God answers each and every prayer but in different ways. He is all knowing, He knows our past, present and future. Like a loving mother He knows what is best for us. He is wise and knows what to give, when to give, how and how much to give. Sometimes He fulfils our prayers fully, sometimes only partially. In some cases He may bestow His grace at some point in future.

At other times He may give the exact opposite of what we expect. Instead of adding he may take away what little we have; instead of happiness he may give more suffering! Since He alone knows what is good for us we must have full faith in Him that whatever He does is for our good only. Our part is to be sincere, pray earnestly and accept with full faith what He ordains in His infinite wisdom.

Hearing of constant complaints from devotees once Holy Mother remarked: "Everybody says regretfully, 'There is so much misery in the world. We have prayed so much to God, but still there is no end of misery.' But misery is only the gift of God. It is the symbol of His compassion."

Strange but true. It is only suffering that purifies all the impurities from our minds. Nobody ever became a saint through a comfortable life. It is the scorching fire of misery that purges us of all dross. Moreover it is suffering that teaches us great lessons and forges our character. Swami Vivekananda says: "you will find that misery and happiness are equal factors in the formation of that character. Good and evil have an equal share in moulding character, and in some instances misery is a greater teacher than happiness. In studying the great characters the world has produced, I dare say, in the vast majority of cases, it would be found that it was misery that taught more than happiness, it was

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poverty that taught more than wealth, it was blows that. brought out their inner fire more than praise”.

Doubts :

Many of people, particularly, Hindus have a reasonable doubt about God’s grace. Hindus believe in the law of *Karma*. We reap what we sow, good good, bad bad. The law of cause and effect is a valid law. If this is true does not God’s grace, which may annul our past Karma, fly against the law of *Karma*?

The short answer is, No! The purpose of the law of Karma is neither to give happiness nor suffering; its real purpose is to awaken man to his real nature. Hence when a person understands that his suffering is his own making and repents, and vows not to do any evil deeds, God, the Master of the law of karma, in His mercy either removes that person’s suffering completely or reduces it to a minimum. The Maker of a law can also break the law!

A devotee should neither become frustrated nor lose faith if he finds that his prayer is not fulfilled; on the contrary he accepts (even rejoices) with deep faith that God knows what is best for him and did the right thing.

Provided all the necessary conditions—earnestness, faith and sincerity—are fulfilled, every prayer is answered. We will discuss these conditions in our next editorial.

(To be continued)  
Swami Dayatmananda

Why don't all have concentration ? Because they don't fulfil the conditions necessary for it, viz., absolute continence. This is known as strength. The long and short of it is that one must have full self-control.  
(Swami Turiyananda)

# Hindu View of Christ

Swami Prabhavananda

(Talk given on 28 December 1969 in the Temple of the Vedanta Society of Southern California at Santa Barbara, USA, by Swami Prabhavananda, the founder and head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California from 1930 until his passing away in 1976. The text of the present talk was transcribed from tape and edited by Edith D Tipple.)

**M**y Christmas greetings to you all. I will speak to you this morning on the Hindu view of Christ, but before I come to the subject proper, I would like to mention how I became interested in Christ and his teachings. Of course, being born a Hindu, we are taught to respect all religions, all teachers and prophets and Sons of God and Divine Incarnations, but that is in the theoretical realm.

I had no active interest. When I graduated from High School and came to study in a college in Calcutta, the YMCA gave me a beautifully bound volume of *The New Testament*. It excited me. I opened the pages of the book and read the first chapter, 'Abraham begat... David begat'-all begats, on and on'. That was the end of my reading of The New Testament.

In college I took a course on philosophy in which I had to study Christian theology. We studied this ontological argument and that teleological argument—all kinds of arguments to prove the existence of God which did not appeal to me again. Then I joined the Monastery during the Christmas vacation.

In every Monastery of the Ramakrishna Order in India, the birth date of Christ is observed. You will recall that before the disciples of Ramakrishna took formal *sannyasa*, Swami Vivekananda, their leader, one night began to talk about Christ and his ideal of renunciation. He infused into the disciples that great ideal of renunciation which Christ stood for. It was learned

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later that it happened to be Christmas Eve, and so ever since in every Monastery in India, Christmas Eve is observed and Christ is worshipped.

At my first Christmas Eve in the Monastery, Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] and all the other disciples were present. Maharaj asked us to meditate on Christ. Suddenly our minds were lifted up and I felt that Christ was as much our own as Krishna or Buddha or Ramakrishna. As we were leaving the worship hall, Maharaj told Swami Shivananda, 'Wasn't that wonderful?' And Swami Shivananda also said, 'Wasn't that wonderful?' In other words, they had the vision of Christ.

Now to come to his teachings and who Christ really is. In the first place, let us remember that he said, 'I come not to destroy, but to fulfil.' He was the fulfilment of Judaism. He was unique in this respect. I do not question it, I believe it firmly. But I also believe that Krishna was unique and Ramakrishna was unique. It is the same Reality or the same God that comes in different Ages, in different garments.

When Ramakrishna was on his deathbed and Vivekananda—then a young boy, Naren—was seated by his bedside, he was thinking, 'If now you can say you are an *Avatar*, I shall believe you'. Ramakrishna said in clear voice, 'Still you have disbelief? He who was Rama, he who was Krishna, is again born as Ramakrishna—but not in your Vedantic sense'. Because, according to Vedanta, each one of us is an incarnation of God, because in each one of us dwells God in His infinitude. So where is the difference?

In the Gospel according to St. John we read: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. Then later he points out, 'The Word was made flesh in Jesus'. Those who are students of philosophy know that what St. John referred to by 'Word' is philosophically known as '*Logos*'.



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The idea of '*Logos*' developed for centuries in the West to find a connection between God and the world or man. At long last Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, who was a contemporary of Jesus, pointed out that *Logos* is one with God and is 'the first begotten Son of God.' St. John added, 'The Word was made flesh'.

It would seem that 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God' was a literal translation from the Vedic saying: 'In the beginning was the Creator, the Lord. Second to Him was the Word'. This Word is Brahman. We call this Word 'Om'. These, of course, are matters of revelation.

So according to St. John, *Logos* or the Word was made flesh in Jesus. But I would say, not only in Jesus. Jesus is a garment and the Word was made flesh in other garments as well. Sri Krishna, before Christ was born, said in the *Bhagavad Gita*: 'When goodness grows weak, when evil increases, I make Myself a body. In every Age I come back to deliver the holy, to destroy the sin of the sinner, to establish righteousness'.

Historically every civilisation, whether material, scientific, or spiritual, goes through ups and downs. There are cyclic waves. For instance, science has progressed so greatly today. Perhaps if you go back in history that same development was reached at another Age. Who knows?

As far as spirituality is concerned, we know that it goes up and down. When Buddha was born the Hindus just stuck to the literal meaning of the words of the *Vedas* and forgot the spirit. Buddha was not a preacher who preached a different religion. but he gave again the spirit of the *Vedas*. What he taught was nothing but the *Upanishads*.

In the same way you will find in the *Bible* how Pharisees and Sadducees stuck to the letter of the laws. Spirit was forgotten. Again, Christ was born to revive that spirit. Nobody has given

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any new Truth. The same Truth is reiterated again and again in different Ages by these great teachers. And we must be ready to welcome again in future anybody who comes, that is, God descending as man.

Religion is, in this sense, eternal. The Hindus claim that their scriptures, the *Vedas*, are eternal, beginningless and endless. How can a book be beginningless and endless? What they mean thereby is that the Truth is beginningless and endless, is an Eternal Religion. St. Augustine also pointed out that there is one Eternal Religion which later began to be known as Christianity. I'd add, 'and which became known as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism...' —that one Eternal Religion. Not many religions. Thus when a Hindu accepts Christ, he accepts Him as God Himself. The only difference between the Hindu and the Christian with regard to the *Avatar* or Son of God or Divine Incarnation, is that Christians insist upon Christ as being the *only* Son of God.

I shall quote St. John to you again: Philip sayeth unto him [Jesus], 'Lord, show us the Father. And it sufficeth us'. Jesus sayeth unto him, 'I have been so long with you and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. And how sayest thou then "Show me the Father"?'

And St. Paul: 'For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are complete in Him which is the head of all principality and power.' In other words, you can become complete in Him only when you reach your union with Him.

Now let us try to understand the nature of the birth of these great ones, of God descending as man. Jesus said, 'Ye are from beneath, I am from above. Ye are from this world, I am not of this world'. In other words, it is the descent of God to show man how to ascend towards Godhead. We are products of evolution—not that the Atman is evolving, but the forms are evolving.

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Obstructions are being removed to unfold that divinity. Each one of us will ultimately attain Christhood, Godhood, oneness with the Godhead.

Sri Krishna says: 'I am the birthless, the deathless, Lord of all that breathes. I seem to be born. It is only seeming, only My *maya*. I am still master of My *maya*, the power that makes Me'. In order to be born you have to be born within this *maya*, relativity. You and I are bound by that *maya*. But when there is the descent of God, He is not bound by *maya*, He is the master of His *maya*.

You will find that from their very boyhood, God is manifested in these great ones. We are born in ignorance and forced by our *karmas*: God has no *karma*. So the Avatar, when He descends, is not within *karma*. He comes by His own choice, that is, the grace of God. You read also in the *Bible*, 'For the law was given by Moses, but the grace and truth were given by Jesus.' It is the grace of God.

There is vibration of light everywhere. In darkness also. But in order to see the light, you have to see by means of an electric bulb. Similarly, there is vibration of divinity everywhere. God dwells within each one of us—but where can we find Him? Wherever He is manifest. Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'. Sri Krishna says, 'He who knows the nature of My task and My holy birth is not reborn when he leaves the body. He comes to Me. Flying from fear, from lust and anger, he hides in Me, his refuge and safety. Burnt clean in the blaze of My being, in Me many find rest'.

Just note the similarity, the parallelism: same words in different languages. Again, Jesus says: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest'. Sri Krishna says, 'Lay down all duties in Me, your refuge. Fear no longer, for I will save you from sin and bondage'. And Sri Ramakrishna in

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this Age says, 'I am the sanctuary. Take refuge in Me. I wipe out all *karmas*.

What is it to take refuge in an *Avatar*? It is to take refuge in God, Brahman. The idea of the Trinity—the Father, Son and Holy Ghost—I explain in my own way. When I try to understand what Christians mean, I get confused. To me, Father is Brahman, Son is Avatar or Divine Incarnation, and Holy Ghost is the Atman dwelling within—one and the same. So when you worship Christ, you are worshipping Brahman, the All-pervading One, who is also your own Atman, your very Self. You cannot live and breathe without that Presence within you.

Jesus also pointed out, 'Abide in Me and I in you'. That's what we have to do. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'God dwells in every being, but every being does not dwell in God'. We must learn to dwell in God.

Listen to the Commandments: 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and love thy neighbour as thyself'. You see, if we can give that love of our heart with all our mind and soul, then He reveals Himself to us. And we must love our neighbour. By the way, in the *Old Testament* you find 'Love the stranger also as thyself'. Our Holy Mother used to say, 'Nobody's a stranger'. Everybody's your own, because the same Self, same God, dwells in every being. Christ also said, 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done unto Me'.

There is one teaching from the days of the *Upanishads*, which is the most ancient scripture of the world up to the present time, that stands out everywhere, in every religion, but which has become forgotten, and that is that we must experience God, directly experience God. Angelus Salesias, one of the great Christian mystics, said, 'Christ may be born a thousand times in

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Bethlehem, but until he is born anew within yourself, you remain forlorn'. That is the truth.

How can that be achieved? By that most beautiful truth which Christ taught, and which is the very heart of every religion: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. In fact, at one time, referring to it, Swami Vivekananda said, 'If all scriptures are lost, and if that one sentence lives, religion lives'.

Now what is meant by purity of heart? We read in the *Upanishads*: 'When the senses are purified, the heart becomes purified. When the heart becomes purified, there is constant remembrance of God. And when there is constant remembrance of God, the Truth becomes revealed to you'. 'Senses become purified' means we are able to move amongst the objects of senses without attachment or aversion. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Let the boat stay on water, but let not water stay in the boat. We must be free from worldliness'.

When the heart becomes pure, there comes constant remembrance of God. That is the main point. Try to constantly remember God—no matter how you do it. Whether you remember Christ as God or Krishna as God or the Impersonal Brahman as God, it makes no difference, it is the same Reality—but keep remembrance. As often as you can. In order to do that, you have to meditate and meditate and meditate. It is a direct experience you have to achieve. It is not a question of belief.

Just as a scientist would not want you simply to believe, he will ask you to come to his laboratory so that he can demonstrate, just so is religion. Your laboratory in this case is in your own heart, the only condition being that the heart must become purified. Your mind must be attached to God, and God only. In this connection and in closing, I wish to read out to you the sermon of a Unitarian Minister which he gave at the time of his retirement.

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'Christmas, he said, 'is the time we claim to celebrate the birthday, not only of a social revolutionary, Jesus of Nazareth, but of a teacher who taught a great deal about the inner life, the "Word made flesh."' Plato wrote more than 2000 years ago that man is a creature who is constantly in search of himself, a creature who at every moment of existence must examine and scrutinise the condition of his existence. There is an insistence about personal religious renewal here that is fearfully difficult for most Christians to grasp. Most men endure a walking sleep and never know the world of the mind or spirit.

Renewal of the individual is not easy. It demands all that we possess. Our feelings, our thoughts, our entire resources, physical and spiritual. Man must have an aim and a purpose in life above all else. There can be no good society with men and women who have no respect for their own death and dignity as individuals. Man is a very complex, frightened, insecure creature much of the time. As we try to change the environment to make it more supportive of the human venture, I hope we will insist upon changing the inner environment of each and every one of us.

Christmas is as good a time as any to remember some of the words which help in a renewal of the heart and mind, a deepening of consciousness to millions for over twenty centuries. The Kingdom of God is within you.

Beware that the light that is within you be not darkness. Ye are the Sons of God and it does not yet appear what ye shall be. The Word is Love, the Word is Joy, the Word is Peace. May the Word become flesh for every living creature, starting with ourselves.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, October 1995)

# The Common Fundamentals of the Great Religions

Prof. S. S. Raghavachar

The study of comparative religion has dispelled a number of longstanding errors. The most pernicious of them is the belief in the exclusive and sole validity of some one of the living religions. The great living religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism stand or fall together. There is so much of conscious and unconscious affinity and identity of content in them that to repudiate any one of them without damaging the substance of the others is a sheer impossibility. To vindicate one is to furnish grounds for the vindication of others. To discard the Hinduism of the *Upanishads* in a radical fashion would rob Jainism and Buddhism of the doctrine of *karma* which is fundamental to them.

Where would Christianity and Islam be with Judaism completely refuted? Can Vedanta be true and infallible if Taoism is proved a wholly worthless creed? Illustrations of the basic coherence of the great religions can be endlessly multiplied. Therefore the philosophy of religion is compelled to focus itself on the common fundamentals of the mature religions for purposes of elucidation and criticism. A religion adored exclusively too often conceals its kernel from its devotees. With this preamble one may proceed to enumerate the essentials of the great religions.

## 1

The first constituent of the great religions is the ethical element. In all of them the principle of self-culture involving a regulation and curtailment of animal impulse is inculcated. No religion has advocated worldliness and hedonism. An element of austerity is an invariable factor in all. Even the most earthbound religion, with only faint notions of the supernatural and the otherworldly, has prescribed emancipation from the

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slavery to irrational impulses. The good is distinguished from the pleasant, and that fulness of life is impossible without self-mastery is a universal maxim of all religions. Along with this principle of self-control, the ideal of compassion and humanity is inculcated. The concept of the brotherhood of man is a specific contribution of religious consciousness. There is no important religion which has not laid down the maxim of treating one's neighbour as oneself. The definition of the 'neighbour' may be undergoing continual expansion, but the maxim itself has been once for all laid down. The moral progress of mankind lies in the progressive expansion of the scope of this rule of life. The rule itself is a bequest of the religious inspiration of the prophets.

One has only to compare the ethical commandments of the Semitic religions with Indian thought on the matter to see the unanimity of religions. The Mosaic rules :

*Do not kill*

*Do not steal*

*Do not commit adultery*

*Do not swear*

*Do not covet*

correspond with literal accuracy to the five great vows of Jainism. They are non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, observance of continence and non-acceptance of gifts. These again are the five points of good conduct specified in Buddhism. They are the *yamas* (restraints) of Hinduism. The correspondence is perfect. The ruling principles of these commandments are self-control and humanity. That the religions are the sources of the great ethical ideals of humanity needs to be recognized when a final valuation of religion is undertaken. While morality is possible without religion, religion is impossible without morality. It may be more than morality but never less than it. In the inclusive substance of religion, individual and social ethics form an integral part.



The next fundamental contention of religions is that they contain supreme knowledge. There is no religion without a 'noetic' claim. Mere conduct, however holy, is not the whole of the meaning of religion. A certain fundamental understanding or insight into the nature of reality is claimed in all the great religions. This insight is not supposed to be laboriously won through human effort. Man's experience of mundane realities and his research and scientific investigation are not held to be the sources of religious knowledge. A mode of knowing transcending empirical methods and even reason and capable of discovering the fundamental realities is posited. All the great religions are committed to a doctrine of mystic revelation. Moses receiving from God the ten commandments, Jesus receiving the approval of the Father in Heaven after his baptism, St. Paul encountering Jesus on his way to Damascus, Mohammed being lifted to prophethood by the transfiguring messages of the Divine, the Buddha gaining the absolute 'awakening' under the Bodhi tree, and Lord Krishna revealing the supreme truth to the despondent Arjuna on the battlefield, are the recorded phenomena of mystic revelation in the history of the great religions. They claim knowledge of absolute truth and claim to have received it through divine self communication. This conception of infallible knowledge through self-revelation of the Supreme is enshrined in the heart of all religions. 'Mere teaching, intelligence and learning of many scriptures do not enable one to gain access to the Supreme. It is attained only by one whom it chooses as a fit recipient of its self-revelation.' This is how the *Upanishads* state this cardinal principle of religion.

In short, religions claim a mode of direct knowledge other than the normal human ways of perception and inference. This knowledge is supposed to cover a vaster realm of being than even

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inference, and to be more direct and immediate than even sense-perception. This epistemological contention is one of the constituents of all the great religions.

### 3

In their conception of reality, all mature religions affirm a transcendent order of being. The higher order may be conceived (*Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.23 ; *Mundaka Upanishad* 3.2.3.) as a law, an impersonal principle, or a personal God. There are minor differences proceeding from the anxiety to do justice to the varied aspects of the central verity. But all of them assert that there is a Supreme Entity transcending the mundane actualities of nature and humanity.

It is held to be self-existent. As such it is unconditioned reality. It is unchanging, for what changes has the roots of its actuality in something beyond itself. It is one. The Buddhistic principle of Cosmic Law, the impersonal Brahman of the *Upanishads* and the Father in Heaven of Jesus admit of these characterisations of self-existence, eternity and unity. It is self-affirming spirit at once surpassing inorganic nature and the finite mind. Buddhism outgrew its naturalistic terminology of the earlier days and boldly championed an idealistic monism in its culminating period of maturity. Confucius never denied the existence of God and did always feel the irresistible fascination of the Tao.

The basic motive in all the assertions in favour of a personal God, whether in Christianity or Islam, is the acknowledgement of the spiritual character of the transcendent. The *Upanishads* identify the ultimate with Infinite Consciousness. The religions ascribe absolute perfection and qualitative infinitude to this principle. That is the significance of naming it '*Purna*', '*Ananda*' and '*Bhuvan*' in the *Upanishads*.

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'Be ye perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect' The transcendent is spiritual and perfect. It is all that ought to be.

The transcendence of the principle is one half of the truth. It is also immanent. God is the ground of the being of the world. His unity is the source of its orderliness. His supreme wisdom is the source of the light of human thought. It is His perfection that is partly mirrored in the earthly values of truth, beauty and goodness. All else derives its being and worth from the supreme being and perfection of God.

All religions have affirmed with one voice the equal truth of divine transcendence and of divine immanence. They have always resented shallow pantheism and an equally shallow Deism. This is the crucial paradox or mystery of the Divine. It fills the universe and goes beyond it, reducing it to an infinitesimal dimension of its own limitless being. This is the significance of the passage in the *Gita* which says that all beings dwell in God yet He does not dwell in them.<sup>2</sup> (*Bhagavad Gita* 9.4) This is the reason why the Upanishads adopt both the negative theology of 'neti, neti' and the positive one of '*sarvam khalvidam brahma*' ('all this is Brahman').

Thus all the mature religions affirm a Supreme Reality, indivisibly one, unconditioned, spiritual and perfect which is at once beyond and within the world. If one overlooks the minor historically occasioned differences of stress, all the religions are found to converge in their conception of the Supreme Being. An unfettered submission to the great documents of the principal religions produces an irresistible conviction of their philosophical unity.

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### 4

In the highest altitudes of religious consciousness as embodied in the greatest saints and prophets, and as treasured in the great scriptures, there is a certain view of the supreme value or purpose of life. God-vision is held to be the final goal of human endeavour. Just as in pure science truth is sought for its own sake, in high morality goodness is valued for its own sake, in great art beauty is enjoyed and produced for its own sake, in religion at its highest the finding of God is valued for its own sake. It is no instrumental. (*Bhagavad-Gita, 9.4.*) value. In fact it includes within itself all the other supposedly intrinsic values like Truth, Beauty and Goodness. It is the supreme and all-inclusive value. All the great religions are characterised by the possession of an idea of salvation. Salvation is no maximisation of earthly happiness.

Nor is it merely a relief from the frustrations of the mundane life. It is an abundance of life achieved through adaptation to and integration with the Supreme Reality.

The cardinal vice for all religions is the life of isolation from the Divine. This isolation may take the form of self-love, or self-will, or the non-cognition of the Supreme. These are all forms of repudiation and are instances of that false freedom which in reality is pure bondage. In opposition to this all the religions have preached the gospel of self-perfection through union with the divine ground of all being and value. We truly live to the full measure of our being when we live in and for the Divine.

Abundance of life is the fruition of dedication. In such union with the Supreme is the true freedom that passeth all understanding. It is peace and joy eternal and boundless. The great parables of Jesus on the Kingdom of God bring out the various implications of this unitive life. The Buddha spoke of it as Nirvana, meaning the extinction of all that is trivial and corrupt in us. The *Upanishads* glorify it as 'becoming Brahman.' The *Gita*

combines the two concepts in its oft-repeated term of '*Brahma-Nirvana*'. The other religions are also unanimous in indicating that the destination of the soul's journey is the life in God. The ideal may be theistically taken or monistically interpreted as the recovery of identity with the Absolute Being through enlightenment. But whatever the minor differences of interpretation the basic idea is that of oneness with the Deity. This idea of oneness as the ultimate purpose of life is an essential constituent of all religions.

5

All the religions contain the teaching of a 'way' to final self-realization. As the *Gita* brings out, the way involves the practical, emotional and contemplative factors. There is no great religion that neglects any of the three paths of *Karma*, *Bhakti* and *Jnana*. On this question of the co-ordination of all the resources of our nature in the quest for God, the *Gita* represents the clearest formulation. But what it formulates is illustrated in all the great religions and prophets.

There is another very significant element in all the teachings of the way. This also seems to be a fundamental constituent of all religions. It is held that the final fulfilment is no achievement by self-effort on the part of man. It is a gift of divine grace. It flows from the life-imparting abundance of God. But grace issues only when man learns to depend only upon grace.

Renunciation of the reliance on all else including one's own exertions and absolute dependence on divine grace are the two conditions that seem to draw out and actuate divine grace. God's grace acts according to the limitless bounty of His nature only when we shed the illusion that we can get 'saved' if rewarded according to our worth. God's grace is limited to the measure of our worth as long as we attach efficacy to our worth. The moment

## The Common Fundamentals of the Great Religions

we renounce all claim to worth and wholly look to God's saving power, God begins to act as befits His unlimited grace. It must be vividly realised by us that grace ought not to be in proportion to our worth but must be in proportion to the magnificence of divine love. The renunciation of the feeling of one's own worth and the sole reliance on God's nature together constitute what is called 'surrender' in mystical literature.

The Buddhist formula of taking refuge in the *Buddha, Dharma* and *Sangha* symbolizes this act of surrender. 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done ... deliver us from evil' is a record of the mood of surrender. The Upanishadic seer praying to be led 'from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light and from death to Immortality' is not presenting a claim. He is surrendering his soul with all its aspirations to the Most High and praying to be led. It is an attitude of supplication, waiting for the initiative of the Supreme. This is the inactivity mysteriously spoken of by Lao Tze. The final exhortation of the Gita to Arjuna is that he should abandon all other resources and surrender himself to God alone in all faith and wholeness of soul. He is assured of redemption. The holy Koran opens with a glorious verse which is considered to contain the quintessence of Islam. In fact, the very term 'Islam' signifies submission to God.

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds !

The compassionate, the merciful !

The king on the day of reckoning,

Thee only we worship and to thee do we cry for help.

Guide thou us on the straight path, the path of those to whom thou hast been gracious, with whom thou art not angry, who go not astray.

This idea of surrender pervades all the higher religions and marks the last words of prayer in the lives of the greatest in the

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field of religion. To offer one's ego at the altar of God is the highest act of the religious spirit.

We may now sum up the common fundamentals of the great religions. In all great religions we have :

1. A solid ethical basis inculcating self-control and humanity.
2. A claim to a super-normal access to Reality.
3. An affirmation of a Supreme Reality.
4. The view that the highest purpose of life is integration with the Divine.
5. The idea that the way to perfection lies through surrender.

(Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1981)

Ramaprasada says in a song that devotion is at the root of all spiritual achievements. Ramaprasada was in a sense the ideal of Shri Ramakrishna. The Master used to say, 'Mother, Thou hast revealed Thyself to Ramaprasada; why shouldst Thou not to me ?' The Master's teaching is Bhakti tempered with Jnana.

When will that day come when the very utterance of the name of God will bring tears to my eyes ? (To the disciple) Do you cry when you take His name ? Ah, what a supernal condition! Just consider! The very utterance of His name makes you cry!

(Swami Turiyananda)

# The Drum-Beat of Awakening

## A Story

### A Devotee

Long ago there lived in a well-known village in North India a good soul whose sole vocation was providing spiritual instruction to earnest seekers. He was a saintly person who ever kept to the hard path of austere living. He was rooted in righteousness and always had his gaze fixed on the distant but definite goal of self-perfection. In him were seen in a happy combination most, nay all, of the qualities of the Divine Wealth, as elaborated in the *Bhagavad Gita*. He was a lovable and inspiring personality and he drew many pious souls to his presence. He was as much interested in helping others to ascend the steep way of soul-glory, as he was desirous of making his own life a poem of virtue and worth. Many were the persons in the neighbourhood of his village and also in distant regions who owed their spiritual awakening to this holy man, and regarded him with reverence, and gratitude. He was simple but profound, humble but great, unassuming but deep-souled.

Years passed, and the influence of this worthy saint, like the force of spring, was, in an increasing measure, providing the healing touch to many hearts which might otherwise have withered. In due course old age came on the great benefactor and he felt he would not live long. Like every other pious Hindu he wished to spend his last days in the Holy City of Viswanatha, Varanasi, and give up his body at the feet of that Lord of the Universe, and have it cremated at the Manikarnika burning ground; for tradition holds that on those who die at Kasi, Shiva bestows salvation. But he was now too old to think of walking the distance to Benaras.

While he was preparing himself to give up the plan of moving to Kasi, four of his admiring devotees offered to carry him in a



## The Drum-Beat of Awakening

palanquin and take him to the holy Shivapuri. The saint agreed and so they carried him. However the going was slow, for the palanquin-carriers were not professional ones, and moreover a brisk march was not thought to be advisable as it would be rather an inconvenience to the saint whose health showed alarming signs of decline as the journey proceeded. They had covered only half the distance when one day the saint told his carriers that he was not destined to reach Kasi as his last moments had come.

He asked them to tell him exactly where they were at the moment. The carriers were very sad that their plan of taking the saint to Kasi had been thwarted and they looked around and told him that just then they were passing a hamlet inhabited by uncultured outcastes and untouchables. On hearing the news the saint's mind pictured to itself the pitiable condition, the economic distress and the uncultured atmosphere that normally go with a slum, and at that moment life left him.

All through his life this saint had managed to keep his mind steadfastly fixed on God and God's manifold glories; even in the palanquin he had been either meditating on the Divine Entity or singing devotional songs. But it so chanced that death overwhelmed him, when in a short respite from his wonted reflection on Providence, his thoughts were hovering - in compassion and sympathy of course - on the poor dwellers in the slum near which he was being carried.

Now it is a cosmic law that is inescapable that the last thoughts of a dying man determine the nature of his next birth. Therefore the saint was reborn as a child of an untouchable couple in the very same slum area where he breathed his last. But the very many past good impressions in his mind and the healthy attitude and righteous outlook that had always been his nature were still his equipment even though he was now a child of the slum.

## A Devotee

His father was the State Drum-beater whose business was to beat the drum, draw people's attention and then announce Government's orders and instructions to the citizens for implementation by them. It was also his job to go around the streets of the capital city at night and by beating the drum warn the people to be awake and guard themselves against thieves and robbers who went about in dark nights for house-breaking and way-side robbery.

The State Drum-beater (who got the saint as his son) had earned a name for honest work and responsible discharge of duties. Though he held a petty office, his integrity had made him well-known to the king who often consulted him in regard to improving the arrangements in the capital city for safety of persons and possessions. But the birth of a son had not made the Drum-beater happy at all, for the son as he grew up hardly learnt to speak a word and chose to keep away from contact with people. He shunned society though he never did anything anti-social. The parents did their best to make him normal, but in vain. The boy displayed no interest in anything and seemed to be hard of hearing, slow of understanding, dull-witted, averse both to play and work. The father had to leave him to himself.

The truth about this strange boy however was something different. He was not stupid and backward. In fact by merely watching his father beat the drum he had acquired skill in drum-beating (the hereditary occupation of the family), but he let no one know of it. He retained the memory of the last moments of his previous birth and remembering how a mere association (in thought) with the slum and its unedifying environment had had such an impact on him as to actually make him take birth in a slum, he had resolved even at birth to avoid any sort of voluntary active involvement in the affairs of his environment. Not that he was unfeeling and stoney-hearted; he yearned to live

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as a philosopher, watching but not participating, a looker-on at the drama of life.

Once the drum-beating father had to be away from the city for a day on some urgent business of his own, but at that time there was a scare in the city about expert thieves being busy, and the chief guard of the city refused to grant him leave of absence from work even for a night. The Drum-beater was in tears, because the business which compelled him to ask for leave was so very important to him. The king saw him in this condition in the palace grounds and asked him why he was weeping. On being told of the cause of his remorse, the king said that leave would be granted to him if he would provide a substitute, as capable as he, to take his place. The Drum-beater could think of no one who would take his place. Then he had an idea, and said, 'My son is now quite grown up to officiate for me. I shall coach him up well and make him beat the drum as well as I beat it.' He knew what a good-for-nothing youth his son was, but there was no other way out of the predicament and he hoped that his son would do the work tolerably well and that by God's grace nothing very serious would happen.

The king who was soft-hearted let the father go, but at evening he began to wonder if he had done the right thing in over-ruling the chief guard and letting the veteran Drum-beater be absent from the city even for a night; for he had heard all the rumours current in the city about spies, enemy agents, smugglers, etc. He was sure that the Drum-beater's son could not be a satisfactory substitute for his father and so resolved to go himself around the city in disguise at night and ensure its safety. It was not unusual for kings in those days to go round the city at night in order to mingle with the common folk and study their condition and also to know the nature of the public reaction to their rule. So on the

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dark night the king, dressed like a wayfarer, was going through the streets and lanes of the city.

The Drum-beater's son, widely regarded as a dunce and an idiot, was also going round the city, not knowing that he shared the honour of the nocturnal vigil with royalty. After a time when towards the end of the first quarter of the night the city lay hushed in sleep, the king was surprised to hear the drum-beat a little away from where he was, and the beating was loud and long. This gladdened the king who said to himself, 'The son is even better than the father, for if at the father's beat the drum has roared like a lion on all the nights, at the son's beat tonight it volleys and thunders. Listening to this noise, even Kumbhakarna cannot quietly slumber on. The city is in no danger whatever. People at home will surely be compelled to be wakeful.' But soon he was surprised to hear the sweet tune of a verse coming over the air. In the silence of the night the verse resounded and reverberated all over the city.

    `Passion and anger and greed  
    Occupy the body like thieves,  
    Intent on seizing the gem of wisdom;  
    Therefore be awake, be awake.'

This warning to the people (to their souls which were in danger of being deprived of discrimination) resounded in the stillness of the night like a message from Heaven. The king was enraptured.

The second quarter set in, and another verse rang through the sky.

    `Birth is misery, old age is woe,  
    Again and again is wife a sorrow,  
    Mundane life is extreme distress,  
    Therefore be awake, be awake!'

## The Drum-Beat of Awakening

The verse for the third quarter was:-

Neither mother is there, nor father indeed,  
No relative is there, and no brother either,  
Wealth is really not, and home is nowhere,  
Therefore be awake, be awake.'

The verse for the last quarter was philosophic wisdom in a nutshell.

The world is by desire bound,  
Bound fast by activity and much care,  
Of life's wasting away are people not cognizant,  
Therefore be awake, be awake!'

It was dawn soon, and the king returned to the palace, happy to have discovered a sage in his city. The Drum-beater's son too returned to his hut, hoping that his philosophical drum-beating had roused at least a few slumbering souls to wakefulness.

When the father came back to the city he had an urgent summons from the king to appear at court forthwith along with his son. The father was naturally alarmed, fearing that his son had kept the watch so ill that the king was about to punish him., but on reaching the palace gates he was astonished to see his son being garlanded and being led to the king's presence with music and other signs of honour. The king told the father, 'Your son is no fool. He is a ripe sage. It is a pity we did not discover his genius and worth all these years. I have resolved to keep him at court. It is for him to choose any office in the kingdom and it will be bestowed on him at once.' The chief minister, the court pundit, and several other high state officials wondered which one of them was going to be relieved of his office in order to find a place for the strange favourite of the king.

Great was their relief when the newcomer told the king, to the surprise of all, ' I shall choose a job befitting my birth and social position. Make me the Chief Executioner, the Senior Be-header, of the criminals in the kingdom who are sentenced to

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death by your courts.' The king was very much puzzled by the nature of the profession the Drum-beater's son preferred, but while several others regarded the would-be Executioner as eccentric, the king remembered the adage that the strange conduct of great men may perplex ordinary folk, but always has a background of supreme sense to it, and let him have what he demanded.

Orders were issued to the effect that criminals who were condemned to capital punishment were to be handed over to the new officer to be beheaded by him, as and when and how he chose. In a hut close to the field where executions were carried out lived the Drum-beater's son who had thus opted for a ghastly job.

Soon were installed in that bloody field of execution two lovely images of Narayana and Mahadeva. When the criminals came to him the Drum-beater's son used to tell them delightful stories about Vishnu and Siva for days and days. He was a marvellous storyteller and would make the simple-hearted, rustic prisoners actually visualise the scenes in the stories he narrated to them. The criminal tendency in them which had led them to a sentence of death was looked upon by him as just a disease, and he knew a disease was curable. He therefore never cursed them, but slowly toned up their souls.

But the law had to take its course and the sentence of death had to be carried out, and at a time when he found the condemned ones in a particularly God-minded mood, singing or dancing in devotion or chanting the Lord's names, he would go behind them and chop off their heads in a trice. And as the last thoughts of the beheaded ones were invariably related to God, because of the sublime way in which he arranged the setting of the execution, the victims of the State law had enviable rebirths, in which they rapidly strode towards perfection.

The bloody act of beheading became in the hands of the holy executioner the blessed service of soul-redeeming.

# The Direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

(continued from last issue)

**Swami Bhuteshananda**

SWAMI SARADANANDA

**S**wami Saradanandaji was very kind to us. In those days I used to live very close to what is called 'Mother's House' at Baghbazar in Calcutta. Swami Saradanandaji had built that house for Holy Mother so that she would have a place of her own to stay whenever she came to Calcutta. Swami Saradanandaji too stayed there to look after Mother and also shouldered the administrative responsibility as Secretary of the Order. We youngsters used to visit him in the afternoon and see him surrounded by devotees who used to unburden their minds of their worries, ask him questions, and seek his advice.

He used to listen to them patiently, even though most of their questions were silly and irrelevant to spiritual life. I never saw him getting annoyed or being unsympathetic to any of the people around him. We youngsters used to become impatient because we had no interest in all those household problems. Swami Saradanandaji understood us perfectly well, so he would after some time gently direct the conversation to spiritual matters. That was just to save us from the trouble of listening to all those household problems. Of course, we now know better and are able to appreciate that teachers like him are born to help everyone, no matter what the nature of the problem is. He spoke very little. In a few words he gave those troubled people some advice and offered solutions, and the people would feel most satisfied.

There were some old women devotees who did not have any relatives to care for them. As they had no one whom they could trust, they often deposited with him their ornaments and money. He used to keep accounts for them. Before passing away he had cerebral thrombosis and he lost his speech.

But just a day before that, he had some premonition about this and he instructed his secretary to take charge of those

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belongings of the old ladies, see that the things were kept safe, and were returned to them whenever needed.

Another thing I noted in Swami Saradanandaji was his special concern for the people who were ill. Irrespective of whether they were monks or lay devotees, he readily volunteered to help them and look after them whenever the need arose. Many undeserving people used his kindness to their advantage. Swami Saradanandaji said he knew the nature of those people, but yet felt like sheltering them because they had nowhere else to go. Such was the power of his holy presence that these troublemakers remained under control and could not harm others as they otherwise would have done.

After my initiation I went on a pilgrimage to Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. On the way back I lost my rosary and became very much worried. It was our tradition not to eat until the telling of beads was completed. So without any food I returned to Mother's House in Calcutta and told Swami Saradanandaji that I had lost my rosary. That time I really thought that it was a great calamity. But Swami Saradanandaji smiled sweetly and said, "You silly boy, why are you so much worried? The rosary is not so important. What is important is God's name. And you can repeat it even without a rosary. You can keep count with your fingers.' Then he said, 'First of all, go and take some food.' Though this is a small incident, it has remained as a very sacred memory in my mind.

As I said, I was staying in an *ashrama* which was not an official centre of the Order. I was still studying in a school and was not eligible for *brahmacharya* initiation, the preliminary vows that the monks of our Order are given. I did not know it that time. I requested Swami Saradanandaji to give me the vows of *brahmacharya*. He did not tell me that I was not eligible. He simply asked me to go to Swami Shivanandaji at Belur Math and request



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him. I said I was afraid to meet him because he had earlier rejected several times my request to be admitted into the Order. He wanted me to finish my studies first. Swami Saradanandaji then suggested that I could go and meet Jnan Maharaj, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, and he would take me to Swami Shivanandaji. I did as told. When Swami Shivanandaji heard that my case was recommended by Swami Saradanandaji, he assured me of admission to the Order and agreed for the *brahmacharya* initiation. His only condition was that I should continue and complete my college studies before I would be allowed to come and formally join the monastery. So I had to stay in that unaffiliated ashrama to complete my studies. I wanted to join right away but, of course, that was not possible. So this is another incident when Swami Saradanandaji broke a rule to help me.

On special occasions we used to invite him to our *ashrama* and he would readily come. I remember one occasion in particular. The shrine was on the second floor and the steps were narrow. Swami Saradanandaji's rheumatism had flared up and, in spite of that, he crawled over the steps to go to the shrine, simply to satisfy us. I felt very sorry and deeply touched by his loving concern for our feelings. That was his nature. He would readily undergo any kind of inconvenience if that would satisfy his disciples or devotees.

There was a devotee suffering from tuberculosis. In those days it was a much-feared disease and considered extremely infectious. Swami Saradanandaji knew that if others learnt of his going to that devotee's place, they would strongly object to it. So one afternoon, when all were taking rest, he quietly slipped away from Mother's House and went to the patient's place. Swami Asheshanandaji, who was his secretary, happened to be awake and he noticed Swami Saradanandaji going out. He thought of accompanying him just in case Maharaj needed his help. But then

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he felt that since Maharaj had gone quietly he would not want him to attend on him at that time. So he followed from a distance and observed what Maharaj was doing.

Swami Saradanandaji sat by the devotee's bed and made inquiries. Some fruits were brought for him and he ate them. Later, when the people at the Math heard this, they remonstrated, 'Maharaj, why did you do that? Why did you take such a risk?' Swami Saradanandaji replied, 'If I didn't eat, just consider how bad the devotee would have felt! What does it matter if he is infected by tuberculosis. His satisfaction is more important than my own health.' Swami Saradanandaji was very soft and yet very strong. His inspiration and helpful advice filled us with joy and courage. The whole burden of the Order's administration was on his shoulders. In spite of that, he always remained cool and in peace. He never complained or grumbled.

### SWAMI SHIVANANDA

**N**ow let me tell you something about Swami Shivanandaji or Mahapurush Maharaj. He always followed a strict schedule. He would get up early in the morning. After refreshing himself, he would sit in the old shrine and meditate for a long time. The present temple was not yet built then and so everyone had to meditate in the old shrine itself. We felt it inappropriate to get up before he finished his meditation. So we used to sit until he got up. Then we would begin our other activities.

Mahapurush Maharaj would return to his room after his morning meditation and meticulously inquire about everything. He would want to know what arrangements had been made for those who were ill. He would ask the monk-in-charge of the shrine as to what arrangements were made for the day's offerings

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to Sri Ramakrishna. Once the *pujari* (performer of worship) was a little late in beginning the early morning service in the shrine. He had probably overslept. Mahapurush Maharaj himself went and opened the shrine and began the early morning worship. He started waving lights (*arati*) before Sri Ramakrishna. The *pujari* hurried in by then and stood behind him silently. Mahapurush Maharaj finished the worship and left without saying anything to the *pujari*. The *pujari* had probably expected some rebuke. But Mahapurushji's silence was a greater lesson.

Mahapurush Maharaj was specially fond of cows and would himself feed them with fruits that remained after offering to Sri Ramakrishna. He would visit the cowshed daily and enquire about the welfare of cows from the monk who was on duty there. Mahapurushji would go round the Math almost daily after breakfast.

The speciality of Mahapurush Maharaj was his innate contemplative nature. Here is an incident. After his morning rounds he once sat as usual on a bench in the courtyard. After some time he started walking towards his room. A monk came and saluted him touching his feet. Owing to the obstacle caused by the monk, Mahapurushji fell down. He scolded the monk for bowing down at that moment. Later on he returned to his room and lay down. I was there, slowly massaging his feet. He said, 'I rebuked that monk, but it was not his fault. How could he know that I was not seeing anything that time?' I was wonderstruck to hear that he could not see anything in front, though his eyes were wide open.

Mahapurush Maharaj was particular to see that those who served him were not put to difficulties. He was quite well-built and it was necessary to have strength for massaging him. I was massaging Mahapurush Maharaj on a hot summer day. A drop of sweat fell on his feet. He sensed it and said, 'You are tired and

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so need not continue the massage.' I repeatedly had to assure him that the sweat was only due to the humid weather and not because I was tired. He felt much concerned if anybody attending on him was put to any inconvenience.

While serving Mahapurush Maharaj I had grown a deep desire to perform austerities in the Himalayas. I was, however, hesitant to tell him about it. One day while I was massaging his feet I raised the topic and said, 'Maharaj, there is some conflict in my mind. I am here having this rare privilege of serving you. But I have also a desire to go for *tapasya* (austerity).' Mahapurush Maharaj instantly sat up on the bed and said, 'You certainly should go. But before going, you should prepare yourself by practising meditation seriously. Otherwise going for *tapasya* will not be of much use.' Later, he would repeatedly think about my going for *tapasya* and encourage me about it. I had a desire to go to Uttarkashi, a holy place meant for monks desiring solitude. Mahapurush Maharaj, however, had other ideas. He told me, 'Your health is not good. You should stay in a place where there will not be any difficulty in getting suitable food.' After some thinking, he chose Kashi for me. When I was about to leave for Kashi, he said solemnly, 'Do spiritual practices for a while and then return here. It is not good to continue outside for a long time at a stretch. It will harm the fervour generated by intense spiritual practice.' The following incident happened much later. I was then at Uttarkashi. There was a great need of huts for monks there. The monks who stayed there repeatedly asked me to take the initiative to build dwelling places for our monks. One of our senior swamis offered money for the construction of the structure. I related this to Mahapurush Maharaj and sought his advice. He wrote back, 'Here construction work is already going on in many of our centres. If you like to engage yourself in such activity, you may return to the Math, where a shortage of hands is being felt.'

## Swami Bhuteshananda

If you want to stay there for some more time, live as if you are a "snake in some body's house." There is no need to build houses there.'

Mahapurush Maharaj had a special fascination for scriptural studies. He himself had purchased a book of *Upanishads* and used to sit with us in the classes. We however did not feel free with his holy presence among us. He understood our feelings and stopped attending classes. But he asked us to tell him whatever was discussed in the class. It was the duty of Omkaranandaji to narrate to him each day's lessons. In his absence, I would do the job.

As I said in the beginning, I was afraid to approach him for my initiation into *brahmacharya* and admission into the Order. But later on, that fear disappeared. When I met Mahapurushji, he appeared outwardly to be somewhat quiet and austere. He would not mince words if it was necessary to scold anybody. That is why many were afraid of him. But later on, all of us discovered that he had a very loving heart. Even his rough exterior disappeared in later days. He became so soft-hearted that he gave free expression to the love he felt for others. He lived like a child of Sri Ramakrishna, hardly conscious of the fact that he was the President of the Order. He had a pet dog. He used to say, 'This is my dog and (pointing to himself) this is the dog of Sri Ramakrishna.' He mentioned this to us many times. In many different ways Mahapurush Maharaj moulded our lives and so he has a special place in our hearts.

### SWAMI AKHANDANANDA

**A**fter Mahapurushji's passing, Swami Akhandanandaji became the President of the Order. He was the first among the brother disciples of Swamiji to implement the ideal of serving God in human beings. He used to say that at Sargachhi, in the *ashrama* he founded, there would be no temple

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for Ramakrishna. God would be worshipped there in every human being who came to the *ashrama*.

One day I was crossing a fence to enter the *Math* (monastery)-building from the riverside. There was a small gate and one could enter by lifting it. Swami Akhandanandaji was upstairs, in the room next to Swamiji's. He was looking out of the window. Behind me there was a mad man following at some distance with a bag on his back. I entered the gate and then lowered it again without giving any thought to the man behind. Swami Akhandanandaji noticed this. He called me to his room and said, 'Did you consider that the other person following you would find it difficult to enter the gate with all the weight on his back?' I expressed my regret for my lack of consideration. I said I should have held the gate open for him. Swami Akhandanandaji told me, 'You must always be mindful about others' convenience. Maybe the other person is not important, or maybe he is a madcap. But even then, he needs to be taken care of.'

Another incident. I had returned to Belur Math from our centre in Mysore and was planning to spend some time in *tapasya*. But I postponed my departure from the *Math* because of Mahapurushji's illness. So after his passing I sought Swami Akhandanandaji's permission to spend sometime in Uttarkashi exclusively in spiritual practices. At that time an earthquake had taken place in Bihar and several people had lost their lives. There was also much damage done to property. Akhandanandaji said to me, 'There is no question of your going now. You must come with me for relief work.' I immediately agreed and told him I was ready.

Thereafter one day Swami Akhandanandaji was sitting as usual with a tea-pot before him. After he finished one cup, I went and poured him another cup from the tea-pot. He smiled and said, 'What is the idea? Are you trying to please me in order to

## Swami Bhuteshhananda

get my permission for going?' I said, 'Maharaj, nothing of that sort. This is pure selfless service.' He smiled. We used to have lot of fun together like that.

Later, he said to me, 'Nowadays you people go and stay in one place and do your meditation. In our days we used to wander about freely, depending only on God, going from place to place without any attachment, all the time with deep meditative awareness.' I said, 'Maharaj, I have never tried that. If you permit me, I shall try it this time.' He thought for a while and said, 'No, you are shy by nature. That kind of life won't suit you. You won't be able to beg from door to door.' Then he said, 'Look, there is another boy going. You two can travel together. He will look after you.' The *brahmachari* (a novice) Maharaj was referring to was my friend, but I had no plan of travelling with him. Moreover, he was going to a different place. So we travelled together only up to the railway station and parted. After reaching Varanasi I wrote a letter to Swami Akhandanandaji and sought his blessings. He blessed me wholeheartedly.

## SWAMI TURIYANANDA

I was greatly fascinated by Swami Turiyanandaji. What impressed me greatly in his life was that he never talked about anything other than spiritual matters. That was his nature. He was always immersed in the thought of God. He had a strong personality. He used to teach us that the purpose of human life was God-realisation. There was no other purpose, But that did not mean he did not like scholarly life among monks of our Order. One day I found him in a very angry mood. It seems he had found a mistake in a magazine of the Order. He took to task the monk responsible for it, saying that they must be mindful of what is published. There should be no printing mistakes.

## The Direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

Once Swami Turiyanandaji said that never in his life had he sat relaxing on an easy chair. He said he always sat erect, and that was literally true. You know about the incident from his life when he refused anaesthesia for a very painful surgery. He simply withdrew his mind from the body. The doctor was surprised. The following day, when the doctor was dressing the wound, he touched a raw part of the flesh and tried to remove a small boil with knife. Swami Turiyanandaji was startled and cried out in pain. The doctor said, 'Maharaj, yesterday you did not feel the pain of a major surgery, and today just this little bit has become so painful to you?' Swami Turiyanandaji told him that he was not prepared for today's minor surgery. If he had been told earlier he could have withdrawn his mind from the body and got ready. Such was the command he had over his body and mind.

He used to say, "When you sit for meditation, write on the door of your mind, NO ADMISSION." That kind of command he had over himself and he expected everyone to strive to have that kind of control.

Living with the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna was a unique experience. Every one of us felt like being a member of a large spiritual family. The entire Order has been closely knit together by the bond of their spiritual love. Thinking of the lives of these disciples of Sri Ramakrishna is an uplifting experience. We find the teachings of Vedanta exemplified in their lives. May their blessings be on all of us.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari,, November 1997)

Man is trying hard to make himself happy. But nothing succeeds unless He wills it. Freedom can be realized, in two ways, by identifying oneself with Him and by living in eternal self-surrender to Him. There can be no freedom of will away from Him.

(Swami Turiyananda)



## 42. On Making Up for a Late Start

Swami Vidyatmananda

One is always hearing how essential youth is when undertaking religious life. Your mind should be bent Godward when it is still plastic.

No doubt there is much truth in this. Certainly nothing is more magnificent than the truly pure soul, the single-minded lover of God from very birth. It is probably quite likely that the sooner you start the more you accomplish. But what if – for one reason or another – you don't have the wish or opportunity to seek God in your earliest days? Are you then to postpone the quest as impossible in the present life; or if you commence it, always labour under a sense of handicap?

There must be something encouraging that can be said for a later beginning. Such may even have advantages. To be discriminative from childhood means that one has experienced everything, if not in this life then in a previous life. But cannot experience and rejection both be crowded into one life? And if so, is not this an equally worthy procedure?

Next to having been dedicated from one's childhood, it seems to me that the second-best thing is to have experienced well and finished cleanly. Then you come to religion with the important requisite of solid conviction, and no twinges of regret for untasted sweets are likely to annoy you later.

Also, is not there a good possibility that the quality of human-heartedness may develop best in the individual of profane past? Fanatics are often those who have never known much of anything, good or bad, and so take out their revenge for always having been nonentities upon those who never were. The honest-to-goodness convert should grow into a wise and loving devotee. Tender understanding – broadness – may result from having known much before. If you begin spiritual life late, perhaps you

## On Making Up for a Late Start

proceed with more intensity. A now-or-never certainty is there to prompt you.

Finally, if someone coming late really accomplishes something in religious life, the utility value of this is very high. At present in America and Europe the most likely candidates for Vedanta may well be the thoroughly worldly-wise. To such the born saint may seem too much of a phenomenon to be interesting, and to such the question must always remain: Can there be true wisdom in mere simplicity? Pure goodness can appear unattractively similar to ignorance. The personality that appeals to the type who has known everything but is seeking, is one who knows everything but has become spiritual. The most convincing example for today's aspirant is one who has gone from unknowing simplicity to sophistication and onward to knowing simplicity. Such types are attractive to modern man because he can grasp them, identify himself with them; they give him courage. How I thank God for the early doings and late beginnings of persons like Augustine and Ignatius! Girish Ghosh may well become the western searcher's patron saint.

Of course this is all a vain argument, for each of us will come to God only when we finally tire of ourselves. The philosophy of Vedanta has always allowed for late arrivals as well as early beginnings. It seems clear that the main thing is to make a start and pursue Him with self-resignation, remembering that in any case the outcome is in His hands.

**(Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912). Playwright, lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, whose worldly life was reformed by the influence of the Master.)**

# God is also Mother – Maya The Temptriss

(Continued from last issue)

Hans Torwesten

## MAYA, THE TEMPTRESS

Most religions – in particular the purely redemption religions – have regarded the feminine *per se* as tempting, even as demonic. Many nations, such as the Celts, had indeed a feeling that woman is close to the divine, and in numerous early societies it was she above all who kept in touch with the divine world – as a shamaness, prophetess, sibyl or priestess. But among the later male-orientated religions, which gradually came to dominate, this only encouraged the suspicion that the women had “something” which the men did not have. It especially irritated them that woman did not make any sharp divisions: her access to the divine world seemed at the same time access to the depths of the earth. She seemed to know secrets which eluded the sharp male understanding.

When in the late Middle Ages and at the beginning of the modern age many women and girls were accused of being in league with the devil and had “intercourse” with him, this male suspicion was fully reawakened – especially in a world, in which the male consciousness radically enforced the division between heaven and the underworld, between light and darkness and often assigned to the female only the dark part. She was almost exclusively identified with the instinctive and sexual – if one ignores the Minnesinger movement in Germany and the veneration of Mary, which however also made a contribution to driving the sexual aspect completely into the underground. Even in

## God is also Mother – 8

Christendom it is known that discussions repeatedly arose again and again as to whether woman had a spiritual soul at all, whether she was not a purely instinctive being. There are still even today cultural philosophies which seriously proclaim that the inferiority and also the danger of woman are to be derived from eternal unalterable archetypes, while man embodies the purely spiritual and heavenly and woman embodies the earthly, abysmal, sensual and seductive – in accordance with the Pythagorean statement, which perhaps derives not from Pythagoras himself, but certainly from a *man*: “There is a good principle, which has created order, light and man, and an evil principle, which has created chaos, darkness and woman.”

One must however be cautious at least in the case of “seductive”. Then for whom is woman seductive? Of course for man. And men have, as we have already often stressed, almost exclusively decided the religion and philosophy of the last thousand years. Any psychologist knows that man projects his feeling of endangerment on woman, especially in a society that suppresses sex life. In his encounter with the female his own sexuality is awakened, but instead of blaming his lust he demonises the “female”. The whole schizophrenia of this situation is revealed for instance in the fact that the Western male world likes to regard woman as the sexual being *par excellence*, from which man as a higher developed spiritual being was glad to separate, but on the other hand denied her the capacity of feeling desire at all. She was the object of pleasure – the pleasure of the allegedly so spiritual man.

## Hans Torwesten

When we described Hinduism as a “female” religion, we did not of course overlook the fact that here also woman has often enough been despised: as the Gate to Hell (a description which we find not only among the Christian fathers of the Church such as Tertulian), as an instinctive being, a seducer. Of course there were also in India great courageous women, from the time of the Upanishads, in which women often even won in spiritual verbal contests with men, until today, where, as also in Europe, there have been a Catherine of Siena or a Theresa of Avila or highly influential princesses. But that does not alter the fact that woman in India over long periods of time formed a lower “caste by themselves”, who did not even have access to the *Vedas* and did not receive the holy thread of the “twice-born”.

It is true that Indian metaphysics is full of “feminine” terms, such as *Shakti*, *Maya*, *Prakriti*, etc., but the female principal is not always raised up to a high throne, it often enough represents the contents of our existence. While man sets himself up as the real Self, as the subject, identical with the highest *Purusha*, he assigns to the female the roll of the non-self, the object, the “other”, which actually should not be the case. Yes, basically it is a non-being, whose complete void is revealed in enlightenment. All the same this non-being repeatedly swells up powerfully for incomprehensible reasons for the as yet – unenlightened person – and becomes the great seducer and falsifier of the true being, which by her illusion-creating *Maya* power makes many out of the One. The consciousness of the male ascetic has to exert itself a great deal to drive this cloud away again. It has to

## God is also Mother – 8

concentrate itself into a ray of male spirit, which has to get to the bottom of this female sphinx, and in this case it means stamping this Maya into the ground, completely destroying it and then heave a sigh of relief on discovering that “actually” there was never a Maya Sphinx at all. Just as the last female animal was driven from Mount Athos, the female was also swept away from the heights of Indian Vedanta philosophy, so as to permit the snow white summit of the male Absolute to shine the more brightly and clearly.

One must not underestimate the power of expression of this archetypal world, even if one has detected that it is characterised above all by male consciousness. Many philosophers and especially monks take over the hierarchy of this world of images, without being conscious of the fact that it is here also a question of sexual explanations. They will insist that these are eternal objective truths – and not subjective struggles of the male mind, which seeks to suppress the female element or even destroy it.

The self-assertion of the male ascetic mind is however only one side of Hinduism. It is true that the religion, which developed and was established in the ranks of the Arian invaders – the “Vedic”, especially a male character, but also elements of the culture and religion of the original inhabitants obstinately survived and even achieved here and there dominance again, so that present-day Hinduism is a strange mixture of Vedic (Indo-Arian) and Dravidian elements, in which the latter tend to represent a “motherly” element. Goddesses such as Durga and Kali cannot be conceived without this dark “mother soil” – as well as all

## Hans Torwesten

the "black" Madonnas which have always grown out of this deep layer, whether in Poland, Spain, South and Central America or among the gypsies who originally came from India. Even the male Krishna, whom his worshippers like to regard as the only "man" in the universe, cannot – in spite of much Arian warlike talk in the Gita – deny his "dark" origin: He, the black or dark blue, who has so many features in common with Kali.

Translated by John Phillips  
(To be continued)

"Reliance on one's apparent self leads to ruin. To presume to be all-knowing is extremely harmful. Self-reliance or self-confidence means faith in the Higher Self. To persist in remaining what one already is or in holding on to one's preconceived opinions at any cost such self-importance is bad."

Swami: "One must have the capacity to love. Oh, how madly we used to love in our boyhood! I loved my brothers so much that the thought of renouncing them to become a Sannyasin, used to make me cry. But afterwards the Master snapped these ties one by one.

He asked S.: "Whom do you love?"

S. said: 'I do not love anyone.'

'Oh, you dry fellow!' the Master remarked."

When the Lord sees that man is finding it hard to give up anything for Him, then He Himself takes it away. Extreme self-abnegation and self-abasement are the *sine qua non* of true passionlessness and renunciation. He who possesses nothing, to him alone the Lord comes.

(Swami Turiyananda)

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"Nothing short of complete self-surrender to Him will do. You call Him the Inner controller, omniscient, and omnipresent, and yet you are afraid to surrender yourself to Him! Thinkest thou that thou wilt realize Mother by thy hypocritical devotion? No, no, this is not a sweet in a child's hand that thou wilt cajole it out of Her.' You cannot deceive God. He sees all....

'Thou art the doer, not I; Thou art the mechanic, I am the machine.'...

I am a jealous God.' If you love anything else than God and do not renounce all for Him, you cannot realize Him."

"Nobody wants Him. Men want to get rid of their misery, to enjoy life. To conceive a 'motiveless' love for Him is very difficult.... I knew a man who used to cry for solitude. But one day he asked, 'Shall I marry again ?'"

(Swami Turiyananda)

## **Programme for November - December 2013**

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)

Nov	3	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 32	Swami Dayatmananda
Nov	10	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 33	Swami Dayatmananda
Nov	17	Message of Sri Ramakrishna	Swami Suhitananda
Nov	24	Day Retreat	
Dec	1	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 34	Swami Dayatmananda
Dec	8	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 35	Swami Dayatmananda
Dec	15	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 36	Swami Dayatmananda
Dec	22	No Talk	
Dec	24	Christmas Eve	
Dec	29	No Talk	

### **Day Retreat**

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda  
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 24<sup>th</sup> November  
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.  
Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

### **Christmas Eve Celebration**

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> December  
at Bourne End at 5:00 pm

### **Holy Mother's Puja**

Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> January  
at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

There are many obstructions to concentration: *Laya*, *Vikshepa*, *Kashaya*, *Rasasvada*.

*Laya* is the mind being overcome by *Tamas* (inertia). The mind falls asleep and loses consciousness. Most aspirants are held down by *Laya*. *Vikshepa* is the scattering of the mind on multifarious objects. *Kashaya* is finding meditation distasteful—one feels disinclined to meditate. But one must still persist. *Rasasvada* is the mind being fascinated by the vision of divine forms and refusing to ascend higher....

Passions will last so long as the body lasts. But through His grace they cannot raise their heads.

You must yearn to see Him. The heart must pant and pine for Him. The Master said to us, 'It is because I had such intense longing for the Mother that She gave me every convenience—She gave me this Kali Temple and Mathur Babu.

If there is sincere longing for God, everything becomes favourable.' There is no other way than Bhakti, devotion to God.

Swami Turiyananda

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*Editorial Adviser:* John Phillips

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You can never be emancipated by adoring a man as man—you must look upon him as God. However great he may be in spiritual wisdom and dispassionateness, however highly endowed he may be with spiritual powers, the worship of him will not bring your liberation, if you do not perceive him as God Himself. Without such a consciousness, his worship may serve to communicate to you his spiritual qualities and powers, but nothing more.

If you worship a divine Incarnation, knowing him as such or not, he will surely grant you God-realization.

The Gopis realized God even though they considered Shri Krishna as only their lover.

(Swami Turiyananda)

