

Vedanta

377 MAY - JUNE 2014

The Prophet's Promise
Swami Sunirmalananda

I Saw the Recording Angel
N. Bangarayya



Divine Wisdom

Teachings of Swami Ramakrishnananda

Adversity

Unless one passes through the school of adversity, one cannot properly be called a human being. We learn much from our troubles. You should not lose heart in adversity. Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, prayed to Sri Krishna to beset her with adversities, since in adversity alone is He more frequently remembered!

Aim

We must not cease to strive for the highest even though it seems unattainable. We must keep God as our ideal and aim; that will pull us on. If a man aims at the sky, at least he may strike the top of a tree. If he aims at the top of the tree, he may not get above the ground.

Ambition

The very fact that we are dissatisfied with our finite nature shows that it is not our natural condition. The fact that we have infinite ambition, that we have insatiable hunger for more and more, proves that we are infinite by nature, and that is why we are always dissatisfied with whatever is finite. Wipe away the dust, arouse your ambition, stir up your activity and know that all power is latent in you. You are not limited.

Attitude

Divine Mother does not like us to call ourselves Her servants. We are her children to Her, not servants. Always think of yourself as Her child.

Contentment

Do not be content with the little things of this world. This universe is like a baby's toy. Throw it away. Claim your eternal

Vedanta

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Contents

98	Editorial Ascent to Truth through Prayer
101	The Prophet's Promise <i>Swami Sunirmalananda</i>
114	I Saw the Recording Angel <i>N. Bangarayya</i>
126	Detachment and Renunciation <i>Swami Bhuteshananda</i>
133	God is also Mother <i>Hans Torwesten</i>
137	Leaves from an Ashram 45: Anticipation and Consequences <i>Swami Vidyatmananda</i>
139	Questions of Spiritual Seekers answered <i>Swami Madhavananda</i>
144	Programme

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Editorial

Ascent to Truth through Prayer

Holy Mother used to say that one attains perfection through *Japa*. So also through prayer thousands of saints have attained perfection in every religion.

Just as there are types of prayers there are also degrees of prayer from the lowest to the highest. In every religion we find prayer used as the main spiritual practice, *sadhana*. Spiritual life is a journey from a lower state of consciousness to a higher state of consciousness.

We find Christ telling his followers how to pray:

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. (Luke 11:9-10) Everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:8).

So ask, seek and knock—these are the steps to perfection. We know hundreds of Christian saints attained perfection through earnest prayer. Some of the experiences of these holy men is faithfully recorded in '*Philokalia*'.

Of all these, '*The Way of the Pilgrim*', by an unknown Russian peasant is the most succinct writing we find on the transforming power of prayer in spiritual life. *The Way Of A Pilgrim* was written by an unknown nineteenth century Russian peasant and tells us of his constant struggle with the problem of 'how to pray without ceasing'. Under the tutelage of a spiritual mentor, he struggles hard to learn how to pray *ceaselessly* and gradually reaches the stage where the Jesus prayer takes over his heart and goes on by itself. This Russian pilgrim shares his struggles, joys and religious experiences in a humble, simple, and beautiful narrative.

In this book the aspirant describes how he attained God-realisation through the famous Jesus Prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me'.

The pilgrim recollects the advice of a wise teacher:

"The continuous interior prayer of Jesus is a constant uninterrupted calling upon the divine name of Jesus with the lips, in the

Ascent to Truth through Prayer

spirit, in the heart, while forming a mental picture of His constant presence, and imploring His grace, during every occupation, at all times, in all places, even during sleep. The appeal is couched in these terms, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' One who accustoms himself to this appeal experiences as a result so deep a consolation and so great a need to offer the prayer always that he can no longer live without it, and it will continue to voice itself within him of its own accord.

The pilgrim's spiritual progress through the Jesus prayer is described graphically and beautifully. The pilgrim's *Starets* (Guru) advises the seeker to say the *Jesus prayer* vocally 3000 times a day.

'...while fighting distractions, diligently and continuously say, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!" If you will persevere for some time then, without any doubt, the path to the heart will be opened to you. This has been verified through experience.'

'I received this instruction joyfully, returned to my place, and began faithfully and as accurately as possible to carry out this directive of the elder. For two days it was somewhat difficult. Then it became so easy and pleasant that when I was not saying the Prayer a need arose within me to say it, and I began to say it then with much greater ease than I had experienced at the beginning'.

As the pilgrim slowly felt at ease in repeating the prayer successfully the teacher increased the number gradually until he was able to say the prayer easily, naturally, and without any strain 12000 times a day. During this progress the aspirant notes that after a few days the repetition of the *mantra* was going on by itself without his effort; it is heart-warming, produced great delight in his heart, and he is unable to live a second without the sweet *Jesus mantra* going all the time in his heart.

Early one morning the prayer woke me up as it were. I started to say my usual morning prayers, but my tongue refused to say them easily or exactly. My whole desire was fixed upon one thing only—to say the prayer of Jesus, and as soon as I went on with it I was filled with joy and relief. It was as though my lips and my tongue pronounced the words entirely of themselves without any urging from me. I spent the whole day in a state of the greatest

Ascent to Truth through Prayer

contentment. I felt as though I was cut off from everything else. I lived as though in another world, and I easily finished my twelve thousand prayers by the early evening. I felt very much like still going on with them, but I did not dare to go beyond the number my starets had set me. Every day following I went on in the same way with my calling on the name of Jesus Christ, and that with great readiness and liking.

This is how through the 'Jesus Prayer, the Russian Pilgrim attained Perfection.

When we study the life of Sri Ramakrishna we also find that his main spiritual practice was praying earnestly to the Divine Mother with intense yearning. Whether he wanted knowledge, protection or spiritual perfection—either for himself or for his devotees—he used to pray to the Divine Mother earnestly.

Sri Ramakrishna said:

"I wept before the Mother and prayed, 'O Mother, please tell me, please reveal to me, what the yogis have realised through yoga and the jnanis through discrimination.'

"Weeping, I prayed to the Mother: 'O Mother, reveal to me what is contained in the Vedas and the Vedanta. Reveal to me what is in the Puranas and the Tantra.'

"And the Mother has revealed everything to me. She reveals everything if the devotee cries to Her with a yearning heart. She has shown me everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Puranas, and the Tantra.

"Yes, She has taught me everything. Oh, how many things she has shown me"!

We were told by the Master himself that one day at that time, he sang for the Divine Mother to hear, and then prayed to Her, weeping in his eagerness to have the vision, "Dost Thou not, O Mother, hear even a little of the many prayers I address to Thee? Thou didst show Thyself to Ramprasad. Why shouldst Thou not then reveal Thyself to me?"

"As a result the Divine Mother had shown Sri Ramakrishna many visions".

In the Upanishads too we find many instances of marvellous prayers for both secular and spiritual help. We will discuss these in our next editorial.

The Prophet's Promise

Swami Sunirmalananda

It is amazing how two prophets, at least two thousand years apart, spoke similar things on a certain day of their lives. Their subject was prophets. The story unfolds.

The Story of Prophets

God loves human beings. According to *Sanatana Dharma*, God's love and compassion makes Him send prophets and come down Himself as an *avatar* frequently. Indian scriptures are untiring in showing God's love for humanity in particular and for life in general. Incarnations are numerous and so are prophets. They come to earth out of love. There have been numerous prophets on the earth. Differences in the manifestation of power, Sri Ramakrishna says, makes for differences between two individuals, and so with prophets. Differences in their mission too make prophets big or small.

Why do prophets and *avatars* come? They come to redeem, to save and to show the way. For the devotee, there is no way of knowing God without the Incarnation or the prophet. Christ said: 'No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.' Swami Vivekananda also said: 'And where shall we see God but in the Son.... The Omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen until He is reflected by these giant lamps of the earth—the Prophets, the man-gods, the Incarnations, the embodiments of God.'

Thus prophets come and show us the paths to God so that our existential suffering, born of ignorance, may go and that we may attain to our natural state—bliss. Though they repeatedly show ways to God, we forget these ways or fill these royal paths with weeds and rubbish in the form of wrong

Swami Sunirmalananda

philosophies, foolish ideas, superstitions, false ideologies, etc.,—as these things appear easier and more realistic than the true paths. Then we go to sleep again.

Of the innumerable things that the prophets and Incarnations do within a short period of their lives on earth, three may be mentioned here. One, they busy themselves in clearing and remaking the ancient ways to God by removing weeds and dirt. Many human beings, however, do not like this: they are pained that their “philosophies”, that is, false beliefs and superstitions, are being eliminated. And they begin to create obstacles along the prophets’ paths. Second, prophets and Incarnations are visionaries and they speak the truth. Swami Vivekananda compared truth ‘to a corrosive substance of infinite power. It burns its way in wherever it falls – in soft substance at once, hard granite slowly, but it must.’ Thus, when the prophet speaks the truth, people easily misunderstand him and trouble him. Third, prophets are saviours who come to save and to liberate. In order to save the fallen and the miserable, they go to any extent. This, again, is misunderstood by some and the prophets undergo trouble. What’s more, seeing them look like mortals, many think these prophets are weak, ordinary beings and even want to supersede them.

Mortals and Prophets

Despite all that the human being can be and can do, he can never come anywhere near the prophet or the *avatar*. The fundamental differences between the human being and the Incarnation or prophet are these : One, prophets and Incarnations come to the earth compelled by love and compassion, of their own sweet will, while we are dragged by our *karma* to take birth. They return to where they came from at their own sweet will

The Prophet's Promise

while we are punished by our karma. Two, they are ever-free, and we are bound head to foot, till we struggle to be free by their grace. Three, their births and actions are divine, inspired and driven only by love, while most of our actions are driven by self-interest and karma. Four, they have absolute control over their personalities and minds while we have no control at all—till we strive for that. Five, Incarnations and prophets are illumined and have attained fullness in life, whereas we are ignorant and incomplete. So the limited and finite intellect of human beings never has the capacity to understand the workings of the universal, infinite and powerful minds of prophets and Incarnations.

We human beings, self-centred as we are, cannot understand the ways of the prophets or Incarnations. Their absolutely carefree natures, born of total inner freedom and lack of desires and attachments, are easily misunderstood. Their total self-control, unlimited purity and unparalleled control of the mind makes them act in ways which we self-seeking human beings cannot even understand. Cannot understand, true, but can give problems!

We can easily guess the amount of suffering which the Incarnation or prophet undergoes, though he comes only to give love. What's more, human beings crucify or poison them! Jesus died on the cross but Vivekananda figuratively bore the cross several times over. They even tried to poison him. Vivekananda never mentioned "ordinary suffering" like being without food or water for two or three days at a stretch and walking all along. When he mentioned some trouble as a passing remark, only then one could see it was indeed an ordeal.

Sometimes, rarely though, prophets pretend to be angry. Not that they can be angry like us, mortals. They have total self-control. But they show divine anger. For example, when

Swami Sunirmalananda

things would go out of control, when the very purpose of their descent to the earth was at stake, prophets like Jesus used harsh words to chide and awaken the erring ones. “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” This was not cursing but chiselling out the unwanted stone to perfect the image. Swami Vivekananda too had to use some strong words, like a loving father chastising the howling child.

The Embodiment of Love

There are prophets and prophets. Rarely do prophets of Vivekananda’s class come to the earth. What other certificate do we need to prove that Vivekananda was *the* prophet than this one from the horse’s mouth? Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of truthfulness, comments about Vivekananda: ‘Naren [Vivekananda] is perfect in realisation since his birth....Everything that you see here [meaning his own advent] is on account of him.’

Of his countless qualities, at least these three make Swami Vivekananda the unique prophet: love, universality and self-sacrifice. True, Swami Vivekananda was a “cyclonic monk”, the lion of Vedanta, a reformer, a lover of India, the saviour of the masses, the educationist, and so on. However, he was also the embodiment of love. His powerful personality, strong and bold statements, powerful actions, etc, hid his true nature—the nature of love. This love was for the whole of humanity. The brilliance of his activities and achievements hid his tender heart, so to say.

All prophets and Incarnations were strong and powerful personalities. Jesus Christ was no exception, though he is generally pictured as a humble lamb of God. Jesus too was a bold person and a hero who walked amidst “wolves and tigers”. He too used strong and bold words, and made strong moves occasionally. So did Vivekananda. The strong exterior of our

The Prophet's Promise

world-moving prophet was only a skin-deep cover— used to awaken souls slumbering in dense darkness—to hide the overflowing ocean of love within.

As in the case of every other subject, the human concept of love is limited. It does not go beyond the physical level or, at the most, the mental level. The depth and extent of God's love for human beings, and for living beings in general, is beyond all our imagination. The best manifestation of God's love is when that love assumes a body and becomes the Incarnation or the prophet. He cares for us, He loves, He yearns to save us from suffering. Prophets are expressions of God's love for the human being. Studying Swami Vivekananda's life as being the manifestation of love is important for today's stressful world.

What does this manifestation of love of the prophet's love mean? It means two things: absolute selflessness and unreserved giving of oneself. Swami Vivekananda's statement about the Buddha, that the Buddha never drew a breath for himself, defines the prophet himself. For Swami Vivekananda never drew a single breath for himself. Every single breath of his was for the good of others. Whether it was his search for God, his glorious attainments or his activities—all were only for the good of others. This is the embodiment of God's love for the human being. Further, this love means we have the safest place to depend upon absolutely.

The Embodiment of Universality

'Everything must be sacrificed, if necessary, for that one sentiment, universality,' this was Vivekananda's life's breath. No exclusion: everyone from everywhere was included in his love. His love was for everyone. This was the singular quality of the Prophet. He represented nothing in particular and everything in general—he was the universe. At the Parliament of Religions, for

Swami Sunirmalananda

instance, he was the only representative to speak about at least two religions, and the only spiritual representative of all religions. He had attained the highest and so was the only authority on Religion. He had seen God face to face. He knew the truth. Therefore he boldly carried the message of inter-religious harmony, so imperative to the present and future world. With the Parliament of Religions as the medium he spoke to the world about assimilation and not destruction, mutual help and not strife, harmony and not dissension. Later, Vivekananda's own composition about Sri Ramakrishna, calling him *sarva-dharma-sthapaka* (the establisher of all the faiths) spoke about himself.

Swami Vivekananda was undoubtedly the prophet of not one religion in particular but of all religions in their essential sense. Religions had lost their vitality. Spirituality had been sidelined and miracle-mongering, superstitions and theories had become the essence of religion. Vivekananda came to rejuvenate and revivify the fundamental undercurrent that flows to enliven all faiths—the spiritual undercurrent. Further, through his ideal of harmony, he showed the religious world that exclusiveness is self-destructive. Swami Vivekananda has, through his ideal of the universal religion, given a new force and vitality to all the existing faiths.

The Embodiment of Self-Sacrifice

All that Swamiji did for the world of the present and the future is beyond mortals to measure or comprehend. So far as the recent past is concerned, much has happened already within the short span of hundred and fifty years. Though changes are so perceptible, the prophet's contributions themselves are subtle and imperceptible. He remains hidden.

The Prophet's Promise

The world has still to recognise Vivekananda's contributions. The prophet remarked hours before departing: 'If there were another Vivekananda, he would have understood what Vivekananda has done!' This was not boasting. Why should he boast? Where is the necessity? This world is not worth a fig for the prophet. Jesus Christ also said, moments before being taken away: "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

Pardoning Prophet

Immaturity, lack of understanding, ignorance of the nature of the prophet, desires and ambitions, mental problems—all these things made several of those who came in contact with him cause Swamiji immense trouble. Even though many insulted him and gave him a lot of trouble, Swami Vivekananda had only love for them. As he remarked, 'a uniform silence is all my answer to my detractors.' He always excused, pardoned, smiled at detractors and marched forward. Vivekananda tried his utmost to evade conflict by keeping silent. He had a lot of great things to do. He had to make the earth spin in the reverse direction. So he silently endured hard labour, life in a cold, dark hole, starvation, and so on. Further, when weak personalities like E. T. Sturdy wrote strong letters and tried to humiliate him owing to their psychological problems, Vivekananda only had blessings. He wrote sadly to E. T. Sturdy: 'I nearly hypnotised myself into the belief that there at least has been a little oasis in the dreary desert of my life – a little spot of light in one whole life of misery and gloom – one moment of relaxation in a life of hard work and harder curses—even that oasis, that spot, that moment was only one of sense enjoyment.' That spot was the so-called faithfulness of Sturdy, revealed to be a mirage, after all. After enduring much,

Swami Sunirmalananda

Vivekananda had to warn Sturdy: 'My heart aches. I understand it all. I know what you are in – you are in the clutches of people who want to use you. The flesh-smell, a little money - and vultures are around. Such is life.' When repeatedly insulted, Vivekananda asked Sturdy: 'Would you like your children put into that dark hole you gave me in London - made to work to death and almost starved all the time?'

Leon Landsberg was another. He made enemies right and left with Swamiji's admirers. In addition, he quarrelled with Swamiji, 'sulked, complained, and criticized'. When this disciple left without notice, and began to give his own classes, Vivekananda wrote: 'May the Lord bless Landsberg wherever he goes. He is one of the few sincere souls I had the privilege in this life to come across.' When Landsberg continued to create problems months and years later, and annoyed others, Vivekananda wrote: "'I am sorry for him. There must be something wrong in his head. Let him alone. None of you need bother about him. As for hurting me, that is not in the power of gods or devils. So be at rest. It is unswerving love and perfect unselfishness that conquer everything.' Such was Vivekananda.

The Prophetic Letter

Ready to give everything for the good of others was Vivekananda's singular trait. This trait finds echo in a rare autobiographical letter, which Swamiji wrote one day— autobiographical in the "prophetic" sense. Swamiji wrote this letter on 6th December 1899 to Sister Nivedita from Los Angeles. He seems to say a million words in a few sentences. He shows to the world to what class of a prophet he belonged. Coincidentally, two thousand years ago, one day, Jesus too made somewhat similar remarks. Those remarks are recorded in *St Matthew*, 11.

The Prophet's Promise

When both are read together, it looks as if the two are discussing—one elaborating and corroborating the other, one citing examples for the other's comments. One speaks, and the other writes. It's not just because Vivekananda quotes from *St Matthew* 11, that this letter is important, but it is important for the promise it brings.

That had been a difficult period in Swami Vivekananda's life. Let alone personal health problems and two or three trusted disciples going the Judas' way. "It is an awful spell of the bad turn of fortune with me last six months. Misfortune follows me ever wherever I go," the prophet wrote, for instance, to Mrs. Bull in 1899. Yet, he had a lot to accomplish and he was in a hurry.

The setting is the same. Vivekananda writes to his disciple, while Jesus discussed with his disciples before speaking those words. Next, Vivekananda begins his letter thus: 'Your sixth has arrived, but with it yet no change in my fortune. Would change be any good, do you think? Some people are made that way, to love being miserable. If I did not break my heart over people I was born amongst, I would do it for somebody else. I am sure of that. This is the way of some, I am coming to see it.' All his life, Swamiji was helpless and unable to control himself when he saw others suffering. Since his childhood, he helped others, going out of the way, even ready to sacrifice his own life if need be. In *St. Matthew* 11, Jesus speaks about the people of Capernaum, the people of 'his own city' (*St. Matthew*, 9.1), about the Pharisees' meeting to punish Jesus and to not accept him (*St. Matthew* 12.15) etc. *St. Matthew* remarks: 'Then He began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! ... And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would

Swami Sunirmalananda

have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for thee." (St. Matthew, 11.20-25). While Swamiji wanted to take all the burden of 'his' people, Jesus was sad that 'his' people were not up to the mark.

Swamiji continues and writes about the real prophet's happiness. 'We are all after happiness, true, but that some are only happy in being unhappy -- queer, is it not?' The prophet is unhappy if he sees others suffering. He struggles to save them, pulls their sufferings upon himself, and then alone can he be in peace. So his true happiness is in being "unhappy" in this extraordinary sense. The prophet is bound neither by the happiness nor the unhappiness of this world. He is ruled by compassion. Jesus says (St Matthew 11:6), 'And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.'

Swamiji continues his letter and says that being happy at being unhappy is not harmful: 'There is no harm in it either, except that happiness and unhappiness are both infectious. Ingersoll said once that if he were God, he would make health catching, instead of disease, little dreaming that health is quite as catching as disease, if not more! That is the only danger. No harm in the world in my being happy, in being miserable, but others must not catch it. This is the great fact.' Having taken upon himself all the sufferings and burdens of the world, the prophet smiles with satisfaction that others are happy, though he himself might be enduring much. He is worried at the same time lest, seeing his physical suffering, his intimate ones should suffer. His concern now is that others should not suffer, seeing him heavily burdened. This is the way of Shiva. Swamiji's mother used to pray to Shiva to grant her a son, and Shiva, the drinker of poison for the good of the universe, was born as her son.

The Prophet's Promise

To corroborate Swamiji's statement, as it were, Jesus Christ continues his talk on the prophets in *St Matthew*, 11 (7-11). Here, Jesus speaks about St. John, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee.' Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding, he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." John the Baptist made the ultimate sacrifice. He was not clothed in soft raiment but in rags. This is Christ's example of how the prophet lives.

Whether it's the prophet or the ordinary individual who wishes to do good to others, the point is to do it happily. Swamiji continues with the letter: 'No sooner a prophet feels miserable for the state of man than he sours his face, beats his breast, and calls upon everyone to drink tartaric acid, munch charcoal, sit upon a dung-heap covered with ashes, and speak only in groans and tears! I find they all have been wanting. Yes, they have. If you are really ready to take the world's burden, take it by all means. But do not let us hear your groans and curses. Do not frighten us with your sufferings, so that we come to feel we were better off with our own burdens.'

We have already mentioned that the difference between two prophets, like between two individuals, is in the difference of the manifestation of power. True to what he wrote in this letter, Vivekananda did not let us 'hear his groans and curses.' He walked away smiling.

Swami Sunirmalananda

As if fully agreeing with Swamiji's statement, Jesus Christ continues his sermon (*St Matthew*, 11.12-19) : 'And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. ...He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.... For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He hath a devil!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children." People are like children, they don't understand. Yet, the true prophet, though appearing normal from the outside, bears the burden inside.

The Great Promise

Swami Vivekananda continues his letter, giving a word of advice to the prophets. In this, we see his magnanimous heart: 'The man who really takes the burden blesses the world and goes his own way. He has not a word of condemnation, a word of criticism, not because there was no evil but that he has taken it on his own shoulders willingly, voluntarily. It is the Saviour who should go his way rejoicing, and not the saved'. Jesus Christ ends his sermon with these words (*St Matthew*, 11:28-30): "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Vivekananda, however, does not end there. He goes a step farther and this is what makes him the *unique* prophet. When a prophet speaks or writes something, it is the absolute truth. So, when Vivekananda promises the world something, it is the truth. Swami Vivekananda ends the letter with these words: 'Come ye that are heavy laden and lay all your burden on me, and then do whatever you like and be happy and forget that I ever existed.' This is the greatest promise to the

The Prophet's Promise

world. Just leave your burden on him and be happy. This is the self-revelation of the biggest "black hole" (to use popular scientific terminology) that ever came to earth, ready to consume all the weight of the heavy-laden world. It is the *Purusha* of the *Purusha Sukta* hymn of the *Vedas*, ready to sacrifice himself for the good of the world.

Vivekananda never wants anyone to remember him even. He wants us to lay our entire burden on him and forget that he ever existed. And he did not go away weeping or cursing the world for all that he had to endure. He is there, even now, inspiring all, for the Prophet promised some days before his final departure: "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off as a disused garment; but I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God."

Devotion

If we are caught in a labyrinth and someone comes and says, "I can show you the way out," what do we do? Follow him. And the gratitude we feel is what we call worship and devotion.

Discouragement

You need not complain that you are not successful in your attempts. So it is with almost all. Every child before it learns to walk falls down a hundred thousand times. I can assure you that God helps those who help themselves.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

I Saw the Recording Angel

N. Bangarayya

I

It looks as though Incarnations of God often bring their own recording angels. Valmiki accompanied Rama, and Vyasa came with Krishna. Who accompanied Ramakrishna? ...

I can never forget the day in November 1916 when I first had placed in my hands a copy of the glorious Gospel. It came as a present from specially holy hands—a monk who had dedicated his life to the service of others and the quest of Truth, one who, even in this Iron Age, had lived all the four traditional *ashramas* (stages of life) in an exemplary way, and at last reached the Goal of life. His disciple, who actually brought it, was also a great lady—a life-long celibate given to austerity, pilgrimage, and *sadhana*.

But for that Gospel, I would have perhaps missed Ramakrishna. No doubt there are other books-- greater in themselves--giving an account of Sri Ramakrishna's life and sayings. But the Gospel stands unique among the Ramakrishna literature, if not among the scriptures of the world. In it we are face to face with the Lord—no veil of interpretation standing between. Ramakrishna speaks, and we listen. How was it possible to preserve the freshness and inspiration, God alone knows. My artistic temperament would not have been attracted to Sri Ramakrishna, but for the fascinating picture in the Gospel. For some time, I entertained a doubt whether the English-educated disciple did not polish up and smarten the crude speech of his illiterate Master. But when I met Master Mahashaya or M (as the modest pen-name goes) I became fully convinced that it is impossible for anybody to add to the charm of Ramakrishna. M spoke beautifully; but there was a distinct and ineffaceable barrier between the two styles, the style of the Master as the disciple has recorded it and the style of the disciple himself. The originality,

N. Bangarayya

suggestiveness, simplicity and directness of the former are all its own. It soars far above the reach of any human intellect, be it ever so great. It is not possible for anybody to have invented for the world 'The Ramakrishna Art'. It is greatness enough to have preserved it.

The Gospel prompted me to visit M. For this literary curiosity apart, I had an intense longing to meet the great benefactor who gave a hero after my heart. I lived in a corner of South India before I actually decided to go and meet him. I had started correspondence with him for about three or four years on questions pertaining to my spiritual practice. At my insistence and in spite of his advanced age and neuralgic pains he wrote a whole card in his own hand, blessing (praying for the Master's blessings as he put it) and encouraging me. I have kept the letter as a precious memento.

II

On 1 August 1930, I with two companions started for Calcutta. We reached there on the 2nd and put up in a South Indian hotel in the Chittarajan Avenue. We met M for the first time on the 3rd of August. Early in the morning we took a guide from the hotel and started to find out M's residence. Amherst Street in which he was then living was very near our hotel. The roads were already wet with the rain of the previous night, and by the time we started (early morning) a slight drizzle had begun. When we reached the house of M, we were straightaway directed to the third floor where M was having his residence. It was a big building in which a school was run, of which M was the Proprietor. The stairs led us to a very tiny apartment, where stood two or three rickety old chairs and a bench. The apartment, on one side, opened into a pretty spacious open terrace. On the other side there was a very big room which we later discovered to be the meditation room. When we occupied the chairs in the

I Saw the Recording Angel

apartment, there was nobody there. We had brought with us a garland of fresh jasmine and sat meditating upon Sri Ramakrishna. It must have been about 9 a.m., quite a long time since we arrived, when the door of the meditation room suddenly opened.

There stood before us a tall and stately figure with an overflowing silvery beard. Is it a *Rishi* that has stepped out of the Vedas? We fell prostrate on the ground before him. He bade us rise up and take our seats. 'I shall be coming presently', he added and went downstairs. He came back shortly after and sat on a bench opposite to us. He spoke for about an hour. There was first a dialogue between us and then an uninterrupted speech by him. The speech was replete with quotations from the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*. It was at once fluent and sparkling. There was a singsong intonation in it such as is found among the Christian missionaries of our parts. If I had a mind, I could have recorded the whole speech from memory after I returned to my hotel. But at that time I did not take it into my head to record it, and now I regret it very much. When he was still going on with his speech, a lean Bengalee boy who was waiting upon him spoke to him something in Bengali. Then M turned to us apologetically, saying, 'I am sorry; recently I fell ill. My heart is weak and doctors advised me not to speak.' Upon this we said, 'We are very sorry to have troubled you. We would beseech you to follow the injunctions of the medical advisers strictly.'

This was the first day. I recorded what I thought important in the dialogue. Though the record is a little fragmentary I would like to share it with the reader. After the introductions were over I started the conversation.

I : (Pointing to one of my companions) He is suffering very much from lust. Can you give him any helpful advice?

N. Bangarayya

M : Every man can be a pilot in a calm sea. He is an expert who can steer his ship in stormy weather. In the same way he is a real *sadhaka* who manages to remember God in spite of lust and other passions assailing his mind. There is true greatness in it.

I : We are far from greatness, and the suffering is too much for us.

M : After God realization not the slightest trace of it will be left. You will not feel embittered, because you have suffered so much. You will only laugh at all this struggle.

I : (Within myself) 'God realization! Goodness gracious! How far away it must be!' There was a short silence.

M : Have you gone to the Belur Math? Have you paid your respects to Swami Shivananda?

I : Yes.

M : Have you come to take initiation from him?

I : For me there is a point of pride. I have made up my mind that I should not take initiation from anybody else except Sri Ramakrishna. Will my desire be fulfilled?

M : What objection can there be, if there is God's grace?

My companion (Narsu) : Do you advise us to take initiation from Shivananda?

M : How can I give any advice in the matter? It is for individuals to decide for themselves. It has become a fashion to take initiation and then to remain in the vortex of worldliness. What purpose is served by such an initiation? After all, your *guru* must appeal to you and you must appeal to your *guru*.

Narsu : We cannot stay here for more than a week; we have no money with us to do so.

M : Is God realization such a light thing as to be decided in a week? If once you take initiation the consequences follow for lives. You must think very carefully in this matter. Have you not heard the proverb :

I Saw the Recording Angel

'Marry in haste and repent at leisure'? So be careful. You must observe your guru for at least ten or fifteen days before you take initiation from him. Then if he appeals to you, you can have initiation.

I : Is Shivananda a realized soul?

M: How can I say? Do not depend upon my opinion. 'Lean not on a broken reed; for man is such.' If you depend upon man you may be totally misled. Suppose I say he is a realized soul. What guarantee is there that you will have faith in it? You must decide for yourselves.

Have you seen Dakshineswar—the scene where Sri Ramakrishna played his Divine drama?

I : No. We have not yet been taken there.

M: Oh, no, no. You must not delay it. You can see the temple's pinnacle even from the Belur Math. Have you seen it?

I : Yes. Every inch of the land in that temple.

M: Why, every particle of dust in that temple is instinct with spirituality. If you just step into that temple you will have spiritual progress.

I: But we may also feel the pain that Sri Ramakrishna is not physically present there.

M: Wherever there is pleasure there is pain also. He who transcends both is a yogi. Even though you cannot feel the physical presence of Sri Ramakrishna, you can try to imagine the presence of his *sat-chit-ananda* (spiritual) form there.

I: Can imagination give satisfaction? We must see Him face to face. Otherwise how can the thirst be quenched?

After this the sage who was facing us turned a little sideways and exclaimed, 'We have become known to each other! We are all of one family. This is all due to the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. Through the grace of an Incarnation people belonging to different

N. Bangarayya

nations and races forget their differences and behave as though they are blood-brothers.'

When he exclaimed, 'We are all of one family', a spring of joy welled forth from within us.

With a glow in his face he asked us, 'Have you seen our *Thakurs* (gods)?' and rose up to take us into his worship room. As we were going, I said, 'You are not doing well. Otherwise I would have requested you for some reminiscences of the Master.' He turned round and exclaimed, 'All that I have spoken to you today are reminiscences of the Master. Take away the Master, the disciple is nothing!' I have already referred to a continuous speech made by M, of which unfortunately, I did not keep a record. That was a bit general and no personal incident was narrated therein. So I failed to understand how it could have come under the head of reminiscences, so I added, 'I mean personal reminiscences.' Still the sage insisted, 'They are intensely personal', and repeated, 'Take away the Master, the disciple is nothing.' I did not like to pursue the point further.

The meditation room was very spacious, but it was not neatly kept. The floor was full of some unbound printed forms; and books lay scattered here and there. I was reminded of the Master's description of a *sattvic* devotee's surroundings. On the walls were hung some pictures. But they were so very old that it was hardly possible to decipher them. Pointing to a photo he said, 'This is Vivekananda at twenty three'. We put faith in his words and took it to be a picture of Vivekananda, for, left to ourselves, we could not see much of a picture there. Similarly he pointed at other pictures, naming each. But one thing gave us very great delight. Pointing to each picture the venerable sage bowed before it, and we had the good fortune to be with him at that heavenly moment. It gave us a thrill of joy.

I Saw the Recording Angel

He next took us on to the open terrace. From there he pointed out saying, 'That is our flower garden.' On the terrace was the sacred basil plant. He fell prostrate before it, and we followed suit.

My companion Narsu wanted to place the Jasmine garland round his neck; but as he attempted to do so the apostle gave a start as though he were shocked. He asked the young Bengalee boy standing by his side to take it and place it on the picture of Sri Ramakrishna in the worship room. As he was doing so M exclaimed in Bengali '*sugandhi*' (very fragrant). At our home for years we had been decorating the picture of Sri Ramakrishna with garlands of flowers. But when we saw the writer of the Gospel decorating the picture in his worship room with a garland we took with us, we counted it a unique moment in our lives.

Then we took our leave of him. Before we parted I pleaded, 'It is unfortunate that you are not doing well. We intend to come here now and then. You need not exert yourself. But please allow us to sit in your company for some time. That boon you must grant us.

He replied, 'Please do come'.

As we were parting I wanted to say how happy we felt to have met him. But before I could finish my sentence he exclaimed, 'Speech is silver, but silence is golden'. So I did not like to give expression to my joy. This meeting is a blessing to me. His modesty silenced us.

III

In the evening of that very day at about seven we again repaired to that tiny apartment. It was dark and there was no lamp in it. He was meditating along with some devotees. As we entered, a devotee ran downstairs, brought a lamp and accommodated us on one of the benches. Another devotee whispered to me in broken and faulty English, 'He is praying.'

N. Bangarayya

The meditation continued, and we too sat meditating. After about half an hour he opened his eyes.

M: (Turning to us) Have you been to Dakshineswar?

I : No.

M : Have you been to the Belur Math again?

I: No. Tomorrow we propose going to Dakshineswar.

M : Before you go there you should prepare yourselves for the visit.

I : Today we have been busy preparing ourselves. That is why we did not go either to the Math or to any other place.

After a short pause, he burst into what I would call an inspired utterance. It was meant to be an introduction to our pilgrimage to Dakshineswar.

M : Seeing Dakshineswar you can have an idea of what Sri Ramakrishna's surroundings were. The temple was the background of Divine scenes and incidents. At Dakshineswar you will find the bel tree under which the Master practised great *tantrik sadhanas*. There is also the *panchavati*, where he went through many spiritual exercises. You will also see the Master's chamber. When you enter the Master's chamber you will see with your mind's eye the Master seated with his disciples and talking to them on divine subjects. We always found the Master absorbed in spiritual moods. Sometimes he would be in *samadhi*. Sometimes he would be singing and dancing. At other times he would be talking to the Divine Mother. We have seen a man who actually talked to the Divine Mother. We were fortunate enough to see a man whose experiences form as it were a *living Veda*. It is revelations from such people that we have to fall back upon and not on our 'ounce of reason'. Intellect cannot go far in spiritual matters. Intellect has been weighed and found wanting. Christ said to his disciples, 'I speak of things which I have seen with my own eyes; and yet you believe me not.' One has to put faith in the

I Saw the Recording Angel

words of a man of realization. When you go to the temple you must purify yourselves and strip yourselves of all sensuality. Only the pure in heart can see God. You must also prepare yourselves to receive wireless messages from the Master. This pilgrimage to Dakshineswar will help you a good deal towards God-realization.

He went on talking like this, when a devotee whispered into my ears, 'Master Mahashay has recently fallen ill. So please don't allow him to go on. The doctors have warned us that there is danger if he is allowed to speak much.' Upon this I interrupted M, saying. 'Revered Sir, you are suffering from heart trouble. If you go on speaking like this, it will do you harm. I would request you to desist.' He at once realized the situation, and in a gentle and tender voice pleaded, 'Yes, it is true that I am ill,' and stopped. He afterwards spoke something in Bengali to some one sitting by his side. A lamp was brought there from downstairs. A devotee gave us *prasad*.

I cannot describe in words the impression made on our minds that night. Each sentence of the speech was a diamond. How much he must have been absorbed in the Master may be gleaned from the fact that he forgot altogether about his illness. He risked his health for our sake, and earnestly prepared us for the unique pilgrimage of our life. I thought, within myself, 'Suppose I now go on a pilgrimage to Brindavan, shall I find an Uddhava or a Vyasa to introduce me to the place. How fortunate am I!'

We knelt before him and prayed, 'Please bless us that we may be fit to enter the temple of Dakshineswar and receive the Master's wireless messages'. But it is impossible for him to slip from his exalted humility even casually. He replied quickly, 'Let us all pray for His blessings. Who am I to bless? *'Lean not on a*

N. Bangarayya

broken reed, for man is such.' The repetition of the last sentence sounded like one of the epic repetitions of the Ramayana.

IV

Our third and last visit was after we had finished our pilgrimage to Dakshineswar. It was probably on the 5th of August. The climate of Calcutta did not suit me and I fell ill. So lest we should be troubling the *sanyasins* of the Math, we wanted to cut short our stay there and return home.

It must have been nearly 5:30 p.m., when we reached M's apartment for the third time. It was evening and the sunset was beautiful to watch. The mellowed light of the evening sun enveloped the open terrace. Some boys and girls were flying kites and shouting merrily. Undisturbed, the sage was meditating within the room. We sat on the bench and after some time he came out and greeted us cordially. Saying that he would return shortly he went downstairs. After a short interval there came a young man of about twentyfive. He had a smiling appearance and had overflowing hair. We entered into a conversation with him.

I : Are you a son of Master Mahashay?

He : No. But you can take me for one from the reverence I bear towards his spiritual instructions.

I : How many sons and daughters has he?

He : Two sons and two daughters. (He then pointed to a boy and a girl playing there as the grandchildren of M.)

I : Does Master Mahashay give initiation to anybody?

He : No. He does not.

It must have been about 7:30 p.m. when M again came upstairs. By that time about a dozen devotees had gathered in that apartment, evidently to bask in the soulful company of M and spend the evening in prayers and *bhajans*. M asked to be excused saying that he delayed us long. We gave a suitable reply.

I Saw the Recording Angel

With a glow in his face he said, 'Come in. You shall visit our gods.' We went into the meditation room and that evening we again bowed down before the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and other deities. Pointing to a picture he said, 'These are the *Saptarshi Maharajas* (seven sages)! It was rather a picture of the old type, and there was not much art in it to admire. He then showed us some cuttings of pictures from newspapers. They were pictures of the *kumbhamela* at Hardwar which took place that very year. 'This is Sitapati Maharaj conversing with the *sadhus* at Hardwar', he explained. I asked, 'Who is Sitapati Maharaj?' He replied, 'Swami Raghavananda. Both the names were equally unfamiliar to us; he then led us to the terrace, and we all prostrated before the sacred basil plant. I narrate this in detail to show that though he was an illumined sage, how punctiliously he observed these practices with a view to set an example to others, and fulfilled the dictum of the *Gita* in this respect.

That day it was the eleventh day of the fortnight, considered particularly auspicious by the Hindus. It must have been a day of fasting for him. He had a harmonium brought there through one of his attendant devotees and asked us to sing some Telugu songs. Our only qualification seemed to be that none of us knew anything of music, and we had never touched a harmonium or any other instrument. But there was one thing, namely,—that we were deeply devoted to the *kirtanas* of Tyagaraja. I explained to him that we did not know anything of music. However on his insistence I gave out the texts of some three or four *kirtanas* of Tyagaraja. I explained their meaning in English to him. On hearing them he burst out, 'Oh! He is a great seer, a God-realized soul.'

After that he asked the young man with whom we had had a conversation before, to sing some Bengali songs for us. In the

N. Bangarayya

Gospel we had read the translation of many a Bengalee song which the Master used to sing, but that was the first time for us to hear Bengali songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta among the ancients, and Sri Girish Chandra Ghosh among the moderns. We considered ourselves particularly fortunate to hear the favourite songs of the Master sung under the direction of a direct disciple. I said smilingly, 'We are exchanging bad for good music.' At this M blushed and exclaimed, 'Oh! No, no.'

We stayed on till 9 p.m. The kirtan was still proceeding. We rose up to take our leave. I explained to him how our stay had to be cut short. He felt sorry for my ill-health, and placed two beautiful oranges in my hand with a prayer in his heart for our spiritual well-being and progress.

It will be presumptuous for anybody to attempt to assign the place of M among the Master's disciples. Maybe he is the least among them. But this much is certain, namely, that he has achieved what no other (not excluding even the great Vivekananda) has done. He has built an indestructible shrine in letters to his Master, which shall stand as a Wonder of the World to the admiring gaze of posterity. As Vivekananda put it, it must be that the Master was with him in this unique achievement. The self-effacement, the love of humanity, and the immense austerity that stood behind the achievement will be adored by mankind for ever.

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Self-surrender

That man who can throw himself at the feet of the Lord and say, "All this is Thine, This body, mind, and soul all belong to Thee; of myself I am utterly helpless; do Thou take me," the Lord takes that man and makes his hands, his feet, his eyes and ears, His instruments. He speaks through his mouth; He works through his hands; He walks with his feet; and the man becomes a living representative of God. This is salvation.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Detachment and Renunciation

Swami Bhuteshananda

(A talk given at Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, on 23-9-1984 by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.)

In our scriptures we find that great emphasis has been laid on the life of renunciation. It is supposed to be the climax of one's spiritual efforts at reaching the supreme Goal. However, renunciation of everything, known as *Sannyasa*, is understood by different persons in different ways. In Vedic literature four *asramas* or life-stages have been mentioned, namely, *brahmacharya*, *garhasthya*, *vanaprastha*, and *sannyasa*, the fourth and the last being considered the highest stage. Again, *Sannyasa* has been interpreted as a state of spiritual realization. When a man reaches a high state of enlightenment, he behaves in a particular way, and this is considered to be the state of *Sannyasa* as distinguished from the *sannyasa-ashrama* of the fourth stage of life that has to be lived according to the dictates of the scriptures.

It is a state which a man reaches whichever *asrama* he may be in at the time. In the *Gita*, *sannyasa* has been beautifully described thus : *The renunciation of all actions motivated by self-interest is stated by wise men as Sannyasa.* As long as the ego has not been eliminated, as long as we think that we are the body, that we are individuals as distinguished from others, we narrow the sense of this Self, and this narrow conception prompts us to do everything for our own gain. Renunciation of this kind of narrow selfish idea is what is called *Sannyasa*.

Sannyasa is not the mere giving up of all activity, which is not possible. Lord Krishna says in the *Gita* : *'Nobody remains even for a second free from doing any action.'* We have a body, and for the maintenance of the body we have to work. Even when you are not doing anything, simply sitting quiet, you are not, according to Sankara, in a state of inactivity. The very fact of

Swami Bhuteshananda

your thinking that you are sitting quiet without any activity, is in itself an action. Because you are superimposing the body on your higher Self, the condition of non-activity of the body is superimposed on the real Self which is free from all limitations. Therefore, when you sit quiet, you say, 'I am inactive, I am not doing anything', as if that were an achievement. Sankara clearly states that it is not an achievement, you are only deceiving yourself. A man does not attain the state of actionlessness simply by not doing anything physically or mentally, because no man can be at any time without any activity. To consider ourselves to be quiet, to be without any action, is in itself an activity, superimposing a condition of the body on the Self which is without any condition. This is a point that needs to be understood. Unfortunately, our misconception regarding this meaning of Sannyasa, and regarding the implication of the scriptures in this respect, has been our undoing. Perhaps, for centuries we have been harbouring this wrong conception.

The ultimate teaching of the Gita, as Sri Ramakrishna has put it, is renunciation. Renunciation of what? Renunciation does not simply mean the renunciation of activity because it is not possible and neither is it desirable. Neither should we give up all our activities, nor should we simply perform certain things aimlessly and say that we are active. Nevertheless, Sri Ramakrishna emphasizes that without renunciation nothing can be attained. Renunciation is of the utmost importance, both to householders and to Sannyasins.

Now it is to be considered whether the so-called Sannyasins who have renounced everything have really renounced all activities. Sometimes we take pride in being aloof from all activities. Is it a state that is desirable? Does it mean any special achievement? This is a point that has to be understood, and the teachings of the Gita lead us to a correct understanding

Detachment and Renunciation

of it. The *Vedas* and other scriptures have been misunderstood in this respect. It was once thought that the *Vedas* enjoined elaborate sacrifices, and penances as our ideals, as a means to unlimited enjoyment, eternal happiness and so forth. But in the Gita there is a statement which directly contradicts such ideas of the *Vedas*.

This misconception of performing Vedic rites with the idea of gaining a comfortable life here and hereafter is censured by Sri Krishna, according to whom those people who have this wrong conception do not know the real import of the Scripture.

Arjuna was afraid that, on account of the sin incurred through the cruel process of war and destruction, he might simply lose his spiritual life. Sri Krishna carefully explains that it is not the action that is good or bad but the motive behind the action. If you do a thing from a sense of duty without any selfish motive, your action can never be termed sinful. If one has an unpleasant duty to perform, what is to be done then? The duty should be performed but unselfishly and in a spirit of detachment.

In the Gita we read, *'Just as a material pleasure-seeker engages himself in his work whole-heartedly, so does a man of enlightenment engage himself in his work.'*

The feature that distinguishes the two people is that while the former works for his own self-interest, the latter works in a spirit of detachment with the idea of bringing about the well-being of the world. People think that without any selfish motive no action can be performed, every action must have a motive and that motive cannot be any other than a selfish one. But Sri Krishna says clearly that a man of enlightenment does not consider himself to be prompted by any selfish motive.

It is only when we identify ourselves with this body of flesh and bones that we consider ourselves to be limited beings and work for selfish gain. But when a man is enlightened, he

Swami Bhuteshananda

ceases to identify himself with his limited body and considers his Self as all-encompassing. This is exactly the teaching of the Gita with regard to Sannyasa. Sannyasa is not shirking one's duties, it is not just keeping quiet without doing anything; that will not enable him to reach any goal. Therefore, the Gita never advocates inactivity. Swami Vivekananda has said that the Gita teaches intense calmness in the midst of intense activity. He calls this teaching 'Practical Vedanta'.

Vedanta, of course, has been taught from time immemorial in our country. Here even in ordinary people who have no education you will find wonderful traits of Vedanta which they have somehow learnt.

Vedanta is in the air as it were. But we have forgotten the true meaning of some of the central doctrines of Vedanta or have given wrong interpretations to them. This kind of misconceived popular Vedanta is useless: it will do good neither to ourselves nor to others. It is not the Vedanta that is taught by the scriptures.

The Gita is the first interpretation of the Vedas. Before the Gita we did not have such clear exposition of the teachings of the Vedas. As we have seen, there were different kinds of sacrifices and different kinds of ritualistic practices. A sizable part of the Vedas deals with them; but here and there, or between the lines, we find one great teaching which can enlighten a man as regards his true self. In the Gita we find all these vital teachings brought together. People do not know their real nature as the Atman, the Self and, considering themselves to be merely bodies, they behave in a manner which makes them constantly afraid of their apparent limitations. The teaching of the Gita, though apparently for the enlightenment of Arjuna, is really intended to enlighten all of us regarding the real import of the Vedas. The real import of the Vedas is to give us knowledge of our true Self and regulate our behaviour in accordance with it.

Detachment and Renunciation

We talk big, indulge in high theories, but fail miserably in translating the teachings into real life. Therefore we have to be careful so that there may not be any discrepancy between what we preach and what we practise. Our preaching and practice must go together. The Gita teaches us how to live in this world: our actions should be motivated in such a manner that instead of entangling us in this world it will free us from bondage, '*Karma Yoga is the secret of success, says the Gita*'. Karma Yoga teaches us how to work in a way which will not lead us to entanglement in this world but will free us from bondage.

In ancient times there was in the minds of people the mistaken belief that if they engaged themselves in activity, they would get entangled or lose their spiritual ideal or state. That wrong impression the Gita has set right. It is now for us to follow the teachings of the Gita. When we do it our whole life will change, we will think and behave differently.

Swami Vivekananda has laid much emphasis on the teachings of the Gita which he has placed in the right perspective. Thus the ancient teaching has received a new impetus through Swamiji's lectures. In his talks we find a wonderful explanation of the cardinal tenets of the Gita and rational ways to make them applicable to our present-day life. Unless our knowledge and actions are relevant to our modern life they have no meaning. Now, how to make our entire life, all our actions, conducive to the achievement of the highest Goal as taught by the Gita which has been so rationally interpreted by Swami Vivekananda? They are not two different things, but have to be understood together.

Having travelled throughout the world and seen the different societies and their behavioural patterns, Swami Vivekananda came to the conclusion that the extremely restless way of life in Western countries would bring about their

Swami Bhuteshananda

downfall because the people there have not been able to think deeply about what they are going to achieve by these activities. Before taking up any activity its ultimate goal and motive must be considered. What is the goal that we have been trying to reach through these activities? Swamiji did not tell us to work restlessly or aimlessly. Though he preached intense activity everywhere, yet he was careful that activity should not be simply selfish activity without a clear conception of the goal to be attained through this activity.

Swamiji has taught us how in our modern world we can live like a *yogi* without running away from society and without living a secluded life. Wherever you are, you can be a yogi. You can perform all activities as a *yoga* by being internally detached from them, by working without any personal gain, doing everything for the sake of others, thinking that others are not different from you. With that knowledge firmly established in your mind if you work for the good of all mankind, you are a Yogi, you are a Sannyasin. Renunciation of selfish action and selfish motive is what is called Sannyasa. Simply by not engaging ourselves in activity we do not really reach the state of inaction. *Naiskarmya*, the state of actionlessness, actually means a state of consciousness in which I feel that I am not affected, I am not changed by my activity, but remain detached as a mere onlooker.

This is a very difficult conception that has to be gradually understood. But this gradual understanding can be achieved through the performance of our activities without any selfish motive. That is the first step through which we are to proceed.

We may be engaged in intense activities outwardly and yet we can be free from all activities internally. This is what Swamiji wants us to teach in the modern world in a language that all can understand. We should read the Gita in the light of

Detachment and Renunciation

Swamiji's teachings. Referring to his own *Guru*, Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji said that scriptures have to be understood in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's life. Sri Ramakrishna was almost always immersed in deep *samadhi*; but when he was conscious of the external world, he engaged himself in work with equal zeal for the well-being of people. He did not do anything for his own gain. There was nothing selfish in him. His ego had been completely eliminated, as it were, and what he did, and said was all for the good of humanity. Let us hope that through our devotion to these Ideals, we will have a real understanding of the message of the Gita, and of Swamiji's and Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.

Through their blessings, may we attain that enlightenment which will be for the good of mankind.

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Education

True education consists in the sacrifice of vanity and the manifestation of the God within.

Ego

Almost all men in the world have usurped the throne where God should sit. On that throne where God should be, a most worthless slave has been given place. This is the ego. When you know this, then drive out the ego. When you do this and become the slave or servant of God instead, you will realize your eternal nature. Being one with God, all fear of death will go, peace will come to you, and you will taste true bliss.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

God is also Mother

Hans Torwesten

(Continued from last issue)

It is not easy to define what it is to live with the “Mother”. Everything that can be said about Her is a paradox. She expresses the Absolute, in that she lets everything “appear” – you and me, the lilac, the typewriter on the table, our little five week old daughter Miriam (in the meantime, at the second revision of this book, she has already become two years old and has been trying for half an hour with increasing success to hinder me at the typewriter – that is also *Maya!*), the fog and the newspaper stand on Paris Square in Haidhausen with its Maya-headlines – and it covers itself again with all these details. She is the cloud, which hides everything, and the light of the sun, which makes everything shine – and can again “blind” us. For a long time I had my doubts as to whether the fat and quite arrogant saleswoman – now I shall be more specific - and the sometimes quite strict Aunt Josephine were also “Her”, but now I know – the Mother sometimes disguises herself wonderfully.

One may ask: Why only just the “Mother”, why not the heavenly “Father”? Does the latter not exist anymore, has he played himself completely out?

The Father has in no way played himself out – he has just stepped back into the background a little in order to thoroughly reconsider his traditional role and renew himself. As I have just indicated, I myself have just recently become a “father”, and I am glad and grateful that I am at the right moment caught up in a new stream of consciousness, which makes it possible for me to play my fatherhood role in a much more intensive way, as it was

Hans Torwesten

in a still patriarchal age. Many will doubt my manliness, when he looks at me with the little one in the carrier out walking, but the mixing and flexibility is indicative of a new situation, in which nothing is strictly laid down for ever, in which Yin appears in Yang and Yang appears in Yin. It is a question of a tendency, which tends towards the mystical and the female, but from which the man can profit to a great extent, as he thereby escapes from the cage, because it was mainly built for the woman, but in which he himself was confined. Many things which lay fallow in the man – as also in the woman – only because the role-play required it, can now be manifested. Man will not thereby lose manliness or fatherliness - he will only take off the crown which he, as alleged Lord of Creation, had himself put on or had it put on him by the male creator God.

One could on the other hand point out that no time has needed the Father more than our time. If one has gathered numerous young people round a “fatherly” *Guru* figure, does this not show a hunger for fatherly authority? And moreover; are there not certain things which are always better expressed through the father figure than the mother? I am thinking for instance of the parable of the prodigal son, who returns to his father – as I look above all at the painting by the late Rembrandt I have in front of me. There is indeed the son returning home, who is embraced by the mother, but in the parable of the prodigal son something specific is expressed, which is expressed only in the father-son relationship.

Nevertheless the purely fatherly religion has very clear boundaries and the fact that it has been held to be the only

God is also Mother

possible religion, certainly contributes to the fact that one is now stressing more the neglected side. Anyone who becomes enthusiastic for the Mother suddenly sees everything “quite differently”, for whom the Father necessarily moves more into the background – at least the Father which the Judeo-Christian religion has so far presented. If terms such as father and mother are also in many cases exchangeable, in so far as it is a question of God, the words nevertheless cannot in *every* case be exchanged. I can say with Ramakrishna: The Mother often *disguises* herself completely, she plays her *Maya* game with us – but can I not also say this of the Father, whom we have got to know in the churches and in religious education? This Father does not *disguise* Himself – that would be beneath his dignity; he is after all not an actor, but a respectable gentleman. We do indeed know Jupiter, who disguises himself in order to approach a beautiful girl; and the gods of the Hindu pantheon seem to almost want to outdo one another in disguises and fine clothing. But all this takes place in a context that has a special feature, the rather feminine-motherly framework of the “eternal religion”. In the infinite space of this mythological religion one takes one’s time. One grasps the whole of creation in a game, while the male-time orientated religion is fully directed at the future and has no time – especially not for disguises and other games.

In the Shakti religion the game characteristic has a fundamental meaning. In this case not only does God take up this or that role, but Being-God oneself already belongs to the game. Anyone who comes close to the Shakti religion, will sometimes be overcome by confusion, because everything is made relative

Hans Torwesten

by the Maya principle. And everything is knocked out of our hand, so that we finally find refuge in her, from whom the whole dizziness derives. While in our Christian religion the devil usually plays the part of the seducer and God plays the part of the saviour, frees us from the trap and saves us, Shakti is always both. She can only appear as *saviour*, because she creates in advance the conditions of servitude, because she spins her Maya-network and dazzles the beings. She laughs, because she sees people so deeply sunk into her play, but she also laughs and claps her hands, when man sees through her game.

The Mother religion is therefore a religion of relativity. When we take up our wisdom fully, all false pride is shattered, along with all conceit regarding our achievements and positions. We see the whole thing as a game, in which everyone is assigned to everything; the high at the lower at least as much as the opposite. Light knows (or should at least know) that it would not exist without darkness, the saved and enlightened one knows that there is no enlightenment without the prior contrast of blindness. One is very modest in such a religion, as one cannot be present in every other being. Are not all beings the children of the Divine Mother? Just as a human mother likes to dress her children, the Divine Mother likes to dress her children with various clothes. Yet she also knows how they look when they are naked – whether in their “natural” being or in their unclothed Atman nature, and she loves them in their nakedness with a love which knows no conditions.

(To be continued)

Translated by John Phillips

45. Anticipation and Consequences in Spiritual Life

Swami Vidyatmananda

Sometimes I grow discouraged with spiritual life. I get to feeling that Vedanta's promise that I shall one day realize God is merely sweet-talk. I shall probably never experience anything of the kind. Vedanta's guarantee that I must eventually attain divine bliss is a carrot fastened to this poor donkey's nose. There it hangs, a few inches ahead of me, tempting but not obtainable, making this tired beast plod on and on. I shall never get to eat the carrot; I shall not reach bliss. All religion does is just keep us trotting, pulling a valueless load nowhere.

But then I think that even if such should be the case, shall I give up? Even if spiritual attainment is not possible, what are the alternatives? Assume that I could know for certain that I shall never reach God? Would I stop? As the Hindus say, "If I should fail to reach Rama (the Lord) does that mean that I must embrace *kama* (the world)?" Equally, "If I cannot get nectar to drink, must I then resort to imbibing ditch water?"

Suppose that this is a vain pursuit, a grand illusion, the journey of a draft animal going round and round. Suppose this regimen of quieting appetites, practising contemplation, and self-naughting will never lead me anywhere at all. Still this is a noble way to live and it has its satisfactions. I know now that I prefer the life of a devotee whether it leads to self-revelation or not. The joys are subtler; I have a clear conscience for the first time in my life; and self-concern is diminishing. Even if I should

Swami Vidyatmananda

be grossly deluded, even if I am an example of that person so despicable in secular eyes--the escapist--I prefer this delusion, this escapism, to the other appalling certainty.

I recall an Indian fable about a woman who waited a long time for her Beloved. She would have no one but Him. As a young girl she kept herself groomed and beautiful, her house swept, her mind in loving anticipation because He might appear. But He didn't come. Years went by; she grew old. Still there was no sign of Him. Yet she kept her heart single. A footstep outside her door, a branch against the window: my lover at last! But yet He tarried. Still she waited, her mind absorbed in that eventual coming, her imagination clear, ready to receive her Lord. Surely there must have been many times when this woman decided: He is only a dream, something I have invented.

In the story, of course, the Beloved finally comes. The girl's hope was justified just as, deep down, I am sure the devotee's is too. But my point is this: suppose He had never come? In what better, happier fashion could one have spent one's life? I choose—even if it be a wish that should never come true at all in this present incarnation--to live and die holding fast to noble anticipation.

God

God does not dwell somewhere beyond the clouds. He is in the heart of all living beings. God comes before us in the form of the ignorant, the needy, the diseased, the destitute, the famished—so that we may serve Him in these forms and thus edify ourselves.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Questions of Spiritual Seekers Answered

Swami Madhavananda

Q : Do you think that India is in danger of losing its spiritual heritage with the coming of technology and a better distribution of wealth?

A: Unless one is careful anything can happen anywhere. But I don't think India will ultimately come to this terrible state of things by losing its spiritual heritage. Spirituality is so deeply ingrained in Indians that even improvements in technology and better distribution of wealth will enable them to profit by that ancient heritage of spiritual teachings all the more, because, at its first moment, probably, when a tidal wave comes many things happen, but very soon there is again adjustment, and I believe that even scientific improvements and technology and distribution of wealth will not sap our spiritual inwardness.

Q : What is meant by 'Don't seek God, see God,' and how is this accomplished?

A : Seeking God means to feel God is away from us, distant from us, at least to some extent; otherwise we cannot seek a thing that is immediately connected with us, that is immediately at our beck and call. So, just do not actually believe that there is a distance between God and ourselves but rather try to see God, that He is here and now, try to feel Him, try to realize Him, that is the idea. And how is this accomplished? There are many paths. There is the path of devotion, path of work, unselfish work, there is service unto others, path of reason, path of mysticism, all these are different paths. The biggest questions, how devotion is attained as also how realization is attained, can be explained in that way. So don't seek God, but see God. Seeing God means we

Swami Madhavananda

must believe in His existence everywhere as if He is in and through us, as if we are immersed in Him, like water everywhere. Some little pieces of ice have been formed in that water; that is what we are, nothing more than that. So, to feel that should be our endeavour. God is not away from us. We are not away from God. We are not entirely divorced from God. We are floating in God, as it were. We are in God's presence. That is what we are supposed to think and meditate on and to have before our mind, and this can be done in innumerable ways. Whatever puts in our mind this central fact, that can be taken.

Q: How does one overcome distracting forces in meditation?

A: Distracting forces come because we have more attachment to those things that distract than to the thing upon which we are meditating. Theoretically, we are supposed to have more love for God because that is the greatest quest in life. Actually, so many other things engross our attention when we are living in the ordinary world, just living an ordinary, normal life and not trying to meditate. So many things have got lodgement in our brain; we have developed attachment to them, we like them, we love them. As it always happens, things that we love, things that we crave, well, they have some power over us, and therefore they distract us even while we try to meditate but they cannot, if we are always thinking, meditating upon the glory of the Chosen Ideal, the glory of the quest of God, that it is the supreme pursuit of human life. Other things that distract us mostly concern themselves with joys in some form or other, may be ordinary joy of the lower kind, or intellectual joy, or some other kind of joy that has been experienced before. Things that are painful seldom attract us. So,

Questions of Spiritual Seekers Answered

if we try to remember that God is the greatest source of attraction for us, ought to be the greatest source of attraction, beyond Him there is nothing, or rather nothing that is more attractive, there will be less of distraction. All the joys that we find in the world are only little bits of the supreme joy, supreme bliss, that God is. God is an embodiment of all this. All other joys that we find through the senses, through the mind, through everything, they are little bubbles, as it were, borrowed things, just as the sun may heat some sand and that sand even may burn one's fingers, but it is borrowed heat, something like that. If we remember that, gradually, the mind will try to be calm.

Also we may watch our minds to see how the mind goes into all these gyrations, the outgoing movements, and so on. Let the mind, a part of the mind, watch how the other part of the mind runs about here and there. And if the running part of the mind knows that, 'I am being watched', then, gradually, those gyrations, those movements to and from, those distractions, will also become slower and slower. That should be the constant effort. First of all, letting the mind dwell on the glories of the Atman, glories of the Self or glories of the Chosen Ideal, that is the positive way; and also keeping watch upon where the mind goes, how the mind goes. If we keep watch, 'Well, let the mind, let this rascal go about everywhere, I will see; I will see, I will watch where it is going', in that way, also, the mind becomes ashamed to go, to distract itself during those times.

One can also tell the mind, as to a child, 'Well, not now.' We are not meditating for 24 hours a day; only an hour, half an hour at the most, we try to meditate. If we tell those distracting

Swami Madhavananda

thoughts, 'Just wait, let me finish this, and then I will attend to you while you possess me.' In that way also they will be a little sober.

Only if they think they are being extinct, there is the trouble about it. I think the real metaphysical truth behind our distractions is this : Nobody wants to die, no principle, no being, no existence wants to be killed. When the mind thinks it is being killed, 'Well, he is obstructing me, he is controlling me! I shall have no freedom, I will die', it tries its worst to free itself, something like that. But if we succeed in telling the mind, 'Know, by sitting still, you will get much more than what you expect to get from outside', then the mind will get calm gradually.

Q : How can our desire for and devotion to God be increased?

A : Just as our desire for the ordinary things of life is increased, similarly, because we think that so much fruit can come, so much joy can come, by having this thing in such proportion! If we apply that mind, that attitude towards God, towards the possession of God, towards the quest of God, then, naturally our desire for and devotion to God will increase. If we can tell our mind, convince our mind, that there is nothing superior to God, God is the greatest possession we can possibly have, and all other attractions are but little particles, little reflections of immense joy of the embodiment of Bliss that God is, so let us strive after God, and other things will be added unto us: if that attitude is held before the mind through discrimination, through gradual enforcing of those ideas upon ourselves, then grace will come.

Questions of Spiritual Seekers Answered

Q : Mind is restless. How can we control it?

A : Think of one thought, namely God. The question is practically answered about meditation. What applies to meditation, steadiness in meditation, applies also to making the mind more and more restful, by watching it and by pondering more on the glory of the Ideal.

Q. How can one come into contact with close friends and relatives who are cynical and sceptical without harming one's spiritual development?

A : This is a real problem in the world. One has to be in the world, of course, and one cannot antagonise one's friends. But as one associates with them, as one attends to one's social duties, one must be a little alert so that the flame of spirituality, the higher ideals that have value only for him, that flame of spirituality is kept burning. Here, a little added effort is necessary, and if one practises that, I think, success will not be lacking.

Q : Were they then exceptions to the rule and came to the earth already perfect souls?

A : Not that, it is not that. They were also ordinary persons. If in the midst of all those handicaps, too, those blessed few women attained realisation, that means, that they became exceptional people. Compared with so many men who have attained realisation the number of women who are mentioned as having obtained realisation is small. That shows that the handicaps were greater for them, simply because of social conditions.

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

May	4	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 49	Swami Dayatmananda
May	11	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 50	Swami Dayatmananda
May	18	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 51	Swami Dayatmananda
May	25	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 52	Swami Dayatmananda
June	1	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 53	Swami Dayatmananda
June	8	Katha Upanishad 8	Swami Shivarupananda
June	15	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 54	Swami Dayatmananda
June	22	Day Retreat	
June	29	Katha Upanishad 9	Swami Shivarupananda

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 22 June
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

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

Sri Krishna's Puja

Sunday 17th August
at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

**There will be no discourses during the months of
July and August**

heritage. This little span of life is not yours; your life has no beginning, no end.

Desire

Mind is like a big mirror which gives a perfect reflection but which has been so thickly covered with dirt that nothing can be seen in it. The more you can rub off that dirt, the more you will be able to see yourself in it. The more you can remove the least speck of dust, the more you can get a perfect image of your true Self. What is that dirt that hides the image? Selfish desires.

Devotee

If we love God for what we can get from Him in the world, we really love the world, not God, and we can never be true devotees. The true devotee loves God just for the joy of loving Him, because God is the Beloved.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

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Struggle

Do not care if you slip occasionally. To err is human. Do not lose heart. Walk firmly onward. No one can hope to get through the slimy path of the world unscathed. And it is rank foolishness to sit down in the midst of the mire for fear of falling in the attempt to get across. Struggle hard and if, in the course of that struggle, your foot slips and you have to fall several times, what does that matter? Rise up again and go on struggling. Rest assured, you will conquer in the end. Never give up the struggle as long as you are not perfect, that is, as long as you are not what you wish yourself to be.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

