

Vedanta

376 MARCH - APRIL 2014

A New Blanket For The Old Ones

Swami Sridananda

Gargi And Yajnavalkya

Swami Tadrupananda



Divine Wisdom

Teachings of Swami Saradananda

To repeat the Lord's name and to worship Him, no special time and place are necessary. In whatever condition one may be one can take His name.

Through selfless work the mind gets purified. And when the mind becomes pure, there arise knowledge and devotion in it. Knowledge is the very nature of the Self; but being covered with ignorance it is not manifest. The object of selfless work is to remove this ignorance.

First you have to attain knowledge. After attaining knowledge, when one returns to this world of diversity, one will see everything as before, but will no longer be attached to anything in it. After one realizes God, the world seems to be a mere appearance like the mirage. There is nothing in it that can attract one.

What really comes in the spiritual domain is this unswerving faith—faith in the words of the Guru, in the Lord, in the scriptures.

The Master would compare the mind to a packet of mustard seeds, “If the packet is once untied, the seeds get scattered in all directions. How difficult it is to collect them again! Some are perhaps lost for ever.” But absolute faith makes the impossible possible.

No man is wholly above defects. But some try to get rid of them, while others do not feel any need for that. Since you have taken refuge at the Lord's feet, you certainly feel the need of eliminating them and have also the will to do so, and the Lord too will grant you the strength for this. We too have taken shelter under Him and are trying to free ourselves from all shortcomings, that is all. What power have we to do something for somebody? But I always pray whole-heartedly for the good of yourself and all others, and I do so even now.

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ISSN 1355 - 6436

Editorial

Types of Prayer

Prayer is the wing wherewith the soul flies to heaven, and meditation the eye wherewith we see God. (St. Ambrose.)

Each soul is divine, perfect. Until this perfection is reached desires will remain. Every desire is a prayer articulated or not. Men are at various stages of this journey to perfection, hence man's prayer also depends upon the state of his consciousness.

Regarding the efficacy of prayer, Swami Vivekananda says: 'By prayer one's subtle powers are easily roused, and if consciously done, all desires may be fulfilled by it'.

Prayers are of two types: Secular and spiritual.

The *Gita* classifies men into four types: those who are in distress; seekers of 'more' be it wealth, power, progeny, long life etc.; enquirers after truth; and those who are perfect. The prayers of these four classes also differ accordingly. The first two types of men fall into the worldly type. The third one has had enough of the world and now seeks to know the goal of life and the way to attain it.

According to Christianity prayer is divided into five types.

Petition

Petition is asking, begging God for something. In this type of prayer man prays for relief from distress for oneself or one's family, or a beloved person. This is considered as the lowest form of prayer.

Intercession

Intercession is a petitionary prayer on behalf of another person. Here one is asking God to help somebody. We find Sri Ramakrishna vowing for the health of Keshab Sen. "I made a vow to worship the Mother with green coconut and sugar on Keshab's recovery".

Types of Prayer

Penitence

Penitence is seeking forgiveness of all evil acts one has done in the past and is now repenting. In this prayer one also asks for strength so that one does not repeat such deeds in future.

Thanksgiving

Here a devotee reaches a state where he feels immensely grateful for all that he receives from God, even pain and suffering. Gratitude is a rare commodity. We take many things for granted as our birth-right. Only in an advanced stage do we realize that everything we get is a gift from God, and become grateful for everything we get.

When suffering comes we tend to blame God or someone else. We do not realize that Divine Providence uses pain for our own good by teaching us valuable lessons in life. God wants us to suffer, so that we may attain illumination sooner.

Adoration.

Adoration is a prayer that springs from our heart when we understand our relationship with God. When man realizes that God is the ground of every thing and every object, and that this world is a glory of God, he bursts into spontaneous praise.

From the spiritual point of view the highest expression of prayer is total self-surrender. Here the devotee surrenders his all and maintains the attitude of '*Thy will be done*'.

'Lord, inspire us to read your Scriptures and meditate upon them day and night. We beg you to give us real understanding of what we need, that we in turn may put its precepts into practice. We ask that the words of Scriptures may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into our hearts'. Origen

Prayers for spiritual progress

One of the most ancient, sacred and most potent prayers is the *Gayatri mantra*. Even today millions of Hindus repeat this

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mantra at least once a day if not twice or thrice. This is a mantra which can be repeated by anyone irrespective of race, religion, gender and nationality. The mantra simply means

'O Lord, I meditate upon you. May you give me Right Understanding'.

Sri Ramakrishna teaches us how to pray to the Lord quoting the example of Narada.

Narada says: *'What boon shall I ask of Thee, Lord? Grant me pure love for Thy Lotus Feet, and may I never be deluded by Thy world-bewitching maya!'*

Vedanta has given us some of the most wonderful prayers which can be chanted by anyone. Here for instance, we have the peace incantation which a spiritual aspirant offers every day:

'Om. Lead me from the unreal unto the real, from darkness unto light, from death unto immortality.' He prays for enlightenment, to walk in the path of God, to endear himself to Him. God being the only reality, he wants Him only.

So he prays: *'O gods, may we hear with our ears, only what is auspicious; may we see what is only auspicious with our eyes O ye worshipful ones; may we sing praises to ye, and by our strong body and limbs may we enjoy the life allotted to us by the gods. May there be peace.'*

Sri Ramakrishna teaches us through his own example: *"To my Divine Mother I prayed only for pure love. I offered flowers at Her Lotus Feet and prayed to Her: 'Mother, here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy knowledge, here is Thy ignorance. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy dharma, here is Thy adharma. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee.'*

Universal prayers

A spiritual aspirant is not satisfied with his own good. As he progresses towards his goal he feels more and more the presence of God and feels for the welfare of the whole world. So he prays:

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'May all be blissful, may all be free from diseases, may all see what is auspicious, may not anyone be miserable.'

Then there are the hymns that speak of the glory of the Self. Here is one instance of it. *'I meditate at dawn within my heart on the Self-effulgent Atman, the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute, the goal of the supreme ascetics, transcendental and eternal, who is beyond the states of waking, dream and deep sleep. That Brahman I am, not a combination of material elements.'*

Prayer is *the* most important part of spiritual life. A sincere prayer can inspire, guide and lead us to God.

Here is a prayer that says all:

'Give me, dear Lord, a pure heart and a wise mind, that I may carry out my work according to your will. Save me from all false desires, from pride, greed, envy and anger, and let me accept joyfully every task you set before me. Let me seek to serve the poor, the sad and those unable to work. Help me to discern honestly my own gifts that I may do the things of which I am capable, and happily and humbly leave the rest to others. Above all, remind me constantly that I have nothing except what you give me, and can do nothing except what you enable me to do'. (Jacob Boehme)

Swami Dayatmananda

Perfect peace will not come until the mind is fully concentrated. You must dwell on God uninterruptedly and be absorbed in the contemplation of His true nature.

If you practice japa and meditation regularly, without break for some years, you will see for yourself what result comes to pass. Your mind will become pure and you will be absorbed in the thought of God. Then you will be reluctant to leave off meditation even for a single day. There will come an inner tranquillity which will fill your heart with joy.

Swami Saradananda

A New Blanket For The Old Ones

Swami Sridananda

Narada the heavenly minstrel was on his earthly wanderings when he suddenly stopped before a hermitage on the banks of river Narmada. It was a summer afternoon. Narada was thirsty; his limbs were tired. A cup of water and a little respite were the need of the hour.

His eager eyes discovered something unusual about the hermitage, something exceptional to the general tradition of such hermitages. He saw a curious signboard put up before that hermitage. It contained a writing which read as follows: 'A New Blanket for the Old One'. Narada pondered with awe and wonder writ large in his eyes, and said to himself, 'What on earth does this mean? Come what may, I will have a bargain with the sage inside.' With due reverence, he entered the hermitage and received a welcome greeting from a figure that compared well with any Greek sculpture in perfection and grace. Narada bowed before the sage who made a sign to him to be seated. There was complete silence for a time; the sage, as it were, retired into a cloister of silence. Narada himself broke the ice.

Narada said, 'Will you kindly enlighten me on the contents of your signboard?'

The sage opened his lips with a bewitching smile and replied: 'Well sir, it is my wont to know something about the enquirer before I answer him. So it behoves you to tell me who you are.'

Narada: 'I am Narada, the son of Brahma. I move about singing the glory of the Lord'

'That will do. Now let me know what 'Narada' is!' interrupted the sage.

'That is the name by which I am known' replied Narada.

Sage: So, Narada is only a sign to denote a certain personality?

Narada: Yes, for the purpose of identification a particular name is used denoting this personality (pointing to himself).

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Sage: Do you think a different name used instead might have changed your personality?

Narada: No sir, not in the least.

Sage: Well, then your personality is different from your name; otherwise it might change with the change of name. Then, is it identical with the body?

Narada: No. The body is constantly changing and the changes are witnessed by me. Therefore I am different from the body.

Sage: Does your personality depend upon the gross body for its existence?

Narada: No, I understand the absence of the physical body in dream on investigation.

Sage: Does personality depend upon the mind?

Narada: No. The mind disappears in the dreamless sleep.

Sage: Thus we find that the real personality is something which persists and that it does not depend on the gross body or subtle mind for its existence. Yet, it persists in all the three states of wakefulness, dream and in deep sleep.

Narada: Does it exist in dreamless sleep?

Sage: Yes. In deep sleep when everything else disappears, it remains there as a witness to that state. On waking, it reports that it had a sound sleep and that it did not know anything else.

Narada: If the witness exists in deep sleep, why did it not perceive anything?

Sage: How can it see anything in the absence of objects? There, the subject alone remains; there is no second entity as an object to be seen or perceived. In the absence of a second, all relationships and all relative knowledge become impossible. Hence, the experience in deep sleep is unique and independent. There the personality exists in its pristine purity; it transcends the body, mind and intellect.

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This proves that the real personality can exist without these adjuncts of body, mind, etc. Nor is it affected by death; it is immortal and is the Reality or Personality of man.

Narada: You say that the witness is immortal. Does it survive death?

Sage: What do you mean by death?

Narada: The fall of the body.

Sage: That is to say, the absence of the body. That is the only logical surmise.

Narada: Yes, sir.

Sage: Do you get any notion of the presence of the body in deep sleep?

Narada: No sir. But does it not prove the absence of the witness itself? Otherwise, the presence of the body might have been felt. Moreover, the absence of the body also is not felt then. No knowledge whatsoever is present then. So I would contend that the witness itself is absent during deep sleep and not the body, because the presence of the body is seen by others who are not sleeping.

Sage: Do you admit that there is an interim period which is neither waking nor dream?

Narada: Yes sir, I do admit that there is such a state.

Sage: What is the source of that knowledge? Is it some external agency, just in the same manner you learn about the presence of your body when you are asleep?

Narada: No sir, it is my own knowledge.

Sage: Is it not the knowledge of your own existence? Narada: Yes sir, it is.

Sage: Does it depend on any external aids, or is there any subject - object relationship about it?

Narada: No, sir.

Sage: - So there is existence during deep sleep?

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Narada: Definitely so.

Sage: And consequently, there is knowledge without subject-object relationship?

Narada: Obviously.

Sage: Therefore it follows that this existence in deep sleep is knowledge, and that both are one, because there is no second in that state. That existence or knowledge is independent of all relations, independent of the body, senses etc.. Hence the death of the body cannot affect it. We therefore say that this existence, or personality if you like, is immortal and eternal.

And what is your experience on waking? Is it happiness or sorrow? Does anyone feel sad for having slept soundly?

Narada: No sir, no one feels unhappy over a sound sleep. On the other hand, one is sad when he does not get good sleep.

Sage: Then it cannot be but a pleasant experience.

Narada: Certainly, it is bliss.

Sage: Now, we are getting clear and near. As there is no other entity in deep sleep except that existence which we said is knowledge itself, it follows that happiness or bliss we experience is naturally identical with that existence. So what exists is Existence - Knowledge - Bliss. It is Absolute existence, and that is the real Personality of man, immortal and ever shining.

Narada: How is it that this Reality is embodied?

Sage: Truly speaking, it is not embodied; it only appears to be so. Once the embodiment is conceded, it enters into relationship with various objects. Such relationships are apparent only, for, if they were true and real, they could not vanish in deep sleep. The Reality appears embodied because of the *upadhis* manufactured out of ignorance (*avidya*). It is the *upadhis* which cause the appearance of embodiedness. They may be considered as coverings or *koshas*, sheaths in which human existence is embedded. They are five in number. First is the gross physical

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form called *Annamaya*. Second is the vital content or *Pranamaya*. Third is the mental stuff or *Manomaya* which, in turn, gives rise to will, cognition etc.. This will, cognition etc., constitute the fourth kosha, called *Vijnanamaya*.

The fifth and last is *Anandamaya* which is full of bliss. These are not really sheaths or coverings; they are just five different planes of existence. They are just five different phases of the embodied state brought into being by the outlook at a particular moment. When a man thinks he is stout or lean, he is in *Annamaya* plane. The sense of strength or vigour for activity is the functioning of the vital or *Pranamaya* plane. Emotional plane is *Manomaya*, while the volitional and cognitional plane is *Vijnanamaya*. *Anandamaya* is the plane of happiness, equanimity and equilibrium. The embodied individuality functions on all these planes. They are the blankets with which the embodied existence protects itself. As this apparent individuation matures, the erroneous identification of the Self with these various phases of embodiedness increases, and hence the individual derives pleasure from the functionings of the so called *koshas*. Eventually, attachment to the *koshas* strengthens. Measures are adopted for their protection, and more and more blankets are added for the security of that embodied state. Ignorance of the real nature of the Self is the cause of that erroneous identification and the resulting attachment. Parallel to such identification and attachment, aversion or hatred to all that shakes or endangers the security of the embodied state also results.

In this way the man, over and above these initial five blankets, adds many other little blankets like 'I am Narada', 'I am son of Brahma', 'I am a devotee of God' etc.. As the web of relations expands, the weight of blankets also increases, and a massive ignorance enshrouds the whole personality. Every new blanket added makes him feel that he is secure and happy, but

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sooner or later his own experience reveals the hollowness of that security and happiness. Every wave of pain and pleasure, of joy and sorrow, exposes an unexplored expanse of insecurity, and he tries to hide that insecurity with more and more blankets of ignorance. But these blankets cannot protect him as they cannot stand the test of truth. The light of truth will penetrate all these blankets sometime or other and expose their futility. So, I would advise you to cast away these blankets; they are old and worthless.

Narada: How to cast them away?

Sage: It is to be effected by a change in outlook. These blankets are brought into existence by an outlook born of ignorance. They constitute a bundle of ignorance, and you are clothed with that bundle. Clear all of them away and get hold of a new one called the blanket of knowledge, and that blanket of knowledge is only one. It is termed in Vedanta as '*Isavasyam idam sarvam*'. That is the blanket of God. Clothe everything with that blanket and it will protect you against all evils. No more security measures are required. When knowledge dawns, ignorance disappears. The *upadhi*-blankets will no more hide your real nature which is *Sat, Chit, Ananda*. The new blanket I promise is the blanket of God; it is *Isavasyam idam sarvam*. All others are old and worn out and are worldly.

Narada: How does this new blanket protect me? Will it not be an additional burden?

Sage: No, it can never be a burden if you can only see that everything is God, including yourself. All that you cognize is symbolical of *Isavasyam idam sarvam*.

In this outlook, there is nothing that is excluded. Is there anything that is exclusively loved? All are expressive of the same Reality. There is neither aversion nor attachment to anything particular.

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With that outlook, all activities become an offering to the Lord. The limited personality is crucified, and is resurrected in the Universal. That offers you protection from every evil. Take this *Isavasyam idam blanket* and be free forever.

Narada: I am too glad to do so. When I approached you, I was not aware that I was carrying old blankets. I was only curious about your strange sign-board.

You not only showed me my burden but also relieved me of it. I was even ignorant of my ignorance. Now, by your grace I have the 'new blanket', which is after all, if I have understood you all right, the negation of all blankets through knowledge. I am deeply beholden to you!

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, May 1954)

You complain that thoughts of duties sometimes intrude when you sit for meditation. All minds are in the same predicament. You cannot escape this even if you leave work and retire to a forest. But if through God's grace it becomes firmly impressed on your mind that the world is impermanent, and if the idea that God alone is your true goal takes a grip on your heart, then this kind of unsteadiness of the mind will be greatly eliminated. To have a strong longing for God and feel ill at ease just because God has not been realised are, however, dependent on His grace. Pray to Him for this with all earnestness.

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Gargi And Yajnavalkya

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The country of Videha was ruled by the great King Janaka. Once he performed a sacrifice in which plenty of gifts were given away to scholars and pious men. Erudite Brahmins from Kuru and Panchala, the famous seats of learning, were assembled there either on invitation or as spectators.

At the sight of that large gathering of Vedic scholars, a desire arose in the mind of King Janaka to know who was the most erudite among them. He had a thousand young cows with horns adorned with gold brought near the place where the sacrifice was being conducted. Then, addressing the assembly, he declared, 'Respected sires, let him, the greatest Vedic scholar among you, take away these cows home.' Silence prevailed for a time, for none dared to claim that supreme honour for himself.

Then Yajnavalkya rose and ordered his disciple to drive the cows to his home. But then a number of Brahmins sprang to their feet and challenged Yajnavalkya's tacit declaration of his own supremacy in scholarship. Volleys of questions were shot at him, to all of which he gave convincing replies. When one by one the scholars were silenced, there rose Gargi, the daughter of Vachaknu, to engage Yajnavalkya in a scholarly dispute. What followed is one of the most famous of upanishadic dialogues.

Gargi: 'If all that is composed of earth is pervaded within and without by water, what pervades water?'

Yajnavalkya: 'Air pervades water.'

Gargi: 'What pervades air?'

Yajnavalkya: 'Sky pervades air.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the sky?'

Yajnavalkya: 'The worlds of the Gandharvas (celestial minstrels) pervade the sky'

Gargi: 'What pervades the worlds of the Gandharvas?'

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Yaj: 'The worlds of the sun pervade the worlds of the Gandharvas.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the worlds of the sun?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of the moon pervade those of the sun.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the worlds of the moon.'

Yaj: 'The worlds of the stars pervade those of the moon.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the worlds of the stars?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of the Gods pervade those of the stars.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the worlds of the Gods?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of Indra pervade those of the Gods.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the worlds of Indra?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of Virat pervade those of Indra.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the worlds of Virat?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of Hiranyagarbha pervade those of Virat.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the worlds of Hiranyagarbha?'

At this stage Yajnavalkya realized that his illustrious interlocutor was going too far.

The Reality which is beyond Hiranyagarbha or the Cosmic Mind cannot be known by the ordinary mind, much less described in words. Mind and speech turn backwards unable to reach the Supreme Reality which can be known only through direct intuitive experience. Therefore, Yajnavalkya told Gargi, 'Do not, O Gargi, endeavour to go further in your attempt to know the Supreme Reality that pervades Hiranyagarbha and, for that matter, pervades all the worlds previously mentioned. If you persist, your head may fall off!' Thus admonished Gargi desisted from further questioning.

Then Uddalaka, the son of Aruna, rose and put a series of brilliant questions to which Yajnavalkya gave luminous answers. When Uddalaka sat down, Gargi again got up, this time with two more questions which she wanted to shoot, like arrows, at Yajnavalkya. But before asking those questions she asked for the

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permission of the erudite assembly. The consent was given and Gargi straightway held forth:

Gargi: 'As water pervades the elemental earth, so what pervades the Sutra which is above heaven and below the earth, which embraces heaven and earth as well as the region between them and which according to the scriptures is timeless?'

Yaj: 'O Gargi, it is the unmanifested ether that pervades the Sutra thus and which is timeless.'

Gargi: 'Salutation to you, Yajnavalkya. I am satisfied with your answer. But now, my second question.' Yajnavalkya: 'Ask, O Gargi.'

Gargi: 'What pervades the unmanifested ether?'

Yaj: 'O Gargi, the knowers of Brahman describe It as undecaying and unchanging. They say Brahman has no dimensions nor has it any colour. It is utterly unlike earth, water, air, fire or ether. It is partless, is neither internal nor external. Unlike the body and mind It has no organs.' Thus indicating the attributeless nature of Brahman, Yajnavalkya proceeded to say how it nevertheless is the support and substratum of the entire manifested universe.

Said he, 'By the supreme command of this imperishable Being the sun and the moon keep their courses, the earth and sky remain apart, the illusion of time in all its subtle divisions is experienced, the rivers maintain their courses and the mountains tower over everything else. All beings, O Gargi, even the departed souls, depend on Brahman for their sustenance.'

Yajnavalkya then exhorted Gargi to know the truth of Brahman by praising it: 'O Gargi, all the merits derived by the performance of sacrifice are evanescent, Brahman alone is imperishable. One who leaves this world after gaining the knowledge of Brahman, he alone is a blessed soul, all the others are all miserable slaves.'

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But the knowledge of Brahman cannot be gained for the asking. It is extremely subtle. To impress this fact on Gargi's mind, Yajnavalkya says next, 'O Gargi, this Immutable One is not the object of sight, of hearing, of the mind or of the intellect, It Itself is the Seer, the Hearer, the Thinker and the Knower. It is Consciousness itself. It is all-pervading and sees through all eyes, hears through all ears, thinks through all minds, knows through all intellects. Indeed, It pervades all elements from the earth to the unmanifested ether'

The above words so authoritatively spoken by the great sage had silenced all her doubts. And with that magnanimity that characterises great minds, she concluded her debate with the following words: 'Venerable Brahmanas, you should consider it a great thing if you can get away by saluting Yajnavalkya. I am convinced that he stands supreme amongst you all in the knowledge of Brahman.' So saying the daughter of Vacaknu ceased talking.

Source: Chapter III, sections 6 and 8 of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad with translation. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, July, 1969)

You need not meditate long on your Guru, but just remember and salute him and then spend most of the time in the meditation of your Chosen Deity. Meditate on the Deity as you go on repeating His name.

Since past mental tendencies cannot assert themselves during the performance of duties, you should apply your whole mind to them. Selfless work is the best means of winning a victory over past tendencies.

Swami Saradananda

Toward The Goal Supreme

Swami Prabhavananda

There is a Hindu legend that tells of Mother Durga, the mother of the universe, and her two children – Kartika and Ganesha. Kartika is out-going, the God of world-success and prosperity; he is also the god of warriors. Ganesha is contemplative, his mind is inward, devoted to Divine Mother.

One day the Mother held a priceless necklace before her two sons and announced: 'Whichever of you goes around the universe and comes back to me first will receive this treasure.' Kartika confidently began the journey in a space-ship, certain that he would win the treasure. However, Ganesha seemed in no hurry and he took his time. Slowly he walked around the Mother and then bowed down before her. Mother Durga gave him the necklace.

When Kartika returned, to his amazement, he found Ganesha wearing the treasure. This legend could be said to be symbolical of our present position in the world today. Kartika and Ganesha, though opposite in tendencies, are both children of Divine Mother. Kartika could be said to represent time and technology and Ganesha religion or spiritual life. Kartika probes the outward universe, Ganesha probes the inner universe.

Within a very few years' time, technology has made tremendous progress. What was considered only yesterday science fiction, today has become a reality. Millions of people all over the world witnessed with a thrill as man walked on the moon.

In time, I believe, we shall be able to explore other planets and perhaps we shall be able to communicate with human beings like ourselves.

We must also remember that Kartika is a God of warriors as well as of technology. We are all aware that there is constantly hanging over us a thermo-nuclear cloud of destruction capable of destroying all human life. This *cloud* is also a result of human

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intelligence – of Kartika’s power; it is human intelligence that has wrought this peril and from where does this intelligence come? It comes from God, from Divine Mother.

There is fire. We can cook our meal with the fire, or we can burn down our house. It can be constructive or destructive. It is not the fault of the fire. It is the fault of those who use it.

Still, I am not a pessimist. I do not believe that this thermo-nuclear cloud will burst. Every nation with this power must be aware that it would be a suicidal policy to use it. They would destroy themselves along with the rest of the world. Furthermore, I see a good sign – the revolt of youth everywhere in the world. Parents and the older generation, who wish to preserve their way of thinking and behaving – their world – believe their children are acting irrationally and sometimes cruelly. Yet one thing is apparent – there is a total rejection of materialism! Youth sees that their parents have made money, have social position; but are they happy? No! There is a demand among the young for a higher goal. No matter how misled and misguided they may be, behind all that, there is this strong reaction to reject materialism and to demand a higher goal of life – a supreme goal.

And here we find the introspective wisdom of Ganesha coming to the forefront—reacting against the current predominance of Kartika’s technological power. As a result, we have this greater urge for spiritual life amongst the younger generation.

With regard to probing the *inner* universe – it is not a new frontier – it has already been explored. Exemplars are not wanting. Every religion in this world has produced great spiritual giants or mystics. They have cleared the path for us. We have only to follow. However, in order that we may follow, we must know exactly *what* that goal of life is. Is it the acceptance of certain dogmas and beliefs and doctrines? Is it to go out in the world and

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do good? Can we only *do good* to the world with our hands? These are the things to consider. Spiritual life or spiritual pursuit is not something blind and purposeless. It is not something that we will achieve in the next life. It has a specific end to achieve and a definite goal to attain. And that goal has to be attained. In the words of the Upanishads 'Here and now, not after the death of the body.' The spiritual aspirant must think for himself, clearly and definitely; he must understand what that goal is, for only then will the pursuit of spiritual life be meaningful.

What is that goal? All scriptures and all religions, without any exception, define that goal as 'the fulfilment of one's life.' And if we use our common sense – which at times seems to be so un-common – we would have to come to the same conclusion. No one could argue with that goal; everyone wants *fulfilment*.

In this connection, just a few months back, a clergyman came to visit the Vedanta Temple in Hollywood. One of our nuns asked him: 'Sir, please tell us what you think is the goal of life.' And his answer was: 'The fulfilment of human aspirations.' Did he mean, he was asked, by 'fulfilment of human aspirations', finding a beautiful wife, acquiring prosperity and name and fame? These are certainly human and natural aspirations! But when you have fulfilled all these 'human aspirations', what have you got? Does not frustration come in the end? Where is the fulfilment?

No. Fulfilment comes when we realize the eternal, the unchangeable reality amongst the non-eternals of life, when we attain that highest abiding joy in the midst of the fleeting pleasures of life.

Then the clergyman said: 'I do not believe that there is any unchangeable reality.' Saying so he refuted the existence of God. For what is God? What is Christ? Call *that* God or Christ or Atman, the Self within! Names do not make any difference. Where is that unchangeable reality? It is all within ourselves! God, that

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Reality, is not 'way out there in the blue somewhere' as many people half-heartedly believe. Which reminds me of the time I was listening to the radio as a minister spoke. He said: 'Do you know how God listens to our prayers? Just as you tune in your radio, God has his radio tuned in way up in heaven.'

No. He is *not* there 'out somewhere.' The kingdom of God is *within*.

There is a story in the Upanishads. Narada, a spiritual aspirant, went to Sanatkumara, who was a knower of Brahman, and said to him: 'Holy sir, I studied science, logic, philosophy, scriptures; I have studied all branches of learning, but I find no peace. I have studied all this, but the Self I do not know. I have heard from great teachers like you that he who knows the Self or God within, overcomes grief. Grief has been my lot. Show me the way to overcome grief and find that peace which is beyond understanding.'

Then Sanatkumara began to teach him. After much discussion, he gave this truth: 'The Infinite is the source of joy; there is no joy in the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite is mortal. One who knows, meditates upon, and realizes the truth of the Self, the Infinite Being, such a one delights in the Self, revels in the Self, rejoices in the Self. He becomes master of himself and master of all the worlds. Slaves are they who know not this truth.'

Now the question is what is the proof of the existence of the Self, or Atman or God? Can our reason or intellect prove that existence? One great seer-philosopher of India pointed out that you can give proof in scientific terms for the existence of God; again there are other intellectuals who through logic, through reasoning, can prove the non-existence of God. In fact, in India there has been a great philosopher, Kapila, who said, 'There is no God, because there is no proof for the existence of God.'

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Where is the real proof? Can it be found in scriptures? In the scriptures we read that Christ or Moses, Krishna or Ramakrishna, or the great seers of the Upanishads had experienced God. But does that satisfy us? No. If you are hungry and another eats food, does that satisfy your appetite? When someone is sick, and you take the medicine for him, does that cure the patient?

Truth can be known through two methods. One method is direct perception through the senses. That is one proof. From the data we take in through our senses, we *infer* something to be true. This is the *empirical* method. But God cannot be known or seen through the senses. Our senses can only *infer* that He exists.

Many philosophers in the West have come to the unknown from the known; they have proved the existence of God, or the Absolute, but here is the question: What guarantee is there that their *idea* of God agrees with the reality of God? After all, it is only an *idea* of God that is proved.

So there is another kind of proof and that is *spiritual* proof, which is perceived through the subtle supersensuous power of Yoga. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* we read how Sri Krishna tells his disciple Arjuna: 'You cannot see God with these eyes, but I shall give you divine sight.' That divine sight has to be opened. It is possible. It is latent in every one of us. To quote the Psalmist: 'Lord, open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' *Open my eyes!* The eyes have to be opened. Pray, pray with a longing, yearning heart for the truth of God. Direct perception is possible; that is the only proof for the existence of God.

As the seers of the Upanishads, as well as great seers in other countries point out: 'I have known the Truth.' Also they tell us: 'Ye also shall know the Truth, then only you can attain freedom and immortality'. In the Upanishads we read: 'Brahman may be

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realized while yet living in this ephemeral body. To fail to realize Him is to live in ignorance, and therefore subject to birth and death. The knowers of Brahman are immortal; others, knowing Him not, continue in the bonds of grief.'

A question may arise. Those who claim to have known God, to have seen God, are in the minority. Very few in any age have had the direct experience of God. How do we know that they are not deluded? Perhaps Christ or Buddha was deluded; perhaps they were insane. At times they behaved like psychotics. But study their lives, their characters. Pure! Look at the power behind them! Here the majority does not prove the truth; though a majority can elect a president, a majority cannot elect God!

These God-men are in the minority because very few consciously desire that Reality – very few want God! My Master once said: 'People's minds are busy with trivial things. Who wants the real treasure?' One time he said: 'We have the treasure to offer, but people only come to get potatoes, onions and eggplants.' Then he said: 'They have time for all kinds of worldly works, but when it comes to spiritual effort, they say: "Where is the time for it?" 'It is what Buddha called the greatest sin – laziness. Through the grace of the Lord, one can be granted a combination of three things: human birth, the desire for the truth of God (or desire for liberation) and the grace of a Guru, an illumined teacher. If one has that intense longing, that desire, then even God comes down in human form to teach him. The one thing necessary is that longing, that desire'.

If we understand the words of Jesus properly, we shall find he says the same thing: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, 'Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.' What does to be born of water and of the spirit mean?

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One does not receive rebirth of the spirit by merely being dipped into water, or by being sprinkled with it. No. Being born of water, of the spirit is what we call in Vedanta initiation. A power is transmitted by the teacher to the disciple in the form of a seed-word – but the word must come from the lips of a man of God. Then as you chant that holy word, gradually you are born in spirit. But it is necessary that you have, initially, *Viveka* or discrimination. You have to convince yourself – no matter how your mind naturally runs after worldly things – that God is the *only* treasure, which ‘no moth can eat’, as Jesus says. *He* is the one treasure. You have to be convinced – in spite of your worldly tendencies – that ‘flat, tame and unprofitable are the uses of the world.’ You have to come to that understanding. You have to be convinced.

What are the methods? Sri Ramakrishna pointed out: ‘As many religions, so many paths.’ There is a saying, ‘All roads lead to Rome,’ but to *reach* Rome must be your goal. So all religions lead you to that one goal which is God, but God must be the goal of your life. Not after death – here and now. You do not have to be born again in the womb to be reborn. While living now you can be reborn in Spirit.

The way is through meditation, prayer, and a concentrated mind. To quote the words of the great seer-philosopher Sankara: ‘Faith, devotion, and constant union with God through prayer, these are declared to be the seeker’s direct means of liberation.’ You may believe in dogmas or no dogmas but you need these three things: faith, devotion and constant union with God through prayer. ‘Pray without ceasing’.

Faith. First it is necessary to have *working faith* in the scriptures and in what a man of God teaches you. And at the same time, you have to have faith in *yourself*. My Master said to me: ‘Others have realized God, why can’t you?’

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In order to develop faith in yourself, in order to have devotion, you have to have interest. You have to be sincerely interested in God; and interest comes, devotion comes, as you continue to meditate upon Him. This constant remembrance of God, does not mean that we have to give up action, work or the duties of life. No. Continue to work. But through work, through action, you also have to keep union with God. As Sri Krishna said: 'Mentally resign all your actions to me. Man attains to highest perfection by worshipping me, by performing his respective duties.' If the heart and soul are fixed in God – work is worship. Again Sri Krishna says: 'All that he does is offered before me in utter surrender. My grace is upon him. He finds the eternal, the peace unchanging'?

Now here is an important question: What to meditate upon? God. But what is God? Any idea, any conception of God that you may have is true. For instance, if the child says 'da, da, da,' and cannot utter the word *father*, does not the father know? God is impersonal. He is personal. You see the ocean, formless, infinite, and then again, through intense cold, the ocean forms icebergs. The Divine Incarnations, Krishna, Christ or Buddha, are like the icebergs; through them also, you can reach the Infinite, that ocean of bliss, that ocean of existence, that ocean of immortality.

Often people imagine that worshipping the personal aspect of God is a lower form of worship than the impersonal aspect. It makes no difference; choose any aspect that appeals to you. Infinite is God, infinite are His aspects. The personal God is the same as the impersonal.

There is a saying: 'He who is Rama, who was the son of Dasaratha, is again dwelling in the hearts of all beings.' Sri Krishna said: 'I am the Atman, Self, that dwells in the heart of every mortal creature. Who truly knows me, in manifold being,

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everywhere present and all-pervading, dwells in my Yoga that shall not be shaken. Of this be certain.'

Christ said: 'I and my Father are one.' Then he said: 'He who hath seen me hath seen the Father.' Whatever may be your Chosen Ideal, try to have constant union with Him, constant remembrance of God. 'Pray unceasingly.'

Through action, also, as it has been pointed out, you can keep that union with God. In the *Chandogya Upanishad* we read: 'When the senses are purified the heart is purified; when the heart is purified, there is constant and unceasing remembrance of the Atman or Self. When there is constant and unceasing remembrance of the Self – all bonds are loosed, and freedom is attained.'

How can the senses be purified: Live in the world; work, but work with the spirit of worship. There are two steps: First we must learn to offer the fruits of our action to God. You perform an action not for gain, but in order to offer the fruit of that action to God. If you ask for the fruit of the action, you receive *finite* results; but if you offer the fruit to God you receive the *infinite* – God. Offer every action to God.

Secondly, see Brahman, see God in every action. Maharaj – Swami Brahmananda said to us one time: 'Do your duties in the world, while taking your refuge in the Lord.' It is only when we directly perceive or experience God, that our lives become *fulfilled*. It is then that we achieve 'the fulfilment of life.' And with this fulfilment comes freedom from grief, from suffering. *There* is the immortal bliss!

But what about this world? What about humanity? Are we not selfish? Often critics of Vedanta tell us: 'Yes, you meditate, but why don't you do something for others?'

My master one time taught me this truth: 'Meditate, meditate, meditate, and then your heart will go out in sympathy

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and compassion for all beings. You will feel that these people are suffering for no reason when there is the mine of bliss within each one of them.'

Sri Krishna pointed out, as did Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda: You cannot help humanity. Who are you to help? Many times by trying to help others we do more harm than good. But you can *serve*. Serve God in man. That is the ideal. Humanism does not work. What did the Bible teach? The First Commandment is: 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.' His Second Commandment is: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.'

You cannot love your neighbour as yourself without loving God. Both must go together. Again Krishna points out: 'That Yogi sees me the same Lord in all things, and all things within me. He never loses sight of me, nor I of him. He is established in union with me, and worships me devoutly in all beings. That Yogi abides in me, no matter what his mode of life.'

Then he says:

'Who burns with the bliss
And suffers the sorrow
Of every creature
Within his own heart,
Making his own
Each bliss and each sorrow:
Him I hold highest
Of all the Yogis.'

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, April, 1970)

What Inspires me Most in Holy Mother's Life

Swami Parahitananda

Holy Mother's life is extraordinary. As an historical event it is extraordinary. But for the moment I am not referring to its singularity in large. Why is it extraordinary as an example of holy life, considered apart from its role in the Sri Ramakrishna Lila (divine play)?

It is extraordinary because it is so ordinary. One is reminded of Caussade's illuminating words in speaking of certain of those who are called by God to live in the state of perfect self-abandonment: (Jean Pierre de Caussade [7 March 1675 – 8 December 1751] was a French Jesuit priest and writer known for his work 'Abandonment to Divine Providence'.)

'... Their life, though most extraordinary in its perfection, shows nothing exteriorly except what is quite ordinary and common: they fulfil the duties of religion and of their state; others apparently do the same. Examine them in other matters; there is nothing striking or peculiar; only ordinary things happen to them. What distinguishes them is not perceptible to the senses; it is the dependence on the supreme will in which they live which seems to arrange everything for them. This will keeps them always masters of themselves through the habitual submission of their hearts.'¹

In such a life as Holy Mother's —

'The ordinary becomes extraordinary, and this is why nothing seems extraordinary. For this path [of utter self-abandonment] in itself is extraordinary and it is quite unnecessary to adorn it with irrelevant marvels. It is itself a miracle, a revelation ... but it is a miracle which, while it renders marvellous all our everyday life of the senses, has nothing in itself that is marvellous to the senses.'²

How, in Mother's life, does the ordinary become extraordinary? In two ways, I suggest. The first way is within the

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context in which her life is seen as a human life, albeit a holy one. Here we can find the answer for ourselves if we ask the further question, what is truly extraordinary? The Divine alone is truly extraordinary. Hence, when the divine will is seen equally in all the events and duties of every moment, those events and duties, whether normal or not are transfigured. They become to the inward eye extraordinary, even though to the outward eye ordinary, because they are now shot through with the Divine. The transfiguration lies in the seeing. The precondition for this seeing of the divine plan in every movement of life is that we have made God 'our very own', to use one of Holy Mother's favourite phrases. This, she tells us, comes about through persevering practice of being immersed in loving thought of God. Formal practices like repeating the name of God are necessary for preparing the mind, making it suitable soil for the love of God to grow in.

With what shall we see the divine action in the circumstances of the present moment? Can it be seen only with the eye of full illumination? No, I do not believe so. It is seen with the eye of faith also.

At first sight, to say this seems to contradict what Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Is not faith wholly "blind"? What then are its eyes? Say either "faith" or "knowledge".'³ But there is no contradiction if we do not lift his comment out of the situation which occasioned it. We are justified in speaking of seeing with the eye of faith provided it is made clear that we are not using 'seeing' in its ordinary senses. When we see with the eye of faith we do not see anything clearly at all. It is a seeing and knowing that is not ordinary seeing and knowing.

Then why speak at all of seeing and knowing by faith? Why confuse the matter? The fact is that it is a confused matter. Though

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when we see and know by faith, we do not see and know in the empirical sense, yet we have certainty. It is not a non-cognitive state. When Sri Ramakrishna contrasted faith with knowledge, he contrasted it with empirical or ordinary knowledge. But that faith was opposed to spiritual knowledge he certainly did not teach, as shown by his remark 'Knowledge relating to God keeps pace with faith. Where there is little faith, it is idle to look for much knowledge.'⁴

Let us continue on this line a little longer; for we cannot go far, when confronted with Holy Mother's life, without needing to speak of faith. A master of devotional psychology, St. John of the Cross, says of faith that it has to do with truths—

'revealed by God Himself, which transcend all natural light, and exceed all human understanding, beyond all proportion. Hence it follows that for the soul, this excessive light of faith which is given to it is thick darkness, for it overwhelms greater things and does away with small things, even as the light of the sun overwhelms all other lights whatsoever, so that when it shines and disables our visual faculty they appear not to be lights at all.... Even so the light of faith by its excessive greatness, oppresses and disables that of the understanding....'⁵

Now let us notice the consistency of this with a striking remark made by Swami Vivekananda at Thousand Island Park. First he says: 'Faith is not belief'; meaning that faith is a matter of certainty, not of thinking that something is probably so. Then he goes on: faith '*is the grasp on the Ultimate, an illumination!*'⁶ A 'grasp on the Ultimate' and 'an illumination' obviously involve knowledge of some kind, even though not of a normal kind; but, as St. John of the Cross has implied, so long as our measure of knowledge is what the senses and understanding reveal, this illumination of faith is thick darkness.

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These considerations suggest that we may not be on the right track if we insist on too definite a distinction between seeing the ordinary as extraordinary with the eye of spiritual illumination, and seeing the ordinary as extraordinary with the eye of faith – since faith itself is a kind of illumination. To recall what was said earlier, it is because the ordinary is seen as ordained by God in every detail and at every moment, that it becomes extraordinary. And as it is God who has ordained it – whether this be known clearly by illumination or obscurely by faith - it must be the best thing for us; since we also know by the same illumination or faith, as the case may be, that God's only design is to make us feel that He is our own, that He is our very being.

With this knowledge will necessarily go love. If the duties and trials of the moment are the best thing for us, the best means for our own purification of mind, there is reason for loving them. Everything is for the best when we look at it in this light. And if everything without distinction is a means for the best, everything is a means of joy.

This last is difficult to swallow. But thinking on these lines we can begin to see how, beneath all the ordinariness and vexation of her daily life, Holy Mother could have peace and joy, and be a source of peace and joy, and knowledge to others. From her example we can begin to see where the sure, short road to our own spiritual development lies: not so much in seeking extraordinary spiritual states – greatly to be prized as they may be should we be blessed with them –, not so much these as in lovingly fulfilling the duties of our state and humbly accepting troubles as they come to us from moment to moment – knowing that, because they come from God, they must be the infallible means for the removal of the specific defects which beset our particular psychical make - up. To write of Holy Mother's natural,

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but none the less exemplary, practice of this attitude always and everywhere, is easy: to follow it ourselves is not.

Lastly, let me make brief reference to the second way in which, in Holy Mother's life, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Of this it is difficult to write; and to speak of following her in this is meaningless, for here we have to do with the superhuman. Yet something should be said to compensate for having treated of her life, or more exactly, of a phase of it, as though hers were the life of a saint – one who achieved liberation by her own efforts, under the grace of God.

The reader who has studied Mother's life, or who simply has devotion to her, will probably have guessed what I am going to refer to. It comes to this. If Holy Mother was Mother Kali Herself; if she was indeed the Divine Mother of the Universe who had freely, of Her own mercy, covered Herself with Her own *Maya* - then all the adversities and actions of her life, however ordinary, must have been extraordinary. For in them the Divine directly involved Itself and engaged Itself. What the meaning of it all is, we do not know. It is entirely beyond understanding. If we are responsive in the matter at all, the appropriate response is one of faith. If we do make this response, it is because our grasp on the Infinite is equal to the challenge. The Infinite in that event comprising the life of Holy Mother, calls to the Infinite in us. It meets with a response if the Infinite in us is not too thickly covered by *Maya*; in other words, if a certain threshold of single-mindedness has been reached.

How is what has just been said related to Holy Mother's exemplification of self-surrender, which was discussed in the earlier part of this note?

Given the fact that Holy Mother's life was divine, then her mode of spiritual discipline and life bears the stamp of authority. The Divine chose to be spiritual in that simple, hidden way of

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absolute self-surrender to God. For that reason it has a special meaning for us today. Let us make no mistake: this is the same way that Sri Ramakrishna himself first practised, and later extolled as appropriate for many people in modern times –the way of spiritual childhood; for that is what Holy Mother’s way, the way of self-abandonment, is. Sometimes he changed its outward form but retained its essential feature, as when he taught the way of ‘giving the power of attorney’. One can see that this may have been more acceptable to those who were at first too sophisticated to take to the idea of childhood.

In the foregoing we first took Holy Mother to be a spiritual aspirant like ourselves and found her practising the way of loving self-surrender. The naturalness and inconspicuousness of her practice of it was noticed. The light thrown on certain aspects of devotional life was what chiefly concerned us then.

Subsequently we found that Holy Mother could not be fitted into so neat a scheme. Somehow, beyond our understanding, she was what she had surrendered herself to: she was the Divine in a way in which we are not. We can believe that this is a fact revealed directly and immediately by grace to special souls. For the rest of us, if our receiving-set is sensitive enough, it is something to be ‘embraced with passionate inwardness’, that is, with faith.

We are thrown back on Sri Ramakrishna’s declaration: ‘She is Sarada, Sarasvati; she has come to impart knowledge.’ And ‘she is the communicator of the rarest wisdom.’ Out of a love and wisdom not to be found in an earthly mother, she has shown us how to be spiritual, how to fulfil our lives, in a way that is practicable for many of us, whatever our native equipment and mode of life.

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1. *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*, translated by Algar Thorold. Burns and Oates, London, 1959. pp. 61 - 62,

2. *Ibid.* P. 104

3. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 4, 1949, Saying No. 495

4. *Ibid.*, No 500.

5. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, translated by E. Allison Peers, Image Books, New York, 1958, p. 82.

6. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama. Calcutta, Vol, VII (1964) p. 60, (*Italics the writer's.*)

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, September 1970)

Our scriptures say, and we too proclaim that all men are the images of the Lord. But what do we do in practice? We do not scruple to despise sweepers and other low caste people. We treat our women as slaves —those in whom lies dormant the wonderful strength of the Mother of the universe! Only at the time of worship do we simply utter the words that all women are but images of the Divine Mother!

Nowadays there are so many religious societies, but people lose all interest in them after a few days. What is the reason for this? The reason is our words are not in accord with our thoughts. The first step in religion is to be sincere to the core.

The four kinds of spiritual practices (Jnana, Yoga, Karma, and Bhakti) are meant for four classes of men. But the aim is the same—to kill the lower self. Think deeply and you will find, there is hardly any difference among them. In fact, there is none. Kill the self and you will be free.

Swami Saradananda

Questions Of Spiritual Seekers Answered

Swami Madhavananda

Q : What practical advice can you give for breaking the bonds that bind worldly herds?

A: The practical advice is to see the evil effects of living this kind of life. Things that bind worldly herds, well, they hurt us, they wound us, they obstruct our progress in life. If we remember this fact along with going through these experiences, - that is, we may be subject to temptations sometimes, we may have to yield to different situations, but if, at the same time, we remember that we are lacking something, we lose something by yielding more, - well, that in itself will be an advantageous thing. So the best advice that is generally given in the scriptures is not to jump to the highest goal - because very few can do that, one in a million even cannot do that, - but they advise progressive advancements; in other words to be in the world but to discriminate also, Well, I am enjoying this, or I am thinking I am enjoying this, but along with this there is the reaction also, going hand in hand. They are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. So, if we remember that thing always, then those very attachments to which we are now being subject, will gradually fall away.

It is a part of *Maya*, and *Maya* has been likened to somebody who is showing some fun to some other person. If a boy puts on a tiger skin and tries to frighten his friend, and if the friend finds out, well, it is not a tiger but his own friend, such and such, wearing a tiger skin, that charm generally does not have any effect. Similarly, if these worldly bondages are perceived by us as such, as what they are, we know that they are bondages, that they are snares for us, we may be in them and we may subject ourselves to them for the time being, but that attitude of awareness, of alertness, will help us out of them in the long run.

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It can be illustrated in this way: Suppose a man has fallen into a current. He cannot go across the current, against the current; that requires very much strength, which the person has not. Similarly, in a stream one cannot wade, one cannot swim directly to the shore also - it may be difficult if the current is very strong. But there is a way of coming to the shore by simply diverting the course a little. Instead of going through the middle of the current straight on, if one just keeps the course a little to one side, then the current itself helps to bring us to the shore. It helps there, being added to our own efforts and that current with our own forces will bring us, to the shore. So here also, if we allow these worldly attachments to have their play, but with our eyes open, 'Well, we are watching you - you are binding me now, but not for all time,' gradually they will lose their attachment and they will lose their force.

Q: The world will never see again a brain like his who wrote the *Gita*, wrote Swami Vivekananda in one of his books. Please explain.

A: What is there to explain in this? In the *Gita* we find a remarkable breadth of view; so many things are discussed – from the highest *Jnana*, the path of reason, to ordinary matter- of-fact arguments, - so that Arjuna might not miss but follow his duty. So there is a wide range of subjects: there is work, there is devotion, there is mysticism, there are rituals, and there is the highest abstraction about the *Atman* and so on, and the relation of the soul and God. And the whole thing, has been composed into a wonderful symphony, as it were. God's infinite grace, the rewards of our efforts, and finally, going beyond the relativities, everything is put in a beautiful way. So Swamiji said that it is a wonderful book. The man who composed the book is called sage Vyasa. Here Vyasa was the recorder of what took place in the shape of a conversation between Arjuna and Krishna. Anyway,

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he was the author, he wrote the Gita; to him the Gita is attributed. It is a part of the *Mahabharata* and the Mahabharata was written by Vyasa. So Swamiji says, here in this book, a wonderful display of intellectuality is manifest. That is all.

Q: Is there any other Indian scripture which explains more explicitly than the Gita the nature of the Atman?

A: Well, if by scriptures are meant those ancient books, probably the *Bhagavata*, in some respects, compares favourably with the Gita, and it is a bigger book. But, it lays more stress upon devotion than on any other thing. It is not mere devotion, of course, but devotion mixed with intellectuality, reason and so on, but the great stress is laid upon devotion. Anyway, there are all the *Puranas*, and what are called sacred books; there are voluminous books, any number of them. And every one of them, every one of those books that are called religious, also try to explain these things. But they may not be so successful as the Gita, because in the Gita, in a very compact form, much of the essence of the knowledge is put forth. As Sri Ramakrishna put it, the Gita contains the essence of all *Sastras*, all scriptures; there is this efficiency of the Gita, the beauty of the Gita. There are other texts, of course; any of the Puranas can help us like that. And if you add together other things, the succeeding things that have come, - you may not class them as scriptures but they are philosophical writings - oh, their number is legion.

Q: In the book, *Thus spake the Holy Mother*, she says, 'Even the injunctions of destiny are cancelled if one takes refuge in God. Destiny strikes off with her own hand what she had written about such a person'. *Does this contradict the law of Karma?*

A: There is no contradiction. Generally, on the ordinary plane, the Law of Karma operates. We are ordinarily under the operation of the Law of Karma, but when, having performed our duties in a true spirit, we have advanced sufficiently and God is pleased

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with our activities which we have offered in the way of work, well, then, there He applies His own help, He extends His own hand and takes us by the hand, as it were, so there really God's intervention - you may call it God's grace - begins. And in this case, if a person has taken refuge in God, and that means at the end of all his works, having performed his duties properly, he finds that man is not independent. God alone is the prime mover and we are like children, as it were, playing in the field, and God is behind us all. When that consciousness comes, then only the operation of the higher law, called grace, begins and then really the shackles of Karma fall off. Whether God compensates these persons or rather takes on Himself some of the evil effects that otherwise would have come on this particular person, we do not know. We do not deal with that. But, simply, even in the ordinary life, we find like that. Suppose a person has done some mistake, something wrong and the punishment is such and such. But if he is well connected, if he otherwise has been a very exemplary person, then the judges generally are disposed to give a light sentence. Something like that.

But here the Holy Mother is referring to entirely different realms of being or existence, or sort of endeavour. In the lower plane it is Karma, and when that is completely gone through, it is transcended and then God's grace helps us. Just as by taking a thing to the centre of gravity of the earth, all the weight of that thing is lost, - there is no weight whatsoever -- , similarly, it is a different operation of the higher law that we come across. So it does not contradict the law of Karma but, rather it brings us into the realm of a higher law than Karma, God's grace; that is all.

Q: What is meant by the law of one's own being?

A: The law of one's own being means that for which we are really fit, or that which the essence of one's existence is. For everyone there is not the same duty or the same path; wherever

Questions Of Spiritual Seekers Answered

one is situated, or whatever level one is on, according to that there are different ways by which he can guide himself. So, by the law of one's own being is meant a person's *samskaras*—the tendencies inherited from previous births – whatever is best operative there, whatever justifies works in that state of existence.

Q: Would you say that meditation is a short-cut to victory over the ego, that otherwise has to be overcome through struggle and suffering?

A: I would not call it a short-cut. Meditation is by itself a very difficult thing. The questioner thinks that struggle and suffering can be avoided through meditation, but it is practically the same thing that is suffering in another form. That is also struggle. For a great many persons meditation is also struggle, only it is a different way of avoiding many of the evils of life, that is all. Victory over the ego can be achieved through meditation, but through other ways also and all of them, every way, each path that we follow, every effort that we make for the obliteration, for the attenuation of the ego, is painful and entails suffering. Meditation is also one of the means; it also entails its own suffering but it is an effective means. I would not call it a short-cut, but it is an effective means of obtaining victory over the ego, because there, through meditation, we understand that ego unnecessarily takes credit, inflates itself, as it were, and we become wiser, we act more soberly and with greater sanity.

Q: Should one try to visualize one's Chosen Ideal during meditation?

A: Of course, because that is what meditation concerns itself with. The mind engages itself in so many different things, tries to oscillate, as it were, run after many things, multiple things, at the same moment. So, the Chosen Ideal - that aspect of the divinity which appeals to one, well, that is the Chosen Ideal - we should always seek to visualize and His presence within us; or we may even consider ourselves as being immersed in Him, as it were.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, January, 1969)

In Search Of A Hidden God

Swami Shraddhananda

It is not difficult to believe in the existence of God when we carefully follow the arguments philosophers and thinkers have given to us through the ages in its favour. There should be a designer at the back of this vast edifice of the universe who must necessarily possess an intelligence infinitely superior to ours. There must be a ruler to guide and control the endless phenomena of nature. Again, when we think of man's life and motives we cannot but feel that there must be a moral law binding the individual to the group and this moral law is not the arbitrary creation of man. It has its origin in a Cosmic Being who is the essence of truth and righteousness. These and similar reasonings are often sufficient to build up a faith in God and to relieve the tensions of doubt from our minds.

Most persons remain contented when they can live their lives with such a working faith in God. It is not necessary for them, they feel, to delve into the mysteries of the Supernatural. It is enough to believe that there is a God – a kind and all-knowing God who is guiding our destiny. In moments of crisis and difficulties the faithful can pray to Him for help. Religion for the majority of people is just this: an intellectual and emotional belief in God and the use of that belief to avert difficulties in life.

These persons can be placed in the two categories of *arta* (distressed) and *artharthi* (needy) mentioned in the fourth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Superior devotees are they who seek God more deeply. They belong according to the Gita to the categories of *Jijnasu* and *Jnani*. They do not want to merely believe in God; they seek to know God. They do not need God for material help; they need Him for their spiritual fulfilment. In the words of the Psalmist:

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'As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God'.¹

If the soul pants for God it is asking much more than intellectual belief. It is craving for a direct experience of God. When our search for God has reached this level serious religion has begun for us. Saints and seers assure us that if we can evince an intense desire for the vision of God He is sure to respond to our prayer.

Says the Upanishad:

'Neither by the study of the scriptures, nor by intellectual excellence, nor by hearing numerous opinions can the Supreme Spirit be realized. Only to one who earnestly longs for Him does He reveal His true nature.'²

Sri Ramakrishna compared this longing to the 'rosy dawn' before sunrise:

'After the dawn out comes the sun.

Longing is followed by the vision of God.'

'God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man; the child's attraction for its mother; and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife.'

Yet the road of earnest search is never an easy one. At times the seeker seems to have come to a dead end and the last ounce of patience appears to have been used up. Often doubt, confusion and fear assail the mind. Sometimes in despair the devotee has to voice the painful utterance of the prophet Isaiah: *'Verily Thou art a hidden God.'* Mystical literature is strewn with abundant evidence of the deep agony scorching the heart of the spiritual explorer expressed in poems, couplets, soliloquies and so on. These are beautiful compositions bespeaking the faith and love of devout souls, but the dominating note is one of a

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tremendous mental suffering that the devotee experiences because of his failure to see God. The mystical writer uses many symbols to describe the plight of spiritual struggle that has no hope of immediate fulfilment. A traveller lost in a trackless wilderness, a boat tossing in tempestuous seas, a bird in flight overtaken by storm and thunder are some examples.

There is really no contradiction between those statements of the scriptures where great hope and assurance are given to an earnest seeker and the utterances which sternly warn him of the perilous journey, the pitfalls, and the hardships. When the Katha Upanishad says: *'The path is as inaccessible as the sharpened edge of a razor'*; or the Gita declares: *'One in a million can know God truly'*, the purpose is not to discourage us but to emphasize the necessity of caution, discrimination, courage and perseverance at every step of our spiritual adventure. When on the other hand, we read in the Upanishads that the Supreme Self is *'known with every piece of knowledge'* (Kena Up. 2.4), or *'He is shining very close to our heart'* (Mundaka Up. 2.2.1), or in the Bhagavad Gita, *'Very soon he becomes righteous and attains eternal peace'* (9.31), we are not to understand that a quick and easy solution of our spiritual search is indicated. Spiritual illumination is a great treasure for which the spiritual aspirant has surely to pay the price. There is no short cut or over-simplification. The purport of the scriptural passages in the latter case is that if one is sincere and prepared to undergo the necessary disciplines, one certainly can find the Divine within one's own consciousness as the effulgent all-purifying Light, the Holy of holies.

Neither a blind self-complacent optimism nor an ungrounded depressing pessimism but a balanced attitude of hope, courage and unrelenting effort seems to be the healthy effective way. Yes, when we are in search of Him, God for a long time may remain for us a hidden God, a deaf, blind and even a dead God. But if

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our objective is not a superficial acceptance of God, but a deep conviction which results from direct experience, we shall have to face the hide and seek game that the Divine plays with His devotees. We must tell our mind that behind the clouds there is certainly the sun.

We must go on praying unceasingly: 'The face of truth is hidden by a golden disc; remove that cover, O Sun, for me who am dedicated to the vision of truth.'³

The golden disc stands for the apparent charm and glamour of the world. In early morning what we see of the sun is just a beautiful disc of golden hue which is so pleasant to look at. We can draw pictures of it, and write poems about it. But it is still far far from the truth of the blazing sun. Covered with the golden disc the sun is as it were a toy, an object for idle reverie. It does not radiate the heat and light necessary for all life. In like manner the life of sense pleasure, however attractive it may be on the surface, is a veil that hides the truth of God. That veil has somehow to go if the eternal shining light of God is to be seen.

Sings a Bengali mystic:

'Oh Lord, even though Thou art so close to me residing right inside my heart, I am foolishly led to think that Thou art far far away.

'Just as the bee flies far and near in search of flowers even though it does not know where the proper flowers have bloomed, in the same way my heart wants to run in quest of Thee though I do not know where Thou art to be found.

'Just as the musk deer runs hither and thither infatuated by the fragrance of the musk in its own navel, similarly I wander heaven and earth seeking Thee, even though all the time I am carrying Thee in my heart.

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'Just as in a puppet show the operator, remaining hidden behind the stage, moves the marionettes, in the same manner, Oh Lord, in this stage of the world we are the puppets in Thy grand performance while Thou hast all the time kept Thyself concealed.

'Just as a blind man, even though bathed in a sea of light does not know what light is, similarly, even though we are constantly living in Thy truth we are not able to discover Thee.'

As we continue our serious search for God through prayers, contemplation, self-control, holy company and other similar means, we slowly begin to realize that our intimate quest has to be directed mostly within ourselves rather than without. Very appropriately did St. Augustine write:

'I found Thee not without, O Lord.

I sought Thee without in vain For Thou art within.'

The Upanishads over and over again state clearly that God as Supreme Spirit can never be comprehended objectively.' He is never heard, but is the Hearer; He is never reached by thought, but is the Thinker; He is never known, but is the Knower.'⁴

'That which man does not see with the eyes, but that by which man perceives the activities of the eye, know that alone to be Brahman and not what people worship as an object.'⁵

Sri Ramakrishna reminisces: 'Then a change came over me. The mind left the plane of the *lila* and ascended to the *nitya*.

I no longer enjoyed seeing forms of God; I said to myself, "They come and go." I lifted my mind above them. I began to meditate on the Indivisible *Saccidananda*."⁶

Objective spiritual experiences have their great value in elevating the sense-bound mind to the level of the supersensuous. They are important signposts of our progress. But as it is pointed out in the scriptures and as Sri Ramakrishna also testifies, they cannot finally quell the unrest of our soul in its search for the

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hidden God. It is only when we retreat from the line of the object and stand on that of the Subject that we are on our way to the ultimate discovery. All objective experiences including the mystical are in the last analysis projections of the Eternal Subject – the Self of everything, the Supreme Consciousness.

When we have known this great fact God can no longer wear any mask. The agony of our search will then come to its end and God will ever remain revealed to us as our true Self.

1. Psalms 42.
2. Katha Up. 1.2.23; Mundaka Up. 3.2.3.
3. Isa Up. 25.
4. Brihadaranyaka Up. 3.8.11.
5. Kena Up. 1.7.
6. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna Math, Madras 4, Dialogue on April 12th, 1885.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, July 1970)

The Ramakrishna Mission does not like to express any opinion, good or bad, about political discussions, for the Master did not instruct us to do anything of the kind, and Swamiji asked the Mission to keep itself aloof from such effort. That is why the Mission has been all along engaging itself in spirituality and service to humanity. Since all things are subject to change, therefore the present condition will change some day and political freedom will come. But the Mission does not know and does not care to know how far off is that consummation.

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God is also Mother

Hans Torwesten

(continued from last issue)

We cannot leave this problem aside if we are concerned with the Shakti religion and wish to live in its spiritual atmosphere. In order to understand it rightly, we must first of all overcome the superstitious conviction that there are only two stages in the development: a primitive undifferentiated initial stage characterised by the Great Mother and a personal dawn of awareness, which has distinctly male features and negatively signifies a separation from the Mother. The transcendental aim of this Approach is and remains male thinking, which emerges like an island from the motherly sea and whose main task consists of pursuing the differentiation process for all eternity. It is true that the representatives of this conviction are mostly aware that this stage is also sorrowful, because if the spirit is confronted with life, man with woman, etc., a crevice runs through the universe and through the consciousness of the individual. But it permits man no flight back into the lap of nature – which indeed admittedly would also hardly be a way out – nor would an overshadowing transcendence be acceptable in most cases, as one accepts this only for a heavenly motherly concealed foundation, in which the lonely suffering man would like to be dissolved again.

One can say: such a logical position, which itself closes all downward and upward emergency exits and compels one to lock oneself out, requires a great deal of courage. Does not the *Maya* of this consciousness lead one again and again to run away from oneself and lose oneself in an unreal life? Certainly. But it also leads the male consciousness to be proud of this “male” consciousness and at least to cling to it, even when in the long run this is an absurd luxury. In the end is not thinking a flight

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from oneself and away from the actual reality, from the way things are? There are certain positive starting points in this attitude which point in the direction of Zen and similar spiritual disciplines. Only in that case endurance is not pursued for oneself; everything is made relative in order to penetrate the walled fortress of the male rational self-consciousness and create a breakthrough to a new level, which we already designate as the superconscious.

Viewed from such a higher level, the differentiation of the consciousness is again only a primitive beginning. To remain in the religious domain the separation into an "eternal" heaven and an "eternal" hell, to name only one of the many differentiations, is certainly a step forward compared with a consciousness in which ethical terms such as good and evil do not yet play any part. And yet for most of us this unholy dualism of such a final division is strangely "primitive" – we can at most accept it as a kindergarten idea. Further development then does not consist in a still further separation and division of reality but introduces a division and separation of reality, starts a contrary movement, which indeed does not deny the "achievements" of the interim phase but certainly connects up again with the "democratic" basis of equality, which we find expressed in the religion of the Great Mother, in order to bring both elements into a higher synthesis.

It is certainly no wonder that the Mother religion with its almost pantheistic atmosphere and its inclination towards wholeness after a long period of continuous division and separation once again emerges in the field of vision, but it is for us generally very important that it is not just a call for "back to nature", however justified this demand is, but that *all* aspects of life, feeling and thinking are affected by this new position. Mother does not live in the vegetable garden. She is not just a protectress of country idylls. Anyone who really venerates the Mother will find her

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everywhere, he will see her emerging everywhere, even from the most hidden corners of our being and even from the powers that confront the spirit of the new era. Resistance also belongs to her play. One would not be a true shakti-worshipper if one just separated her again from “others”, from the banal and normal. She does not let herself be locked into a country, not even in any progressive spiritual ghetto. Her empire is called Everywhere, and anyone who knows her feels at home everywhere.

(Translated by John Phillips)

(To be continued)

One must have faith in the enlightened souls and carry on religious practices accordingly. Otherwise it leads nowhere trying to understand the pros and cons of their teachings through our impure minds—occupied as they are with thoughts of the world—and then to carry them out in practice. Hence give up the attempt for understanding everything, and start your spiritual practices by relying on what the Master has taught.

When you sit down for meditation, first think thus: “It is my own Chosen Deity, who like an eternally pure and indivisible ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, pervades everything and I also exist within Him. It is He who exists everywhere inside and outside myself.” Thinking on this idea for a while start your Japa and meditation as usual. This will remove the unsteadiness of the mind.

Swami Saradananda

Programme for March - April 2014
Sunday discourses begin,
at the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm
Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

Mar	2	Ramakrishna Puja	
Mar	9	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 44	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	16	Katha Upanishad 6	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar	23	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 45	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	30	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 46	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	6	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 47	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	13	Katha Upanishad 7	Swami Shivarupananda
Apr	20	Day Retreat	
Apr	27	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 48	Swami Dayatmananda

Ramakrishna Puja
Sunday 2nd March
at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

Day Retreat
With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 20th April
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm
Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.
Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

Whatever work stands in the way of God-realization and increases discontent is bad work. You should wholly discard it.

All souls are ever free, and that is why all minds ever hanker for freedom. A true leader is he who never hampers that craving for attaining freedom, his only concern being to see to it that when the person concerned gets liberty, he does not misuse it.

Brahman and Brahman's power are non-different like fire and its power of combustion. The scriptures speak of this Brahman as the Cosmic Person (*Virat*) and the power associated with Him as the Mother of the universe. That is why the presiding deity of *Gayatri* is sometimes spoken of as the Cosmic Person, and sometimes as the Mother of the universe. That is why there is no contradiction in imagining either way.

Vedanta

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

Phone: (01628) 526464

www.vedantauk.com

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

Editor: Swami Dayatmananda

Editorial Adviser: John Phillips

If the mind continues to be unsteady, pray to the Lord, "Lord, kindly make my mind steady!" Know this for certain that He hears whatever you say, and knows whatever passes in your mind. Both peace and peacelessness come to us, for the sake of our own experience, according to God's dispensation, but we have to remain steady under all circumstances by holding on to Him. Again, from one point of view, peacelessness appears to be the more welcome, for then one can call on the Lord with greater earnestness.

The greatest sin is to think oneself weak and sinful. If you have to believe anything, believe that you are His children, His part, the heirs to His infinite strength and bliss.

Swami Saradananda

