

Vedanta

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The Ladder of Love

Swami Chetanananda

The Message of Sri Ramakrishna to Modern Man

Swami Tapasyananda



Divine Wisdom

Teachings of Swami Vivekananda

Our principle should be love, and not compassion. The application of the word compassion, even to *jiva*, seems to me to be rash and vain. For us, it is not to pity but to serve. Ours is not the feeling of compassion but of love, and the feeling of Self in all.

Perfect sincerity, holiness, gigantic intellect, and an all-conquering will. Let only a handful of men work with these, and the whole world will be revolutionised.

Freedom: He whom the sages have been seeking in all these places is in our own hearts; the voice that you heard was right, says the Vedanta, but the direction you gave to the voice was wrong. The ideal of freedom that you perceived was correct, but you projected it outside yourself, and that was your mistake. Bring it nearer and nearer, until you find that it was all the time within you, it was the Self of your own self. That freedom was your own nature, and this *maya* never bound you.

The people of old knew that fire lived in the flint and in dry wood, but friction was necessary to call it out. So this fire of freedom and purity is the nature of every soul, and not a quality, because qualities can be acquired and therefore can be lost. The soul is one with Freedom, and the soul is one with Existence, and the soul is one with Knowledge. The *Sat-Chit-Ananda*—Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute—is the nature, the birthright of the Soul, and all the manifestations that we see are Its expressions, dimly or brightly manifesting Itself.

God is self-evident, impersonal, omniscient, the Knower and Master of nature, the Lord of all. He is behind all worship and it is being done according to Him, whether we know it or not. I go one step further. That at which all marvel, that which we call evil, is His worship too. This too is a part of freedom. So long as you have a body, so long as you are a slave to happiness, so long as time works on you, space works on you, you are a slave.

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Editorial

Will-Power

When we look around us we find enormous differences between man and man. What are these differences due to? The answer we get is that it is due to the difference in their grit or resolution, i.e., will-power. There may be various factors in the stories of men's successes and failures in life but in every case we find one common factor—that is will-power. The degree of a person's achievement in life—good or wicked—is commensurate with the degree of will-power he has attained. The heroes of history have all been men of iron will. The secret of their success is sheer will-power. Small-hearted folk never accomplish anything worthwhile.

So how can one develop will-power? This turns out to be the most important issue of everyone's life. The answer is right education. Education from one's childhood is the secret of developing will-power. Swami Vivekananda says:

What is education? Is it book-learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education. Now consider, is that education as a result of which the will, being continuously choked by force through generations, is now well-nigh killed out; is that education under whose sway even the old ideas, let alone new ones, are disappearing one by one; is that education which is slowly making man a machine?

A few shining examples of strong wills may well be mentioned here. From the *Katha Upanishad* we have the story of Nachiketas — who had the courage to point out boldly but respectfully to his father the rather hypocritical manner in which his father was performing a great sacrifice. His father took it as an affront and asked him to go to Death. Nachiketas did not hesitate, he boldly went to Death's abode. He was not afraid to face death. Rather he took advantage of it and sought and obtained the highest wisdom from the god of Death, remaining utterly untempted by initial offers of wealth and luxury. Nachiketas was the embodiment of that rare and saving virtue, *Shraddha*. (faith)

Let us turn to the *Bhagavad Gita*. When Arjuna's resolution to fight wavered on the battle-field — on what appeared to be laudable and

praiseworthy grounds of compassion -- Krishna pulled him up and imparted the glorious *Gita* message and restored to him his strength of will, his dedication to his chosen mission and his hero's resolution and daring.

What about Buddha? He was an incarnation of *karuna*, compassion. For all his compassion shown to a kid, what an iron will and strong resolution he exhibited! After years of toil, when enlightenment seemed far away, Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree — telling himself in words of steel and muscles of iron, “*Never will I arise from this place, though this my frame shall perish of starvation, not though the blood within these veins shall cease to flow, till I have won Enlightenment Supreme!*”, and not all the wiles of Mara could dislodge him by an inch from this resolution. And Enlightenment he had that very night.

History stands witness to the heroic struggles St. Francis of Assisi had to go through. When the society he was living in was looking askance and was ridiculing him, he did not budge an inch from his chosen path. He was convinced that God wanted him to rebuild his church. That was more than enough for him.

St. Teresa of Avila too had to pass through innumerable difficulties created mostly from the Holy Church itself. She endured all cheerfully for the love of her beloved Lord. We also know of St John of the Cross, how cruelly he was treated, including imprisonment and beatings from his own brother monks. Yet none could sway him from his chosen path.

In our own times Sri Ramakrishna's life too furnishes many instances of adamant will on his part. There is the incident connected with his sacred-thread ceremony which showed that he could not be shaken out of his resolve, even if the whole world stood against him. Gadadhar, as he was then known, had given his word to the blacksmith woman, Dhani, that he would take his first *Bhiksha* (holy alms) from her, when he would be invested with the Brahmin's insignia of the sacred thread (*yajnopavita*). On grounds of merit and qualification perhaps no one deserved to be Gadadhar's *bhiksha mata* better than Dhani. But the hardened institution of caste which ruled society would not permit it. Dhani disqualified from being a *Bhiksha mata* to a Brahmin lad at the sacred thread function.

The boy Gadadhar refused to budge from truthfulness—for he had pledged his word to accept first food from Dhani— and stood

against his family and community, the boy taking his stand on the spirit of the injunction and the society on custom. It was Gadadhar that won! The community had to bend before his strong resolution and logic. He had his alms from Dhani of low caste, but of virtuous spirit.

Again when he was yearning for God-vision with one-pointed determination, he would rather kill himself with the sword in Kali's shrine than give up his quest for God-realization. And so the Divine Mother Kali revealed Herself to him without any more ado.

What about Narendranath (Swami Vivekananda)? Speaking of Narendra, when Narendra was yet a new-comer to the temple of Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna told M. (the author of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)

'Narendra is full of spirit within. There are some people who have no grit whatever. They are like flattened rice soaked in milk — soft and mushy. No inner strength! Spiritual progress is far from such mushy folk.'

Sri Ramakrishna in speaking of the need for fiery determination in aspirants narrates the story of two peasants, one of whom, seeing his field dry, set out to dig a channel to bring water from the river. He worked all day long, refusing to be called away even for food, and after herculean labour succeeded in bringing water to the field, and then went home in joy for food and rest. The other farmer, after having worked a little, heard his wife calling him home and followed her meekly. His field never got irrigated.

When we study the lives of great men we find without exception that they were all men of strong will. It follows that no one can be great without developing a strong and adamant will.

So how can we develop a strong will? We will explore the why and how of a strong will in our future editorials.

(To be continued)

Swami Dayatmananda

The Ladder of Love

Swami Chetanananda

Chaitanya had quite a few disciples, but Rupa Goswami was a prominent one who wrote many valuable books elaborating his guru's philosophy. He was originally a minister of a Muslim king. One dark and stormy night the king summoned him for a consultation. Accompanied by bodyguards, Rupa was carried to the king in a palanquin. The road was inundated with water, and on both sides of it were the king's servants' quarters. Sitting in the palanquin, Rupa overheard the conversation of a couple. The husband said, 'I hear some noise in the street. Who is travelling in this awful foul weather?' The wife answered: 'It must be a dog, or a thief, or a king's slave. Because no one else would dare to go out on such a terrible night.' The husband looked out through the window and saw Rupa in the palanquin. He said, 'Oh, it is not a dog or a thief; it is one of the king's wretched slaves going to the palace.' This remark changed Rupa's life. He went to the king and submitted his resignation from ministership. He renounced his hearth and home and became a disciple of Chaitanya.

As a person needs a ladder to climb to the roof of a house, so a person should move step by step to reach the goal. In his famous book *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu*, Rupa Goswami describes the ladder of love as having nine steps, each one necessary in order to reach God: faith, holy company, spiritual disciplines, cessation of obstacles, steadfastness, taste or relish, attachment, spiritual mood, and supreme love.

1. *Shraddha*, the first step on the ladder of love, is difficult to describe because there is no synonymous word in the English language. *Shraddha* not only means faith, but sincerity, love, strength and bravery. Krishna mentions in the *Gita*, 'A man is

made of his faith; what his faith is, that verily he is.' It is the essence of spiritual life.

Real faith comes from experience. We have faith in the pilot, so we fly by plane; we have faith in the cook of a restaurant, so we eat there; we have faith in the surgeon, so we allow that doctor to perform surgery on us. We have faith in dollar bills and their purchasing power; otherwise they would be nothing but paper. Truly we cannot function in this world without faith. Krishna says in the Gita, 'A doubtful soul perishes.'

A patch of thin cloud floats in space and has very little strength; but when many small pieces of cloud join together and form a vast dense cloud, the result is a tornado which uproots trees, destroys homes and causes havoc. Similarly, shraddha or intense faith generates tremendous power that can transform life very quickly. When all virtues accumulate in the life of a *yogi*, according to Patanjali, he attains samadhi, which is called the cloud of virtue. In the Bible, Christ mentions the power of faith: 'If you have the faith of a grain of mustard seed and ask the mountain to move, it will move.'

2. The second step of the ladder of love is holy company. The scriptures say: 'It is the medicine of worldly diseases.' When you see that your mind is very restless and you are unable to control it by *japam* or meditation or study, have the company of the holy. It works instantly. If you go to a perfume shop, the fragrance will penetrate into your nostrils, whether you like it or not. Similarly, holy company is so powerful that it will penetrate inside you and will lift your mind to a higher plane of consciousness.

Holy company is called *sat-sanga* in Sanskrit. Sat means existence or holy, and *sanga* means association. It actually means having the company of that *Sat* or Eternal Existence (*Brahman*) who is within you. It is difficult because our minds are not sufficiently pure. So the second alternative is the association of holy people in external life. How to recognize a holy person?

Swami Turiyananda said: 'He is a real holy man whose association awakens divine feelings.' There is a saying in the scriptures: 'When the sun rises, it looks red. When the sun sets, it also looks red. The sun always remains the same and is never devoid of light' Similarly, a holy person, in times of trials and tribulations or in times of prosperity, is always the same. He maintains equanimity of the mind; he is always peaceful and blissful, and he carries the message of the Lord.

In the beginning of a spiritual journey, one should avoid evil company. Evil company drags the mind down; holy company carries one to divine fragrance. Narada says: 'It is hard to obtain the grace of a great soul because it is difficult for us to recognize such a person, but if a man receives the grace of that soul its effect is infallible.' Swami Brahmananda remarked: 'A bumble-bee hiding in a fragrant flower offered in the worship touches the feet of the Lord. Similarly, by the grace and association of a holy man, one attains liberation.'

3. The third step of the ladder is practising spiritual disciplines. Patanjali calls it *kriya yoga*. It consists of performing austerities, studying the scriptures, chanting the name of the Lord, praying, meditating and having devotion for God. Rupa Goswami says that a devotee destroys evil tendencies with the help of spiritual discipline; then the mind becomes purified, and that purified mind will lead that person to *samadhi*, the goal of spiritual life. One cannot reach this level as long as evil propensities function in the mind.

Chaitanya succinctly told Raghunath Goswami how to practise *sadhana*: 'Don't talk or hear about worldly things. Don't seek good or fancy clothing. Be humble. Always chant the name of the Lord. Live in Vrindaban (a holy place) and serve the Lord.'

The Vaishnava tradition of Chaitanya mentions sixty-four means for practising preparatory devotion, such as, acceptance of a *guru*, initiation, *japam*, meditation, worship, service, singing,

fasting, eating *prasada*, observing festivals, studying the devotional scriptures, living in a holy place, having holy company, visiting the deities in the temples, serving the devotees of God, cleaning the temples, practising humility, and so on. This tradition says: 'In this *kali yuga*, chanting the Lord's name is the only way to attain realization.'

It is not out of place to mention an episode which shows how *bhajana-kriya* worked in Swami Yogananda's life. One day he found Sri Ramakrishna alone and asked him, 'Sir, could you teach me how to conquer lust?' 'Chant the name of Hari [Lord], then it will go away,' answered the Master. This simple remedy did not convince Jogin (later, Yogananda). He thought that the Master did not know any practical method and had prescribed something useless. 'Moreover,' he thought, 'so many people are repeating the name of Hari. Why does lust not vanish from them?'

The next day Jogin went straight to a *hathayogi* who was staying in the Panchavati, and while he sat listening to the yogi, Sri Ramakrishna arrived. The Master took Jogin's hand and asked Jogin to follow him. While they were walking towards his room, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Why did you go there? Don't do that. Your mind will only stick to the body if you learn those techniques of hathayoga. It will not thirst after God.'

Jogin again doubted Sri Ramakrishna. He thought that the Master had discouraged him from visiting the hathayogi to keep him from running away. However, he thought again: 'Why don't I do what he told me to do and see what happens?' Later Jogin said: 'Thinking thus, I took the name of Hari with a concentrated mind. And as a matter of fact, shortly afterwards I began to experience the tangible result mentioned by the Master.'

4. These spiritual disciplines subdue the evil propensities of the mind and thus the aspirant reaches the fourth stage- cessation of obstacles. Of course there is no end of struggle in spiritual life. This stage is like a little rest after winning the first battle.

Sri Ramakrishna mentioned the effects of bhajana kriya on himself: 'At the time of performing *Sandhya* and worship, I used to think, according to scriptural prescription, that the evil spirit within had been burnt up. Who knew then that there was actually a *Papa-purusha* within the body and that it could be actually burnt and destroyed? A burning sensation came on the body from the beginning of *sadhana*. I thought, "What is this disease?" It increased by degrees and became unbearable. Various kinds of oils prescribed by physicians were used; but it could by no means be alleviated. One day, while I was sitting in the Panchavati, I saw that a jet-black person with red eyes and a hideous appearance came reeling, as if drunk, out of this (showing his own body) and walked before me. I saw again another person of placid mien in ochre-coloured dress, with a trident in his hand similarly coming out of my body. He vehemently attacked the other and killed him. The burning sensation in the body decreased for a short time after I had that vision. I suffered from that burning sensation continually for six months before the *Papa-purusha* was burnt up.'

The same was true in the lives of Christ and Buddha: Christ was tempted by Satan, and Buddha was tempted by Mara. These evil forces came not from an outer source, but from within their own minds. The yogis experience that the more a person practises austerity, the more his psycho-physical system generates heat, which clears up evil tendencies and makes a person pure.

5. The fifth step is *nistha*, or steadfast devotion. A husband wants a steady wife; a wife wants a steady husband; a disciple wants a steady guru; a guru wants a steady disciple; no one wants to be around someone who is unsteady, undependable and unpredictable. The Atman alone is steady and unchanging reality; whereas the universe and the beings which are the products of *maya* are always changing and therefore unsteady. The more a person touches the Atman, the more he becomes steady.

Swami Brahmananda said: 'Always practise your disciplines with unswerving steadfastness and let not a single day pass without them. Whether you like it or not, sit down at the appointed hour every day. If you can continue your practices for three years with unerring regularity, I assure you that the love for God will grow in you and you will feel yourself nearer to him.'

There is a Sufi story: Hafez, a famous mystic, fell in love with a courtesan. The girl wanted to entertain him and told him to meet her in the evening. When evening came, the courtesan sent one of her attendants to light a candle in his room. Seeing that candle, Hafez remembered that for the last thirty years, without a break, he had lighted a candle in the mosque in the evening, and today for the girl, for his personal enjoyment, he was about to neglect his duty. He immediately left the room, went to the mosque and lighted a candle. The steadfast devotion that he had practised for thirty years saved his spiritual life.

6. The sixth step is relish in God's name. People sometimes say that spiritual life is tasteless and dry. This shows that they are not sincere. We often try to understand God with our brains, but we do not love one another with our brains; we need to use our hearts. When our hearts and our minds are united, we get the taste for God. If we get a little spiritual experience, the journey becomes smooth and easy; otherwise, spiritual life can be very tedious. For example, when a person swallows a piece of cheesecake without keeping it for a while on the tongue, he will not get the taste. To get the taste, one will have to bite and chew the cheesecake, then the taste buds will relish that food.

To get taste in spiritual life is very important. Sri Ramakrishna suggested the following method: 'Just as cows eat their fill, become free from anxiety, and then resting in one place, chew the cud; so after one has visited temples and holy places, one should sit in a secluded place, and ruminate over and get absorbed in those holy thoughts that occurred to one in these sacred places.'

Immediately after visiting them, one should not put one's mind to the sense objects., for, in that case, those godly thoughts cannot produce permanent results on the mind.'

In his famous book *Vidagdha Madhav*, Rupa Goswami described how chanting the name of God can produce taste: When this *mantram* of Krishna-vibrates on my tongue, it is like an expert dancer dancing rapidly on her toes. When this mantram vibrates on my tongue, I wish that I had millions of tongues so that I could taste God's name millions of ways. And when this mantram comes to my ears, my ears vibrate and I wish that I had millions of ears. When the same mantram vibrates on my mind, all my senses become silent; I feel so much joy I cannot hold it. I really do not know what nectar there is in the name of Krishna.

Taste comes. Vedanta is a little difficult to understand at first. It can be compared to eating a coconut. First you have to break the shell, then eat the flesh, and finally you will get the sweet milk.

7. The seventh step of the ladder is attachment. We all know what attachment is, and that its result is pain. Attachment for worldly objects creates pain, and on the other hand, attachment for God gives us peace and bliss. Sage Shandilya says, 'Devotion is supreme attachment for God.' There is a prayer by Prahlada: 'May I think of Thee with that strong love which the ignorant cherish for the things of the world, and may that love never cease to abide in my heart.'

We sometimes say, 'Hold on to God.' What does that mean? It means that love is reciprocal. If you love, you will be loved. If you embrace your beloved, your beloved will embrace in return. Similarly, if you hold onto God, God will hold you; the Holy Ghost will descend, and all the divine qualities will enter inside you.

Even attachment for heaven is bondage. Those who try to go to heaven want celestial enjoyment. They may go to heaven, but

when the result of their virtuous deeds is over, they will have to come back again to this world. It is just like having money in the bank; you spend it bit by bit until it is gone.

There is a story about a Sufi saint who took a bamboo pole and set both ends afire. He then began to dance rotating the pole. People asked, 'Sir, what are you doing with this blazing fire?' The saint replied, 'With one end of this pole, I am going to burn heaven, and with the other end I am going to burn hell.'

'Why?'

'So that people will not try to go to either place.'

'Then where will they go?'

'They should go to God.'

8. *Bhava*, spiritual mood or ecstasy, is the eighth step of the ladder. In this stage, a devotee loves to be alone and wants to spend long hours in meditation. His desire for food, drink or any kind of comfort diminishes. He has almost constant recollectedness of God. Chaitanya describes the mood in this way:

'Ah, how I long for the day when in chanting Thy name the tears will spill down from my eyes, and my throat will refuse to utter its prayers, choking and stammering with ecstasy, when all the hairs of my body will stand erect with joy.

'Ah, how I long for the day when an instant of separation from Thee, O Govinda, will be as a thousand years; when my heart burns away with its desire and the world without Thee is a heartless void'.

That is *bhava*. It is a kind of drunkenness. If you drink too much liquor you lose control over your senses. Similarly, if a devotee drinks too much of this divine nectar, he has no control; sometimes he is calm and quiet, and sometimes he laughs and cries. In this state, the aspirant is almost devoid of body-consciousness.

Once Radha, the spiritual consort of Krishna, went to see Krishna near the Govardhan Hill. The path was stony and she

was barefoot. The stones in the summer in Vrindaban are like red-hot iron. Radha's feet were full of blisters, but she had no body-consciousness. She never felt the pain because of her exuberant love for her beloved Krishna.

9. The ninth and final step of the ladder of love is *prema*, or supreme love. Having reached this point, the aspirant's climb is complete, and he stands with both feet on the roof. At that time, love, lover and beloved become one. In Christianity, it is called Divine Communion, in Buddhism, *Satori*, and in Hinduism, *Samadhi*. Except for some godlike souls or divine incarnations, it is very difficult for ordinary human beings to experience this highest love.

Once Chaitanya wanted to evaluate his spiritual experiences from the scriptural point of view, so he asked his learned disciple Ramananda to describe the various levels of mystical experiences. Hearing about each level, Chaitanya said, 'I experienced that, tell me more.' At last when Ramananda began to explain "*prema-vilasa-vivarta*," where the idea of duality dissolves and the lover and the beloved become one in love, Chaitanya was so overwhelmed with devotion that he passed his hand over Ramananda's mouth and said, 'Don't speak further, otherwise, my body will not last.'

According to Vaishnava tradition, *Prema-vilasa-vivarta* 'indicates a type of love which is capable of inducing simultaneously the joy of union and the pang of separation; with complete oblivion to selves and surroundings; and imbuing the lovers with a sense of identity to each other.' In this state the idea of male and female disappear, as well as the idea of division. This is the highest love.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, March 1997)

What I Learned from My Master

Swami Vivekananda

1 . Sri Ramakrishna came to live near Calcutta, the capital of India, the most important university town in our country which was sending out sceptics and materialists by the hundreds every year. Yet many of these university men—sceptics and agnostics—used to come and listen to him. I heard of this man, with nothing remarkable about him. He used the most simple language, and I thought, can this man be a great teacher ? I crept near to him and asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life: 'Do you believe in God, Sir?' 'Yes', he replied. 'Can you prove it, Sir?' "Yes". "How?" 'Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense.' That impressed me at once. For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I began to go to that man, day after day, and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance, can change a whole life. I have read about Buddha and Christ and Mohammed; about all those different luminaries of ancient times, how they would stand up and say, 'Be thou whole', and the man became whole. I now found it to be true, and when I myself saw this man, all scepticism was brushed aside. It could be done ; and my Master used to say, 'Religion can be given and taken more tangibly, more really than anything else in the world.'

Be therefore spiritual first; have something to give and then stand before the world and give it.

Religion is not talk, or doctrines, or theories; nor is it sectarianism. Religion cannot live in sects and societies. It is the relation between the soul and God ; how can it be made into a society? It would then degenerate into business, and wherever there are business and business principles in religion, spirituality

dies. Religion does not consist in erecting temples, or building churches, or attending public worship. It is not to be found in books, or in words, or in lectures, or in organizations. Religion consists in realization. As a fact, we all know that nothing will satisfy us until we know the truth for ourselves. However we may argue, however much we may hear, but one thing will satisfy us, and that is our own realization ; and such an experience is possible for every one of us if we will only try. The first ideal of this attempt to realize religion is that of renunciation. As far as we can, we must give up. Darkness and light, enjoyment of the world and enjoyment of God will never go together. `You cannot serve God and Mammon'! Let people try it if they will, and I have seen millions in every country who have tried; but after all, it comes to nothing. If one word remains true in the saying, it is, give up everything for the sake of the Lord. This is a hard and long task, but you can begin it here and now. Bit by bit we must go towards it.

2. The second idea that I learnt from my Master, and which is perhaps the most vital is the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of one eternal Religion. That one eternal Religion is applied to different planes of existence, is applied to the opinions of various minds and various races. There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion; there never existed many religions, there is only the one. One infinite Religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this Religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can. Religions manifest themselves not only according to race and geographical position, but according to individual power. In one man religion is manifesting itself as intense activity, as work. In another it is manifesting itself as intense devotion, in yet another, as mysticism, in others as philosophy, and so forth. It is wrong when

we say to others, 'Your methods are not right.' Perhaps a man, whose nature is that of love, thinks that the man who does good to others is not on the right road to religion, because it is not his own way, and is therefore wrong. If the philosopher thinks, 'Oh, the poor ignorant people, what do they know about a God of Love, and loving Him? They do not know what they mean', he is wrong, because they may be right and he also.

3. In the presence of my Master I found out that man could be perfect, even in this body. Those lips never cursed anyone, never even criticized anyone. Those eyes were beyond the possibility of seeing evil, that mind had lost the power of thinking evil. He saw nothing but good. That tremendous purity, that tremendous renunciation is the one secret of spirituality. 'Neither through wealth, nor through progeny, but through renunciation alone, is immortality to be reached', say the Vedas. 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and follow me', says the Christ. So all great saints and Prophets have expressed it, and have carried it out in their lives. How can great spirituality come without that renunciation? Renunciation is the background of all religious thought wherever it be, and you will always find that as this idea of renunciation lessens, the more will the senses creep into the field of religion, and spirituality will decrease in the same ratio.

That man was the embodiment of renunciation. In our country it is necessary for a man who becomes a *Sannyasin* to give up all worldly wealth and position, and this my Master carried out literally. There were many who would have felt themselves blest if he would only have accepted a present from their hands, who would gladly have given him thousands of rupees if he would have taken them, but these were the only men from whom he would turn away. He was a triumphant example, a living realization of the complete conquest of lust and of desire for money. He was beyond all ideas of either, and such men are necessary for this century. Such renunciation is necessary in these

days when men have begun to think that they cannot live a month without what they call their 'necessities', and which they are increasing out of all proportion. It is necessary in a time like this that a man should arise to demonstrate to the sceptics of the world that there yet breathes a man who does not care a straw for all the gold or all the fame that is in the universe. Yet there are such men.

4. The other idea of his life was intense love for others. The first part of my Master's life was spent in acquiring spirituality, and the remaining years in distributing it. People in our country have not the same customs as you have in visiting a religious teacher or a Sannyasin. Somebody would come to ask him about something, some perhaps would come hundreds of miles, walking all the way, just to ask one question, to hear one word from him, 'Tell me one word for my salvation.' That is the way they come. They come in numbers, unceremoniously, to the place where he is mostly to be found ; they may find him under a tree and question him , and before one set of people has gone, others have arrived. So if a man is greatly revered, he will sometimes have no rest day or night. He will have to talk constantly. For hours people will come pouring in, and this man will be teaching them.

So men came in crowds to hear him, and he would" talk twenty hours in the twenty-four, and that not for one day, but for months and months until at last the body broke down under the pressure of this tremendous strain. His intense love for mankind would not let him refuse to help even the humblest of the thousands who sought his aid.

Therefore my Master's message to mankind is: 'Be spiritual and realize truth for yourself.' He would have you give up for the sake of your fellow-beings. He would have you cease talking about love for your brother, and set to its work to prove your words. The time has come for renunciation, for realization; and then you will see the harmony in all the religions of the world.

You will know that there is no need of any quarrel. And then only will you be ready to help humanity. To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names, but this great teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed because he had realized that in reality they are all part and parcel of the one eternal Religion.

(Excerptes from 'My Master', The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978) Vol. 4, pp. 179-187.)

But the goal of all is the knowledge of the Self, the realization of this Self. To it all men, all beings have equal right. This is the view acceptable to all.

What we want is to see the man who is harmoniously developed. We want the man whose heart feels intensely the miseries and sorrows of the world; the man who not only can feel but can find the meaning of things, who delves deeply into the heart of nature and understanding; the man who will not even stop there, who wants to work. Such a combination of head, heart, and hand is what we want. Why not the giant who is equally active, equally knowing, and equally loving? Is it impossible? Certainly not. This is the man of the future, of whom there are few at present.

Swami Vivekananda

The Message Of Sri Ramakrishna Swami Gambhirananda

(Message sent by the Late Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, 11th President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, for the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Vedanta Society, St. Louis, U.S.A. in 1988.)

I am glad to know that the Vedanta Society of St. Louis is observing its golden jubilee (50th anniversary), which is an important milestone in the Society's history. The Ramakrishna Order carries to the West the ancient spiritual tradition of Vedanta. The religion of Vedanta is not based on doctrine or dogma ; it is based on direct experience or realization. The main tenets of Vedanta are the divinity of human beings, the unity of existence, the Oneness of Godhead, and the harmony of religions.

Vedanta is a universal religion. Unlike other major religions of the world, it is not confined to any Book, or Prophet, or Personal God. It deals with the eternal Truth which is unchanging; beyond space, time and causation.

Swami Vivekananda, the main disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, carried the message of Vedanta to the U.S.A. in 1893, and later his four brother disciples and other swamis of the Ramakrishna Order propagated this universal religion in the West.

Long before Swami Vivekananda went to the West, Sri Ramakrishna had a vision in Dakshineswar which he described to the Holy Mother, his wife: "Do you know what I was seeing in meditation when you came in? I felt I was in a far-off country where people were of fair complexion. They were different from us and spoke a language I could not understand. As I was wondering about the vision, the Divine Mother revealed to me that they too would follow my teachings. How sincere their

devotion was!" It is an amazing phenomenon that Sri Ramakrishna's message encircled the globe within seven years of his passing away, while it took hundreds of years to spread other religions after the death of their founders.

The message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world is: "Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realization. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light."

Nowadays there is so much religious intolerance in the world that people are killing each other in the name of God. Observing the religious fanaticism, a great thinker pointed out: "We have enough religion to hate one another but not enough to love one another." With a view to eradicating narrowness and bigotry, Sri Ramakrishna said: "It is not good to feel that one's own religion alone is true and all others are false. God is one only, and not two. Different people call on Him by different names: some as Allah, some as God, and others as Krishna, Shiva, and Brahman. It is like the water in a lake. The Hindus call it 'jal,' the Christians 'water,' and the Muslims 'pani.' " Swami Vivekananda reiterated Sri Ramakrishna's message of harmony at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago: "Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight,' Assimilation and not Destruction,' Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.' "

Sri Ramakrishna's life is the beacon light for the modern world. He was born in this age to uproot doubt and delusion from

the minds of the people. To the sceptics and atheists, Sri Ramakrishna would say : "God really exists. You don't see the stars in the daytime, but that does not mean that the stars do not exist. There is butter in milk but can anyone see it merely by looking at the milk ? You cannot realize God by a mere wish. You must go through some mental disciplines." He declared again and again: "The goal of human life is to realize God."

I sincerely pray to the Lord that the eternal message of Vedanta which was revitalized by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in this present age will inspire and uplift the people of the East and the West. May the Master shower His blessings always and ever on you all.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, August 1988)

To turn the mind, as it were, inside, stop it from going outside, and then to concentrate all its powers, and throw them upon the mind itself, in order that it may know its own nature, analyze itself, is very hard work. Yet that is the only way to anything which will be a scientific approach to the subject. It is good and very grand to conquer external nature, but grander still to conquer our internal nature. It is grand and good to know the laws that govern the stars and planets; it is infinitely grander and better to know the laws that govern the passions, the feelings, the will of mankind. This conquering of the inner man, understanding the secrets of the subtle workings that are within the human mind, and knowing its wonderful secrets, belong entirely to religion.

Swami Vivekananda

Theology and the Different Religions

Swami Sunirmalananda

(Continued from last issue)

We have seen until now that, though there are other theologies, Theology is largely understood as Christian. There are some who feel that Theology is a Christian, and, at the most, an ecumenical, subject. However, this knowledge, or the study of the nature of God, is not restricted to the Christian tradition. Theology can also mean the study and understanding of other faiths.¹ We must, however, note that this trend of studying and understanding the other faiths under Theology is quite recent, and need not necessarily interest everyone.² For, according to some, in the study of Theology, other faiths should be excluded. Here is a broadminded opinion of how Theology should be studied: 'If defined as the science concerning God (*doctrina de Deo*), the name of Theology applies as well to the philosophical knowledge of God, which is cast into scientific form in natural Theology or theodicy. However, unless theodicy is free from errors, it cannot lay claim to the name of Theology. For this reason, pagan mythology and pagan doctrines about the gods, must at once be set aside as false Theology. The Theology of heretics also, so far as it contains grave errors, must be excluded. In a higher and more perfect sense we call Theology that science of God and Divine things which, objectively, is based on supernatural revelation, and subjectively, is viewed in the light of Christian faith.'³

Hans Kung, the "rebel" theologian, concentrates on ecumenical Theology. 'Ever since the sixteenth-century Reformation new theological schools and denominations have multiplied. By the end of the twentieth century the confusion produced by the multifariousness of Christian theologies gives Christian theologians an ambivalent sense of despair and hope.

Recognizing that Christian Theology is in crisis some theologians despair. Other theologians hope that the present crisis of identity and theological divisiveness can be overcome during the twenty-first century by way of an all-inclusive Ecumenical Theology.⁴ Ecumenical Theology hopes at bringing about not just cooperation amongst the different schools of Christianity, but their unity. Such unity of all the branches of Christianity is essential for a global village. Cardinal Walter Kasper writes in the Vatican website: '...many Christians no longer understand the differences on which the Churches are arguing with each other. Others hold that ecumenism is outmoded and that inter-religious dialogue now represents the new agenda. In my opinion, there is a difference but not a competition between the two dialogues, for ultimately to be effective inter-religious dialogue presupposes that Christians can speak one and the same language. Indeed, the necessity of inter-religious dialogue makes ecumenical dialogue even more urgent.'⁵

That is about Theology within Christianity. Despite restrictions as to what Theology should be and what it should not be, various systems of Theology have sprung up with the passing of time. Apart from Christian Theology of diverse denominations and schools, there are Jewish and Islamic theologies too. Jewish Theology as such did not exist, though ideas might have existed since long. Seeing this lack of a systematic study of Theology, a practicable form was given to it in as late as 1910 by Professor Kaufmann Kohler, when he published his systematic study of Jewish Theology in Systematic Jewish Lore.⁶ Scholars read the fundamentals of Jewish Theology in this way: 'Abraham ben David (Ibn Daud) of Toledo (Spain) sets forth in his "Sublime Faith" six essentials of the Jewish faith: 1. the existence; 2. the unity; 3. the incorporeality; 4. the omnipotence of God (to this he subjoins the existence of angelic beings); 5. revelation and the immutability of the Law; and 6. divine Providence.'

Two terms are used to signify Theology in Islam: *aqîdah* and *kalâm*. 'Aqîdah is a branch of Islamic studies describing the beliefs of the Islamic faith.'⁷ Kalâm, on the other hand, 'relates to the discipline of seeking theological knowledge through debate and argument.'⁸ "Aqîdah is the Arabic word for articles of faith, particularly the Islamic faith. 'Aqîdah states clearly what a Muslim should believe in. 'Aqîdah is the plural form of 'Aqîdah', which literally means to bind or tie; thus, 'Aqîdah' is the articles of faith to which Muslims must be bound absolutely. Kalam (dogmatic Theology) is the branch of Islamic Studies that thoroughly discusses the articles of faith in Islam and supports these principles through various comparative studies. It seeks to prove the articles of faith. The difference between Kalam and 'Aqîdah is the following: 'Aqîdah defines what a Muslim believes in, whereas the main objective of Kalam is to defend 'Aqîdah. Throughout the history of Islam, Kalam has always emerged whenever cultural conflicts have arisen."⁹

The Buddha is known to have negated God, and so Buddhist Theology as such must not be a faithful study of God but his negation of Him. Yet, some attempts have been made to initiate studies in Buddhist Theology in recent times. There's no dearth of scholars, saints and literature in Buddhism as it is in other religions. But the idea of Theological study is recent. *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* is an excellent attempt in this field.¹⁰ There are of course some recent attempts in the West in Hindu, Jaina and Sikh theologies. But though the word 'Theology' has been used, what is generally studied or taught is just Hinduism.

So we have made an attempt to present a small introduction to Hindu Theology. There have been one or two attempts earlier, principally by non-practitioners, to write about Hindu Theology. This present introduction is objective and comparative in its approach, as far as possible. This is in no way an elaborate

study—much needs to be done. It is just an attempt to study this ancient, eternal *dharma* the way the world of today wants it.

Before beginning the study of Hindu Theology, we must know several things associated with Theology. Who should study Theology? What is the methodology and what are the parts of standard theological systems? And so on.

Theology as a Subject of Study

In Christianity, theological studies, in a very broad sense of the term, began almost a century or two after Christ. After all, the 'Theology' that was studied was not as 'complex' and 'theoretical' as it is now. It was mostly the study of the Gospels and interpreting God's relation to the Son or to man. 'The need for ministerial training along more formal lines seems to have been borne in upon the Church during the course of the second century,' comments Harold Rowdon in his *Theological Education in Historical Perspective*.¹¹ Of the several institutions teaching the Bible (and not Theology as it's taught today), there was the famous school by Origen. 'The Catechetical School of Alexandria is a prime example. Founded by Bishop Demetrius towards the close of the second century, it grew to its greatest heights under the leadership of the famous Origen before his departure to Caesarea (where he developed a similar institution).'¹²

Growing in this way, facing numerous upheavals, Theology as a subject set foot firmly almost since the 13th century on the Christian soil. Since then, it has never looked back. Harold Rowdon says: 'The outstanding development of the twelfth century was the emergence of the university. In a sense, the university grew out of the bishop's responsibility to provide clerical training. The 4th Lateran Council of 1215 still exhorted every metropolitan bishop to ensure that Theology was taught in the context of his cathedral church, but in fact this duty was being taken up by the universities.'¹³ Further, the clerical and pastoral

studies of Theology are an important boost to this subject. That the clergy and aspiring to be priests, monks and nuns, and others had to study at least some of Theology was not without reason. 'The reformers of the sixteenth century drew attention to the extent of clerical ignorance and ineptitude. Bishop Hooper's famous visitation of the clergy of his Gloucester diocese revealed appalling ignorance (two of the clergy questioned thought that the Lord's Prayer was so called because 'the Lord King' had commanded it to be used).'¹⁴ Theological studies have also become more and more complex with time. Dr Fernando Canale says in his introduction to *'Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology'*: 'Ever since the sixteenth-century Reformation new theological schools and denominations have multiplied.'¹⁵

There was one other difficulty for this multiplication, or the expansion of theological studies, to take place. Apart from the want of the printing press, there was the problem of language. Theological texts were generally written in Latin, Greek, German, French or Italian and so on. This trend changed with the flow of time, and translations began to appear, easing the road for this great subject to make inroads into many distant corners.

Now, Theology is an established subject, studied mostly by aspiring Christian priests and others, as also by academics seeking doctorates.

When we have the *Bible* and the words of saints as sacred literature, is a science like Theology, complex that it is, needed at all? Can we do without Theology? Charles Hodge remarks about the need for Theology: 'The answer to this question is, in the first place, that it cannot be done. Such is the constitution of the human mind that it cannot help endeavouring to systematize and reconcile the facts which it admits to be true. In no department of knowledge have men been satisfied with the possession of a mass of undigested facts. And the students of the Bible can as little be expected to be thus satisfied. There is a necessity,

therefore, for the construction of systems of Theology. Of this the history of the Church affords abundant proof. In all ages and among all denominations, such systems have been produced.¹⁶ In his Lectures on Systematic Theology, Rev Charles Finney makes a significant statement: 'The doctrines of a nature, sinful *per se*, of a necessitated will, of inability, and of physical regeneration, and physical Divine influence in regeneration, with their kindred and resulting dogmas, embarrassed and even confounded me at every step. I often said to myself, "If these things are really taught in the Bible, I must be an infidel."¹⁷

Theology is a very important subject because it deals with the most fundamental question of our lives: the knowledge of God. Stanford Murrell says: "Nothing so affects the spirit and character of a person as his knowledge of God, or the lack of it." (David Clark). Because this is true, Theology becomes the most vital and fundamental of all studies.¹⁸

So, the study of Theology is important, and this is an important field of thought.

Theology and the Academics

Is Theology an academic subject? There are numerous universities teaching religion, Theology, and other allied subjects now. Many books and numerous articles are being published on different phenomenological aspects regularly. Is Theology an academic subject then? Nowadays, mystical experience too appears to be an academic subject—for gaining doctorates. Every human being has the right to knowledge. But there are some subjects which are perhaps particular to some individuals, who are specializing in certain areas. Nowadays, however, ancient mystics and saints are studied by academic students, who sometimes go to the extent of using newspaper articles as references and get degrees (please read further to see an example)! In some place, students ask, for instance: 'Are the spiritual

experiences of saints mere “cultural products” and expositions of past theories, or are they phenomenological?’ What is more, God Himself comes under scholastic scrutiny. The extent of such academic scrutiny is clear when a writer calls spiritual experience a “dysfunction of the brain”: ‘Many argue that by the machinery of neurobiology of faith, spirituality, religion, and ‘God’ are dismissed as mere chemical reactions occurring in the brain.’¹⁹ ‘In addition to the studies conducted on accomplished practitioners of spiritual behaviour, observations of patients of temporal lobe epilepsy has revealed specific hyper sensitivity to religious and spiritual behaviour.’²⁰ ‘All these findings could make atheists and sceptics argue that religion and spirituality are only a dysfunction of the brain. However, is it possible that it is in reality a ‘function’ and not a dysfunction of the brain activity?’²¹ This is what happens to spirituality at the hands of academics. So, a systematic study of Theology by the religious is a must.

Academics, instead of seeking God (while studying Theology), seek such subjects for debate, degrees, doctorates and discussions. Sometimes, they create newer ‘disciplines’. For instance, Anton Fredrich Busching wrote an article in German in 1758, calling it ‘Reflections on the Nature of Biblical Dogmatic Theology and its Superiority to Scholastic Old and New’. This article became the basis of a ‘schism’ in theological circles. What happened was this: For almost 17 centuries, Systematic (Dogmatic) Theology was the one subject that was being studied. Systematic Theology gives a clear, rational account of the nature of the Christian faith. But with this article as the trigger, a newer Theology, called Biblical Theology came into being.²²

Further, academics tend to ‘academize’ everything. For instance, the profoundest sentiment that the incarnation, Jesus Christ, suffered and died for the salvation of human beings is, while studied as Soteriology, theorized thus: ‘The Ransom Theory’ (that Jesus gave himself up to Satan as a ransom for

human sins), 'The Satisfaction Theory' (that Jesus Christ's sacrifice was to satisfy God, who expects penitence from human beings), 'The Governmental Theory', or 'The Moral Influential Theory', and so on.²³

Real theology, or God, mysticism, and other related subjects are beyond the scope of the intellect. Theology as the intellectual search for Truth and God, should be undertaken with *shraddha*. Yet, the positive point to note is that there is a lot of interest in this subject and intellectual reasoning will take the person, if sincere, towards spiritual search for Truth.

The Method of Theology

In his book, *Method in Theology*, Bernard Lonergan proposes two important functions of Theology: retrieving the past and moving into the future.²⁴ 'Is Theology to be based on scripture alone, or on scripture and tradition? Is the tradition just the explicit teaching of the apostles, or is it the ongoing teaching of the church? ...Not all answers can be correct. ...After all, Christian theologians disagree not only on the areas relevant to theological research but also on the interpretation of texts, on the occurrence of events, on the significance of movements.'²⁵ To know what happened in the past is of course necessary, and that is at the core of theological or philosophical studies. Now, the knowing of the future is impossible, and yet, something could be projected into the future as a possible proposal. To do this and to study Theology as an integrated subject, theologians use three methods to study Theology.

The first is the Speculative Method. Down the years, certain philosophical truths have come into existence in religions. The speculative method attempts to prove the validity of these philosophical truths through logic, argument, faith and scripture. The Inductive Method is the second; it goes from the particular to the general. That is, seeing some individual examples, a

generalization is made. The third is the Mystical method, in which explanations of personal experience are considered in the light of the scripture.

(to be continued)

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- ³ The Catholic Encyclopaedia, read under ‘Dogmatic Theology’
- ⁴ Dr Fernando Canale, *Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal* (Michigan: Berrien Springs) see Introduction.
- ⁵ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs
- ⁶ Dr. Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, (New York : Macmillan Company, 1918) see Preface, p. 4
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- ¹⁴ Harold Rowdon, p. 80
- ¹⁵ Prof Dr Fernando Canale, ‘Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology’, p. 1
- ¹⁶ ^Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, pp 20-21
- ¹⁷ Charles Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, London (William Tegg And Co., 1851), p. 15
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- ²³ See David M. Williams, *Soteriology*, (The NTS Library), Online Christian Library of Theological Sources.
- ²⁴ Lonergan, Bernard. *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972)
- ²⁵ Lonergan, Bernard, p. 150

The Message of Sri Ramakrishna to Modern Man Swami Tapasyananda

[In his Foreword to The Life of Sri Ramakrishna Mahatma Gandhi says: 'The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of Godliness ... In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. ']

This brief estimate by the Mahatma appropriately highlights the message of Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master to all mankind, to the youth as well as to the old. If his life and teachings have survived and have been gaining ever-increasing popularity during these ninety years after his demise, it is because they have in them a power to give man a sense of certainty with regard to his ultimate destiny — to give him a positive and unambiguous answer to the tormenting question that has agitated his mind through the ages — Is there a God ?

Born in 1836 in the village of Kamarpukur in Bengal he migrated as an adolescent to Calcutta, about 60 miles to the southeast of his village, and spent the whole of his spiritually eventful life in the temple of Dakshineswar situated near that great city. A few days of worship in the temple as priest of the Divine Mother were sufficient to generate in him an intense and sustained craving to have a direct and immediate experience of the Divine Mother who was symbolised by the image he worshipped. It is impossible for us, engrossed as we are with the humdrum affairs of life and steeped in our conventional religious attitudes, even to imagine how the human mind could long for an experience of God as a drowning man will pant for a breath of air. Such were the intensity and urgency that characterised the quest of Sri Ramakrishna for God, and we have got his witness to assure us that an organic demand of this type

from the deepest core of man is answered by the Divine. Describing the first outburst of Divine consciousness on him he says: *The building with its different parts, the temple and all vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead was a limitless, infinite, effulgent ocean of consciousness. As far as the eyes could reach, its shining billows were rushing towards me! In the twinkling of an eye they were on me and engulfed me completely.*' This was the beginning of his spiritual experiences which culminated in his capacity to see the *Sat-Chit-Ananda* in every thing.

In later days, addressing mankind on this question of the direct experience of God, he spoke out from the pages of his life: *'The Divine Mother is like a housewife. She has sent all of us, her children, to play, and provided us with plenty of toys and other devices for entertainment. We, the children, play with them all the livelong day, forgetful of the Mother. But the child who gets bored with the toys and also begins to feel the pinch of hunger remembers the Mother and cries for Her. If the cry is of a really hungry child, the Mother understands it and appears before him and takes him up in Her arms. But few want Her, as the attractions of the play engross their minds. She therefore keeps away from them, attending to the works of Her cosmic household, and appears only when man really wants Her.'*

Such is Sri Ramakrishna's assurance to the seekers after God and his reply to those flippant critics who question the existence of God without feeling any intense need of Him.

There are many rationalists and free-thinkers who reject the idea of God, because neither their senses nor their intellectual faculties can reveal His existence to them. They are just like deaf men who reject the truth of sound, because their eyesight and sense of touch, the only ways of knowing they possess, fail to give them any indication of sound. Only a pure heart, wherein worldly cravings have been replaced by an intense longing for God, can get an immediate understanding of Him. *'Men shed jugfuls of tears for their near and dear ones, for wealth, position and other worldly objects they love or are in need of. But whosoever does the same for God?'* asks Ramakrishna. It is futile to judge about the existence of God without feeling

an intense want for Him. For unless God reveals Himself no one can grasp His truth directly, and this revelation comes only to the pure in heart, the sign of this purity being the manifestation of a longing for God to the exclusion of all worldly values.

Sri Ramakrishna's experience of the Divine was not a fit of spiritual elation, but an abiding transformation of his understanding. It marks the awakening of a new power of awareness, a new sensitivity of being, which is as distinct from, and superior to, reasoning, as reasoning is to sense perception, and sense perception to inertness. Animals have sense perception, which marks a state of greater advancement from the inertness of the inorganic world. Man has a still higher faculty of understanding by virtue of which he can reason, conceptualize and apprehend values, but this faculty cannot give him any direct perception of the spiritual reality. Intense longing for God, which is aroused in a pure mind, awakens a new power or sensibility of understanding, known commonly as intuition, and it is with this higher power of understanding that Ramakrishna apprehended the reality of God. In place of the inert world of matter and insignificant living beings, he apprehended the whole of existence as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, and the world of our everyday experience as a mere expression of the thought or will of that *Sat-Chit-Ananda*.

After his first experience of the Divine, Ramakrishna, who was a great experimentalist in the spiritual field, tried whether the paths for God-realization laid down in the different religions, both Hindu and non-Hindu, were true. He lived the life of a true Vaishnava, Shakta, Advaitin, Muslim, and Christian for brief periods of his life and meditated on God in the ways prescribed by these faiths with the same intensity that he evinced in his early life, and he found that they all led the sincere seeker to the same *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. Thus he established the truth of God and the validity of all religions in spite of all their doctrinal differences.

From the above description of the salient features of Ramakrishna's life, it should not be understood that he was a mere

recluse who thought only of his own salvation and shunned humanity as vile. On the other hand he was one of the greatest lovers of mankind that the modern world has witnessed, and all his spiritual efforts were ultimately to reveal the truth of God to man. If he showed an extraordinary ardour in quest of God in early life, he showed afterwards an equal zeal in sharing his experiences with men, in eradicating the spiritual poverty and suffering of people, and in establishing them in a state of peace and joy. He lived his whole life near the busy city of Calcutta and kept himself easily accessible to the innumerable people who went to him in doubt and despair. The natural state of his mind was one of constant absorption in the bliss of God-consciousness, technically called *Samadhi* where no trouble, turmoil or suffering of the world could disturb him. But out of love for suffering humanity he generated in his mind a desire to serve all who were in need of spiritual help. By virtue of this noble desire created by an act of will, he kept himself in the ordinary plane of human consciousness, sharing the weal and woe of his fellow men and engaging himself for hours in conversation with the large numbers of people who flocked to him for instruction. A fraction of these charming conversations recorded by a faithful disciple has been published in a volume of about a thousand pages under the name of the '*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*', wherein one will find most simple and enlightening discussions on all problems of spiritual life. One who has read this book can easily understand the significance of the words of Mahatma Gandhi quoted earlier.

To those who question the validity of spiritual experiences, Sri Ramakrishna's life and spiritual ministry offer a standing challenge. From where did this unlettered man get all the wisdom that we find reflected in his conversations which were listened to with rapt attention by the wisest men of his times and continue to be read by the wise men of our times too? Wherefrom did he get that power of will with which he could mould the minds of powerful men even as a potter moulds clay? How could a man of the stature of Swami Vivekananda who went to question and test his real-

izations become a humble disciple at first and later his chief apostle to all mankind? The only satisfying answer is that his realizations were fully grounded in Truth and the power of Supreme Truth, which is otherwise called God, manifested through him.

The work of prolonged spiritual ministry, involving incessant conversations with spiritual seekers, told upon his health gradually and he fell a victim to a fatal cancerous growth in the throat. The few months he spent on sick bed were days of excessive pain and practical starvation, but they also formed the most dynamic period of his ministry. No physical pain could shake his mind from his calmness and his conviction regarding the reality of the Divine presence. It was during this period that by an act of will he dispelled the veil of ignorance and brought the light of spiritual illumination to most of his disciples, including the great Swami Vivekananda. Physical ailment had no effect on the powers of his mind. The circumstances attending his demise were as much a demonstration of the truth of God as were his realizations and his spiritual ministry. Though there have been many sages, saints and incarnations in the past, Sri Ramakrishna's witness of God comes to us of the modern generation with a special force, as it has occurred so close to our times and as it has been recorded by men with modern scholarship and critical insight.

To conclude, Sri Ramakrishna's message to all mankind, including youth, is that God is true and that the true purpose of life is to strive for His realization even in the midst of all worldly preoccupations. He bears witness to the fact that God can be realized as an actuality, if we entertain a wholehearted longing for His realization.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, October 1976-77)

God Comes in Many Forms Umesh Gulati

Is God formless or does God have forms also? Sri Ramakrishna said that God is both formless, and also has a form, and much more. This seems quite illogical. But the sages of the East follow, what Erich Fromm calls, the paradoxical logic, in which A and non-A do not exclude each other. That makes sense. Since Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is Infinite, it follows that Infinity must include all contradictions. Sri Ramakrishna explained this by the parable of an elephant and some blind men. One of them touching the elephant's leg said that the elephant was like a pillar. Another who touched the elephant's ear said the animal was like a winnowing-fan. Others touching the elephant's tail or belly gave different versions of the animal. Just so a man who has seen only one aspect of God limits God to that alone. So God can be formless, and also have a form.

Sri Ramakrishna said further, the formless God is real, and equally real is God with form. Formless God, *Brahman*, is beyond mind and speech. Sri Ramakrishna's famous allegory to illustrate this truth was that of a salt doll that entered the ocean to measure its depth, but it could not come back to tell others. It melted in the ocean itself! Sri Ramakrishna used to say further that so long as we are in this relative world, we could not ignore it as unreal; the *Nitya* or Absolute, and the *Lila* (or the play of the Absolute), are two aspects of the same Reality. It is like the roof, and the steps leading to it. [*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by M., tr. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1942), 359.]

He further said, the Absolute plays in many ways: as *Ishwara*, as the gods, and as the universe. So, in our history such divine personalities have come again and again, as Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and very recently Ramakrishna, to protect *dharma*. In 1896 Swami Vivekananda gave two lectures on the divinity of Sri

Ramakrishna; these were later combined into one with the title: *My Master*. It is now published in volume 4 of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. This lecture opens with the following sentence, 'Whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, I come down to help mankind'. (Ibid. 154) This is nothing but a short version of two verses of the *Bhagavad-Gita*: (4.7-8): whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, I [Sri Krishna] come to help mankind (4.7), for the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of *dharma*, I come into being in every age.(4.8) So Swami Vivekananda rightly presents Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation of God in this age. [As a point of fact Swamiji's quote is the compressed version of the Bhagavad-Gita (4.7-8): 'Whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, I come to help mankind' (4.7). For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of *dharma*, I come into being in every age'.(4.8) These two verses, as one can see, deal with the concept of divine incarnation.]

This essay, however, is not to expound the divinity of Ramakrishna, but it is to assert that divine personalities can also come as individual persons, men or women, who may not be recognized as incarnations; they come only to do some specific tasks for their devotees, and disappear without being noticed by people in general. It is to illustrate the appearance of such divine persons we will set below a few stories from *the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and from *the Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, and also from elsewhere.

First, here are two stories from *the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. [Ibid. 337-338.] The first is a story of a man who had a daughter that became a widow when she was very young, seven or eight years old. She noticed the husbands of other girls of her age, and one day asked her father, 'Where is my husband?' The father said: 'Govinda (another name of Sri Krishna) is your husband. He will come to you if you call Him'. The girl went to her room and closed the door. Then she piteously began to call: 'O Govinda, come to

me! Show Yourself to me! I cannot live without you. So, You please come!' God could not resist the girl's piteous cry and appeared before her.

Another story from *the Gospel* is that of a boy named Jatila. He used to walk to his school through woods. The journey frightened him. So one day he told his mother how afraid he was of walking through the woods. The mother said: 'Whenever you feel frightened, call Madhusudana (another name of Sri Krishna)'. The boy asked: 'Who is Madhusudana?' 'He is your Elder Brother', replied the boy's mother. So, next time when Jatila had to walk through the woods to go to his school, he called, 'Brother Madhusudana, where are You? I am scared'. At first there was no response, but as the boy began to cry and called his Brother Madhusudana. God (Sri Krishna) could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said: 'Here I am. Why are you frightened?' He took the boy out of the woods and showed him his way to school. Taking leave of the boy, God said: 'I will come whenever you call Me. Do not be afraid.'

In both these cases, God came as ordinary persons and was recognized as such (not as God or an incarnation of God to be recognized by people in general). Besides, one must also have this kind of faith like that of a child; apart from this faith, one should have intense love and yearning to see god in the form of one's brother or husband. Next, we give below a couple of stories from the life of Swami Vivekananda during his wandering days.

After the death of Sri Ramakrishna in August 1886, Swami Vivekananda and his brother monks set out to tour the whole country on foot, unless someone gave them a railway ticket. In August 1888, in Vrindavan while going round the Govardhan Hill, the Swami vowed that he would not beg his food from anyone and eat only that which was offered to him without asking. During the first day he became exceedingly hungry at noon. Besides that the heavy shower that came pouring added to his discomfort. But he continued to walk through the woods. Soon he heard a voice

calling him from behind. The Swami didn't pay any attention and began to run instead to test this apparent act of Providence. But the man who was calling him soon overtook him and insisted that he must accept some food. The Swami accepted it, saying nothing. Shortly afterwards, the man disappeared in the woods, and was nowhere to be found even after Swami's great efforts. Ecstatic for this miraculous act of the Lord, and with tears streaming from his eyes, the Swami cried out, 'Glory to Shri Radha! Glory to Shri Krishna'! It is quite clear that in the wilderness the Lord had taken care of His devotee. [*The Life of Swami Vivekananda By His Eastern and Western Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2000), v.1, 218-19.]

The Swami then visited Radhakunda, sacred for its association with Shri Radha. At this time he was wearing only a loin-cloth. Having no other thing to wear after his bath, he took it off, washed it, and left it on the side of the tank to dry while he was bathing. When he had bathed, he found the loin-cloth missing. He chanced to look up in a tree and found a monkey having the loin-cloth in its hands. When the monkey refused to give it up, the Swami became despondent, and decided to move into a cave and starve himself to death. As he advanced into the forest in pursuit of his plan, a man appeared and offered him a new ochre cloth and some food, which he had brought for him. The Swami accepted these as the grace of the Lord. But when he traced his steps back to the side of the tank, he found the loin-cloth lying exactly where he had put it to dry. Such incidents convinced him that he was a beloved of the Lord and protected by Him wherever he was. (Ibid.)

There is another incident that is also worth narrating. This occurred at Tari Ghat in Uttar Pradesh, which was then a railway station for Ghazipur near Varanasi. Someone had given the Swami a third class train ticket to travel to a certain place. In the train he travelled for more than a day without the money to buy even drinking water or food. Getting down at the railway station he was even pushed rudely out of the shaded waiting area for third

class passengers. He went out and just sat on the ground leaning against a lamp-post. It was the summer time when the mercury rises to 115 degrees Fahrenheit in that part of India. Across from him was sitting a man of the merchant caste, on a mat in the shaded area, and his train companion during the last thirty-six hours, enjoying his food and taunting the Swami for taking to the life of a monk. All of a sudden an unknown man with a water pot in hand and a mat under his arm, came to him and said, 'Come, Babaji [which literally means father, but the word is used in reverence to address holy persons in India], come and take this food I have brought for you, and I am spreading this mat for you to rest on'.

'There must be some mistake', said the Swami. 'I have never seen you before; you may be mistaking me for someone else'. Then the man told him that he was a sweetmeat vendor and was just taking his afternoon nap when he dreamt that Lord Rama pointed you out to me that He was pained to see you without food from the day before, and that I should get up instantly, prepare some *Puris* [Bread fried in oil] and curry [North Indian delicacies] and bring them to you. The man said that he didn't believe it since he realized it was just a dream and went back to sleep. But the dream kept repeating as he tried to sleep. So finally, there he was with the food, and the rest. Hearing this the Swami was dumbfounded, and so was the man sitting across from him; he was embarrassed. Swami Vivekananda profusely thanked the vendor with all his heart, tears streaming down his face, thinking that the Lord had given such care and protection to His devotee! [Ibid. 348-49.]

The late Swami Prabhavananda, the former head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California wrote a commentary on *the Narada Bhakti Sutras* with the title: *Narada's Way of Divine Love*. Commenting on a couple of *sutras* or aphorisms, he provided some stories that can be used to reinforce the theme of this essay. In this connection the Swami refers to a verse from the *Bhagavad-Gita* (9.22) where Sri Krishna says: 'But if a man worships Me with an

undistracted mind, devoting every moment to Me, I shall carry to him everything that he needs, and protect his possessions from loss’.

The Swami alluded to an interesting legend associated with this verse. There was a great scholar who was a priest. He was writing a commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita*. When he came to this above-mentioned verse, he was puzzled, for he thought to himself, ‘How would Lord Krishna carry to his devotee everything he needs’? He concluded that this particular phrase was an interpolation. So he scratched out the phrase *vahaamyaham* (I carry) and substituted the phrase *dadaamyaham* (I provide)[Swami Prabhavananda: *Narada’s Way of Divine Love* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986), 112-13.].

The scholar worked as a priest in a village some distance from his home. He earned enough money for his family and for his own needs. Now it so happened that the day he scratched out that particular phrase from the *Gita*, he went to a distant village to do his priestly work. But at the time he was ready to come back, a terrible storm raged, which continued throughout the night, which made it impossible for him to get back home. The priest had to buy some provisions for the family while returning home. The storm made this impossible and made the priest very worried that his family would remain hungry until the next day.

However, during his absence from home, a young boy carried a big basket loaded with fruits and groceries and handed it to the wife of the priest, saying, ‘Your husband cannot return until tomorrow, so he sent this basket which I have carried here for you and the children. But I must tell you; your husband scratched my forehead before he sent me. You can see the marks here’! Thus saying the boy disappeared.

When the priest returned the next day, worried that his wife and children had suffered from hunger, he apologized and said he had been unable to come home because of the raging storm. But his wife said, ‘Why, you sent a young boy who carried a basket

of food for us, and we had a delightful feast. But what's the matter with you that you could be so cruel to that boy? You scratched his forehead and there were traces of blood'. Then suddenly it struck the priest that it was the Lord Himself who had carried to them what they needed. So in the edition of the *Bhagavad-Gita* that he was commenting on, he repeated the phrase *vahaamyaham* three times I carry, I carry, I carry.

Swami Prabhavananda narrates another incident of the same nature. In about 1930, the Swami, still a *Brahmachari*, went on pilgrimage, along with three other Brahmacharins to Badri Narayana, in the Himalayas. One among them, Gurudas Maharaj, was a Westerner from San Francisco, California. At that time the priests in India invariably didn't allow any Westerner to enter the shrines. The party arrived at the temple site quite early in the morning when the temple gate was not yet open. So many pilgrims were sitting in the courtyard of the temple; these four pilgrims also sat in the corner of the courtyard, waiting for the gate to open.

A few minutes after they got themselves seated, Swami Prabhavananda saw a priest beckoning to the Swami and told him to tell his friends to go with him into the shrine from a side door of the temple. When other pilgrims tried to enter also he said, No, it is not time for you yet. Saying thus, he shut the door. The priest then went forward and stood beside the deity. This was quite unusual, but none of these four became conscious of this. As a general rule, no priest stands beside the deity; he always stands facing the deity. After a few minutes of *darshan*, they were asked by the priest to go out, and then the door was locked again.

A little later, the head priest refused to allow them to enter the *sanctum sanctorum*, though he made arrangements for them to look at the deity from the door at a time when other pilgrims were not allowed to enter, so that their view would be unobstructed. *Brahmacharins* as they were, the head priest was extra nice to them; he gave them accommodation and sent them delicious sacramental food. For three days and three nights they were

there as honoured guests. During that time they became acquainted with a few other priests who were there. But strangely enough, they never saw again the first priest who had let them in from the side door and took them to the innermost shrine. Who was their benefactor, and where had he disappeared?

On their way back they visited Swami Turiyananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who was then living at Almora in the Himalayas, and reported the incident to him. He said excitedly, 'Ah! How foolish you are not to have recognized the Lord! It was He who appeared in that [priest's] form and led you to the innermost shrine!' (Ibid. 75-76)

To conclude this essay, we want to stress the point again that God incarnates again and again as a person like Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Ramakrishna, and is recognized as such, but God also appears as an individual to do specific work for his or her devotees. In that case, God is seen only by the devotees concerned and not by people in general. So one need not dismiss the first two stories that we gave from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as mere fiction without having any reality. If those stories are without any reality, what can we say about Sri Ramakrishna saying to Swami Vivekananda that he had seen God as he saw him (Swami Vivekananda), but had seen God more intensely? In fact, during the course of his talking with devotees, Sri Ramakrishna would often lose outer consciousness, and would be seen talking with the Divine Mother Kali.

God is also Mother

Hans Torwesten

(Continued from last issue)

Yet the beginning already points to the end, the simple being of nature – whether it is manifest in a tree, a mountain lake or a resting body – to the transcendental Being. It is precisely the feminine, which one so often accuses of staying put in the immanent, but which can in a world of activity and pride become a pointer to the transcendent. The futile beauty, the unmotivated smile of a girl, which passes away can more intensively push man to the transcendent than a tense male face of an ascetic. Nowadays we no longer need to pass through the world with blindfolded eyes in order to find God. Immanence and transcendence are no longer irreconcilable opposites, because the Ground is both. Male asceticism and male urge to conquer long believed that the way to the truth and reality could be found only over the dead body of the world. Today we have had enough of its battles and continual manoeuvring, which destroy the fields and uproot people. A self-imposed “male” transcendence, which mainly considers that it justifies its superiority by uprooting nature, has today become more than questionable. For the final Ground is not only pure spirit, but also and above all Love, and a transcendence without love is an empty transcendence. If man is not prepared to get out of his spiritual or material armoured car and kiss the grass, which he previously had so assiduously run over, he can be robbed of his alleged transcendence.

But let us go back to the double character of the Ground. What appears to one person as dangerous, is but a protective mantle for another. The Ground as the endless abode of the “Feminine” has something disturbing – and something saving about it. The “mantle” of the Divine Mother can have many forms, ranging from the very material form of the Mantle of Mary, which is spread over all sinners, to the subtlest of all “mantles”, to the Emptiness

(*Sunyata*) of Mahayana Buddhism. This Emptiness is radical Non-Form, out of which however all forms arise. We flee from her, because she seems to call everything into question, and we flee into her, because in our uttermost depths we know it is only in the limitless openness of this space, which is a non-space and in which we can no longer hang on to anything, that there is our final refuge. There the Mother receives us at last as Space, as the “silent desert of Divinity”. There she has even removed the covering of her nakedness and we have finally come home in endless homelessness.

As long as we look on the Ground as “Stop”, as the eternally fixed, unchangeable, as the “Purusha”, it may have something masculine about it at least for the ascetics: as the highest refuge in the face of the snares of Maya, as a quieting rock in the boisterous sea of Samsara, on which we are safe. Yet we misunderstand the nature of the ground, if we see in it only the fixed and the secure; at least there is the danger that we only want to bring our conscious ego into safety. There are therefore two aspects of the Ground: the “dangerous” Space, which destroys all false support, and the fixed Base, which makes the cosmic dance at all possible. It is depth and summit at one and the same time - in which the depth represents more the feminine and the summit more the masculine aspect of the Ground. In the Upanishads, in which we again and again come across examples of a splendid overall view, we often find pictures uniting both aspects. “Just as the rivers flow into the sea and thereby give up their name and form, so do the Knowers enter the Higher Spirit (Purusha), the Brilliant One, who is higher than the highest, whereby they are freed from name and form,” it says in the Mundaka Upanishad (III,2,8). Here the apparent opposites come together: the feminine depth of the ocean, which takes in everything, is at the same time the highest sun consciousness, the light is engulfing darkness, in which everything that is “obtained” – name and form – is lost again. We

find security only in insecurity, we reach the highest summit when we fall into the depths.

The Ground has something disturbing only for the person who will let himself be disturbed, who is afraid of the void. He knows that he is letting himself be taken on an endless adventure, if he accepts the challenge of the “feminine” and permits himself to be drawn into the distance. In that case there is no more future, if one has already started. And yet it is the only possible way.

This is also of course seldom: we are afraid of something that is actually the guarantee for all forms, the nourishing Mother Ground, which guarantees the continuance of life. What produces something that “liquidates” and dissolves forms, also produces them. The annihilating void is at the same time the ever pregnant womb of all forms. As such it has something firm and safe about it. Something which disturbs many is at the same time the ever reliable – through which the relationship between the transcendent Ground and “Mother Earth” again comes into view. Male metaphysicians and psychologists often believe that only the male has to be characterised as “immutable”, and in so doing attribute all changeability to the “unfaithful” feminine principle. But we only need to look at the quite changeable history of man, which has been mainly “made” by the male, to see the relatively unchangeability of the female. In the animal kingdom the female often has something of the colourless inconspicuousness of the supporting Ground, while the male not seldom puffs himself up in great shimmering Maya-colours. The fact that a woman dresses in exotic costumes, while a man prefers an unimaginative, respectable and good quality dark colour, is a modern development – in the Middle Ages the fashion was more akin to the animal world. So the male also often enough embodied the Maya nature, while the feminine became the “sign” of the Ground, who does not act a part and appear on the stage. When the Buddha needed a dependable sign for enlightenment, he did not call upon a male god or on heaven as a witness, but on the *Earth*. He touched

it with his hand and said: "This earth bears all living beings. It is just and impartial to all that moves or does not move. May it show that I do not lie, and may it be a witness for me." Is it not strange and at the same time informative that Buddha called upon the earth, the feminine embodiment of immanence, as a witness to the fact that he has realised the highest transcendence? This would never be possible if there were no secret connection between the two. The one reality calls on the other, the Ground inclines towards the Ground. Even the Buddha needs, just like the medieval knight in the tournament, the objective sight of the "Other" which for him is the Earth or the Woman, which becomes the judge and the witness. A knight would hardly look for this incorruptibility in another male knight, just as the Buddha would in a male ascetic. They look for refuge in their opposite, so that the relationship between transcendence and immanence almost turns inside out: the earth and the woman, which normally embody immanence, are judged and recognised by the transcendent eye, that of the transcending achievement – Buddha's enlightenment, the warrior's courage to fight. How relative everything is! – even and in particular the play with transcendence and immanence, with the absolute and the relative. Prakriti dances before the eye of Purusha, but if Purusha needs a witness for what he has in his pure spirituality realised, he has to call upon Prakriti as a witness.

(To be continued)

Translated by John Phillips

Programme for March - April 2015

Sunday discourses begin

at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

Mar 1	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 1	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar 8	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 2	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar 15	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 3	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar 22	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 4	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar 29	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 66	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 5	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 67	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 12	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 68	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 19	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 69	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 26	Day Retreat	

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 26th April
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

The idea, therefore, is to be free of external and internal nature. Nature must fall at your feet, and you must trample on it and be free and glorious by going beyond. No more is there life; therefore no more is there death. No more enjoyment; therefore no more misery. It is bliss unspeakable, indestructible, beyond everything. What we call happiness and good here are but particles of that eternal Bliss. And this eternal Bliss is our goal.

In perfect concentration the soul becomes actually free from the bonds of the gross body and knows itself as it is.

Desire, ignorance, and inequality—this is the trinity of bondage.

Every action of man is worship, because the idea is to attain to freedom, and all action, directly or indirectly, tends to that. Only those actions that deter are to be avoided. The whole universe is worshipping, consciously or unconsciously; only it does not know that even while it is cursing, it is in another form worshipping the same God it is cursing, because those who are cursing are also struggling for freedom.

The going from birth to death, this traveling, is what is called *samsara* in Sanskrit, the round of birth and death literally. All creation, passing through this round, will sooner or later become free.

We want to know in order to make ourselves free. That is our life: one universal cry for freedom.

Swami Vivekananda

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All nature is crying through all the atoms for one thing—its perfect freedom.

Pray all the time, read all the scriptures in the world, and worship all the gods there are . . . unless you realize the Soul there is no freedom.

The universe itself can never be the limit of our satisfaction. That is why the miser gathers more and more money, that is why the robber robs, the sinner sins, that is why you are learning philosophy. All have one purpose. There is no other purpose in life, save to reach this freedom. Consciously or unconsciously, we are all striving for perfection. Every being must attain to it.

Swami Vivekananda



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