

# Vedanta

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**Bayazid a Great Sufi Saint**  
*Aga Syed Ibrahim Dara*

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**The Hindu Tradition of Paradoxes**  
*Umesh Gulati*

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## Divine Wisdom

# Teachings of Swami Adbhutananda

## Advice to a Devotee

Biharilal Sarkar: "Maharaj, why are there so many ups and downs in the mind of a householder?"

Latu Maharaj: "Because the mind of a householder is too involved with worldly objects. Sometimes it goes up as a result of spiritual practices, but it falls back again. The Master used to say: 'if one ties a rope with a brick at the end of it to the tail of a mongoose, it will be able to climb a wall only as far as the loose rope permits but no farther, because of the weight of the brick. Likewise, the mind of a householder may move toward God, but the weight of worldly objects pulls it back'.

"To keep the mind always in God is a great *Tapasya*. Such a mind does not fluctuate between high and low. A thread with stray fibres cannot pass through the eye of a needle; similarly, a mind with desires cannot be absorbed in God.

"When a man's mind becomes fully concentrated on God, he enjoys the bliss of the Atman. But this is very difficult in the householder's life. Disease, sorrow, enjoyment, desire—all these are constant companions of the householder; also physical lethargy and mental restlessness. In addition to these if the man doubts the existence of God, there is no hope of his getting liberation. Often you will find that worldly people are busy with their families, their children, and other mundane matters, but they have no inclination to think about God. Such distracted minds cannot make progress in spiritual life."

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## Editorial

Worship of the Divine Mother-6  
(Continued from the last issue)

Rituals are a part of life; even animals and insects have their own rituals. Rituals foster unity, strength and freedom. A ritual is a fine technique of transforming every action into a sacred act. Worship is a most sacred ritual. Every devotee finds worship of the Divine in any form a great help in unfolding their spiritual potential.

The aim of ritualism is to take man to God, to the Ultimate Reality, to make him liberated. A ritual or a ceremony is that which advances us toward God.

A religious ritual is a sacrament. Through the act of worship the worshipper feels himself and everything related with the worship as sacred. Such is the power of the ritual that the devotees transcend time and place and feel themselves in the presence of his/her chosen deity. The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna feel that he/she is in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother at Dakshineswar or Jayarambati; for them time stands still and they feel that God is graciously accepting their whole-hearted puja and blessing them. Each place of worship is filled with purity and becomes Holy. Whenever devotees enter into such a place of worship they feel uplifted with spiritual feelings. That is why worship is given such a high place in every religion.

What does a ritual do? It :

- Gives a structure.
- Binds people together.
- Creates a holy atmosphere.

- Transforms *Samskaras* (past impressions), character, consciousness (William James's discovery -Feeling follows action, and action produces feeling).
- Helps one to cross time, space i.e., and become eternal.

Puja-Ritual helps a devotee in several ways:

- They help in attaining focus and concentration.
- A restless mind, usually, is seen flitting from one thought to another. But in a ritual the restlessness becomes centred around one idea, or one aspect of God, thus gradually paving the way to meditation.
- A steady practice of ritual gradually helps the devotee develop a strong feeling of devotion towards the deity, finally culminating in total surrender to Him.
- It also fosters a strong relationship with God and brings him closer to Him.
- A ritual gradually strengthens the will and transforms the life of a devotee. He/she slowly becomes free from distractions and worldly dependencies.
- A ritual gradually purifies the heart so that the Divine may manifest there in all Its glory.
- One of the main functions of a Puja-ritual is ego-reduction. It is the ego that stands between God and the devotee. With the reduction of the ego God's grace flows uninterruptedly.
- The joy that a devotee derives from a worship-ritual draws him/her nearer to God.
- Finally it leads one to the direct vision of God called *Sakshatkara*.

There are many people who think that worship-ritual is the lowest form of spiritual practice, and it should be given up

after some time. But Sri Ramakrishna, the Supreme master of the spiritual realm debunks this idea. He says:

*“What is wrong with image worship? The Vedanta says that Brahman manifests itself where there is existence, light and love. Therefore nothing exists but Brahman.*

*“Without having realized God one cannot give up rituals altogether. How long should one practice Sandhya and other forms of ritualistic worship? As long as one does not shed tears of joy at the name of God and feel a thrill in one’s body. You will know that your ritualistic worship has come to an end when your eyes become filled with tears as you repeat ‘Om Rama’.*

One can give up such rituals as puja only after the realization of God. Sri Ramakrishna says :

*“Formal worship drops away after the vision of God. It was thus that my worship in the temple came to an end. I used to worship the deity in the Kali temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the door frame all Pure Spirit. Man, animals and other beings all Pure Spirit. Then like a man I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshipped. One day while worshipping Siva, I was about to offer a bel leaf on the head of the image when it was revealed to me that this Virat itself is Siva. After than my worship of Siva through an image came to end”.*

There are many saints who continue worshipping God even after realizing Him. They worship Him for their own enjoyment as well as for the benefit of others.

Every puja-ritual contains at least 4 main elements:

- a) Preparation
- b) Purification
- c) Dedication
- d) Unification

In the next editorial we will outline the actual puja-ritual.

(To be continued)

## Bayazid a Great Sufi Saint

Aga Syed Ibrahim Dara

### Part I

There are few Sufi sages whose life can equal in simplicity, romance and grandeur to that of Bayazid. He was a great sage of his time, and truly called 'Jewel of Sages.' Bayazid was the son of an uneducated man and had the misfortune of losing his father in an early childhood. His loving and affectionate mother brought him up and making great sacrifices sent him to school to study the Quran. Bayazid proved a brilliant student in the class and became a favourite of the master whose explanations of the Quran he heard with great interest. Once, a simple passage from the Quran greatly stirred his mind. The Quran said, "*Serve God and your parents.*" "*How can a man serve two masters?*" asked Bayazid. The teacher gave an explanation, but he remained unsatisfied. The teacher proceeded further, but Bayazid could not follow him; he remained absorbed in his own trend of thoughts. He then suddenly got up and taking leave of the teacher went to his mother to ask the meaning. The mother's explanation too did not satisfy him. He told his thoughts to his mother and added, "*I want to serve God and serve Him utterly and fully. You ask me to serve you. I find I cannot do the two things; either you ask me to be always with you and serve you, or give me up to God and let me be His servant forever.*" It almost broke the heart of the mother to part from her only son. But nobly she said, "*Bayazid, I give you over to God and withdraw all my claims on you. Go gladly and be God's servant forever.*" Putting himself in God's hand, Bayazid left the house that very moment

and walked out of the town almost forgetting that he had a home and a mother.

From that moment he was God's—his only object in life became to serve God and to find Him. He went from place to place for the knowledge of God. He visited many sages and did hard and difficult penance for thirty years. Though, by this time, he himself became a sage and was revered by people, Bayazid was not satisfied. He felt an intense agony at separation from God. He kept awake at nights and wept and prayed for the "hidden door" to open and for God to reveal Himself more fully. In this condition he at last came to Jafar Sa Ai Sadiq, the great-grandson of the Prophet. He was a great spiritual leader of his time and founder of all the great schools of philosophy in Arabia. People came to him from distant lands, and became his disciples. He was always haunted by the then Khalifa and his spies, who, fearing lest he might claim the Caliphate, made many plots to kill him. Had Jafar Sadiq been allowed to deliver his message fully, Islam would have been greatly enriched and benefited. His explanations of the Quran are the greatest authority with most Muslims. Bayazid found a right master and felt not only satisfied but felt so much love and devotion for him that he never wished to leave his presence and remained absorbed all the time. As Jafar Sadiq was a great scholar and writer he naturally had many books. One day he told Bayazid, *"Go and fetch for me that book from the almirah."* But to his surprise he found that Bayazid did not even know where the almirah of books was. He said, *"Bayazid, you have been here so long and yet you do not even know my almirah of books. It is a wonder!"*

Bayazid answered, *"My master, what is the good of seeing the almirah of books? I see your face and hear your discourses. It is sufficient for me."* Jafar Sadiq was greatly struck with the reply. He began to ponder over the condition of the disciple, who had been so absorbed in him all these days. Then he called Bayazid and said,

*"Bayazid, your Sadhana with me is complete. You leave me and now return to your mother. May the knowledge you have acquired lead you to the final Goal."* Thus giving him blessings, he sent him back to his mother.

## **Part II**

Every incident of Bayazid's life is wonderful. When he reached his mother's house, he stood at the door and heard what his mother was speaking. To his surprise he heard her loudly and earnestly praying to God with a voice choked with sobs and tears,

*"O Lord, always shower Thy blessings over my son. Let the teachers and sages be pleased with him and let his life and service please Thee forever."* When Bayazid heard this prayer, tears fell from his eyes. He went in and said, *"Mother, your son is here."* His mother embraced him and said, *"My child, after a long span of thirty years you have remembered your mother! At your separation I have cried and cried, and become blind."* Bayazid answered, *"Mother, I have acquired the difficult knowledge. When leaving you, I was given two alternatives by the Quran. That which was more important of the two I then placed in the background, and followed the other. At last I have discovered the secret. I ought to have served my mother first. For I find that what I obtained through long penance I could very easily and quickly get by serving you. From now on, I shall serve my mother."*

This was a great spiritual discovery of Bayazid. He was one of the very first men in Islam to discover the consciousness of the Divine Mother. He now changed his entire course of *Sadhana* and began serving his mother or rather serving the Divine Mother through her. With astonishing devotion he did it. One day when his mother woke up at night and asked him for some water to drink he found the vessel was empty and there was no drinking water in the house. He thereupon took a heavy brass water vessel and went to the adjacent river. Meanwhile his mother fell asleep again. When Bayazid returned, he stood in the courtyard with the water pot on his head all the night and did not put it down lest the sound would wake his mother. This and many similar incidents prove that in serving his mother Bayazid was consciously doing a *Sadhana* and felt the realization of the Divine Mother. It is also a spiritual fact that what is gained after great difficulty and hard penance by means of personal effort, can be very easily got by the Mother's Grace. This too is well known in India to need any explanation. This principle was adopted by some other Muslim sages also. The Prophet himself gave a clear hint to that effect in the famous saying, "*Praise lies at the feet of the Mother.*" It is clear that Bayazid's *Sadhana* was taking a new turn, and its beginning was made when he came in contact with Jafar Sadiq. The very fact of his not caring for any other thing except being devoted to the Guru shows that his was a *Sadhana* of love and devotion. It was for this reason, perhaps, that his master sent him to his mother. This is indeed a very interesting part of Bayazid's life.

### Part III

Bayazid after this period went for a pilgrimage to Mecca. This too he did with great faith and devotion. He pondered that he was going to the 'House of God' and trod every step of the way with great reverence. He performed penance all along and took twelve years to reach there. While he was returning people asked why he did not visit Medina, the place where there is the grave of the Prophet. Bayazid replied, "*One cannot serve two masters at a time. I will do special penance for it and come again.*" After this he spent twelve years more in purifying the heart through penances. Then for full one year he 'carefully watched his heart,' and found in it to his great dismay, 'the ego of penance.' So for the next five years he tried to eradicate it with great care and, then, became free and humble like a child.

At his prayers Bayazid always asked for a complete union with God, and perfect freedom from all traces of ego. "O Lord," says he, "*how long will remain this gulf of separation? Take away my ego from me, then only will my personality merge into Thee. O Lord, as long I am with Thee and in Thee, I am in a safe and exalted position. But when I am in my body, in the ego, I become the lowest of the low.*"

Bayazid's character is revealed in the following incidents. He was quite original in everything. One day Bayazid met a young man on his way home from the mosque and gave him some advice. The youth got angry and hit him with his musical instrument, which broke into pieces. Bayazid too got a deep wound in his head. But on reaching home he sent the price of the instrument and a big pot of sweets to the man and insisted on his taking them. Since then the youth became his great friend.

One day a man came to Bayazid and said, *"I have fasted every day for thirty years and spent greater part of every night in prayers, yet I have not even got a glimpse of God, while you bathe in His sunshine."*

Bayazid said, *"Do as I tell you and you will surely find Him. First of all throw away all your riches and then sit on the roadside with a pot of sweets. Then ask all the boys to beat you with shoes, and who insults and hurts you most, to him give the largest share of sweets. Do this in every quarter of the town, staying most in the place where you are treated worst."* The man did not agree to follow this advice and went away.

There are many such stories about Bayazid.

#### **Part IV**

The sayings of Bayazid are very famous. His discourses are profound and inspiring. The following is a discourse about his *Sadhana*. We must here remember that during his time Mohammedan belief was strictly against the Sufi ideas that man can be united with God.

Bayazid says, *"I spent sixteen years on the threshold of the door and could not enter. Then one day I said to God, 'O God, Thou art mine. When Thou art mine I have got everything'. That very moment, through His grace, all my internal struggle was over. Then I got new life and direct experiences. One who follows his command gets all he wants as a return. But I have not sought for any other thing except Him in return. First I thought that I loved God. But when my inner sight opened I found that it was God Who first loved me and drew me to Himself; that made me love Him."*

*"With great devotion I turned my eyes towards God. He took me away from worldly things to a very high place. He made me luminous*

*with his light. He revealed to me the deepest secrets and showed me His greatness and power. From Him I turned my eyes towards myself and I found that He was so high and I was so low. He was all purity, I was all impurity. I turned my eyes still further and I found that my light was His own light. Contemplation showed me that all worship and devotion is done by God and not by me. The former ego-sense that I do prayer or worship went away in an instant, and in bewilderment and wonder I spoke out :*

*'My Lord, what is this phenomenon that Thou showest me!' –*

*He answered, 'I am everything. There exists nothing without me. You only do work, but the power for work and the fruit of your work I am. Unless I help you, you cannot even worship me.'*

*After this God asked me to see only His form everywhere and do only His work. He removed the ego in me and made me alive with His all-blissful Existence. Thus He took me from falsehood into Truth, from darkness into Light. I made my house in Him and enjoyed Eternal Bliss. I silenced my tongue, I closed my ears; all the traffic of the senses I stopped. Then the Divine Grace descended upon me. My heart shone forth with the New Light. I got the Divine Knowledge.*

*He said to me, 'Bayazid see where there is nothing there is everything.' I answered, 'My Lord, see that I do not become egoistic. I have got a new life and I am anxious to keep it. It is better that I lose myself rather than live without Thee.'*

*God said, 'Bayazid, keep on to your contemplation, in the end you will be successful.'*

*I said, 'God, I have full faith that if Thou takest me in Thy service, then only I can do contemplation. By myself I am unable to do anything.'*

*Then God said, 'Bayazid, ask of Me now what you want.'*

I said, 'O Lord, I love Thee, and I love nothing else. Thou art the greatest of the great. Thou art the most gracious. I shall get peace in Thee and through Thee only. Therefore, do not separate me from Thyself even for a second and do not bring before me anything but Thyself.'

He answered, 'Let it be so.'

After that He remained silent for a long time and then said again, 'The Truth you saw and heard, you have spoken now.'

I replied, 'What I have experienced I have experienced because of Thee. What I saw I saw through Thy Grace. What I heard I heard through Thee. First Thou madest me hear and now it is Thou that praisest it.'

"Again He severely tested me, but I came out successful from the test brighter than before. The flame of my devotion illumined my heart, and I saw there was no other means but prayer to reach God. I saw that silence was the only lamp to dispel the darkness. By these means I became totally free from human limitations, external and internal. Then the inner sight opened and all the darkness disappeared. My tongue was transformed and it could utter nothing but of His Unity, Grace and Love. My eyes saw only His indescribable Beauty. I live in Him and I am never to die."

## **Part V**

Bayazid was greatly revered by his disciples and the people of his time for his eloquent, inspiring and sincere discourses and the hard penance he had done all his life. They not only loved and honoured him but had faith and trust in him. One day, to the surprise of all his disciples, Bayazid stood up in ecstasy and said that he was God himself.

"Lo I myself am God Almighty. There is no God besides me; Worship me."

His disciples were wonder-struck, and afterwards asked him to explain it. Bayazid said, "*Next time I say it, kill me on the spot.*" He, however, said it again, and yet again, and each time with increasing conviction and force. One day a disciple aimed a dagger at him on one such occasion. But to the surprise of all, the dagger turned back in the hands of the disciple, who struck his own heart and died! Then Bayazid explained that he had merged in God. His outer being was only a mirror in which they saw their own faces. It reflected all that was thrown at it—good and bad alike. Hence the dagger too turned to the hitter.

His sayings on the subject of his union with God are many. He would say,

*"Within my vesture there is nought but God,  
Whether you seek Him on earth or in heavens."*

Or

*"How wonderful am I!  
Salutations unto Me  
How great is My Glory!"*

Bayazid realized many other great and complex spiritual Truths and left in Sufism many great things.

Bayazid successfully established in Sufism ideas for which so many sages had given up their lives or suffered innumerable troubles and persecutions. He was a great master and up to this day is revered by the Sufis.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, November 1933)

## The Hindu Tradition of Paradoxes

Umesh Gulati

**A**ncient sages in the Hindu tradition were concerned with the understanding of the Ultimate Reality, which they called Brahman. Brahman is both transcendent and immanent in every being and in everything as Atman or the Self; and Brahman and Atman are identical. The Taittiriya Upanishad describes it as truth, consciousness, and infinity. Mandukya Upanishad says this entire manifested universe is Brahman.

The Upanishads also describe the Ultimate Reality (the Atman) as silence, and to speak of the Ultimate Reality is to limit It, which by nature is Infinite. Let us illustrate it by an anecdote from the Upanishads. A disciple went to a teacher and asked him to teach him the highest Reality. The teacher kept quiet. The disciple repeated the question a second, and a third time, but the teacher kept quiet. Finally, the disciple in frustration said, *'sir, I have asked you to teach me about the Atman, but why have you refused to tell me?'* The teacher said, *'I have been answering your question all the time. The Atman is silence, quietness.'*

In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna also the Master talks about two young men whose father had sent them to a sage to learn of *Brahman*. After they returned, the father asked the elder son what he learned about Brahman. The young man, quoting the Vedas and the Upanishads, began talking about the nature of Brahman, according to these scriptures. After hearing what the elder son said, the father told him to go back and learn more about Brahman. Then the father asked the younger son to tell him what

he had learned about Brahman. But the young man kept silent. Thereupon the father said that he indeed had learned what Brahman is.

Sri Ramakrishna compares the experience of one who has understood Brahman with the honeybee and its behavior. It is humming all the time, hovering over from one flower to the other, and humming continuously. But as soon as it sits on the flower and begins to drink the honey, all the humming stops; then the honeybee begins to enjoy the honey. Therefore, in all mystical experiences, silence is very much recommended. In the Bhagavad-Gita (10. 38) Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that silence is one of his chief glories.

So, 'silence' is the most profound idea about Brahman and Atman in our spiritual literature. For, to express a thing like a table or chair, we bring it within the fold of our thought and speech and thereby limit the Reality. We may correctly distinguish a table from a chair, but we cannot express either of the two in *Itself*. Our senses and the mind cannot comprehend the *essence* of things. Besides, our language can understand and express things of the phenomenal world only, but the Self is beyond the world of name and form.

Sri Ramakrishna once told Pundit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar that all scriptures of the world had been defiled because the tongues of people touched them; Brahman alone has not been so defiled because no one has been able to say what Brahman is. He also gave the parable of a salt doll. He said that once a salt doll went into the ocean to measure its depth. But as soon as it entered the ocean it melted. Who was there to tell the depth of the ocean?

In other words, our language or speech cannot describe adequately the nature of the Ultimate Reality. At the most it can describe it with the understanding that language can only give us an approximation. Thus, as we move more and more into its subtler levels, we find our language finds it increasingly difficult to make logical statements, and therefore we take shelter in speaking in paradoxes. Logic, after all, is based on reasoning, which is a function of the mind. For instance, if we see two objects, one of which is a chair and the other a table, then recalling the properties of these two objects, we can say with certainty, which is which. In other words, one needs a thinking and active mind to be logical. At the deeper levels of experience, however, an active mind is an obstacle; what we need, instead, is a quiet or a still mind. Thus Truth is beyond speech and thought. The Taittiriya Upanishad put it very well: *'that Reality from which speech and thought recoil not being able to comprehend it.'*

Since the ancient sages often remained silent because they found it impossible to describe the nature of Brahman or Atman, they used paradoxes to describe that indescribable Self. For instance, the Isha Upanishad says in its verse four that *'the Self is unmoving, yet it is faster than the mind. Thus moving faster, It is beyond the reach of the senses. Ever steady, It outstrips all that runs. By its mere presence, the cosmic energy is enabled to sustain the activities of living beings.'* Paradoxical descriptions like these make us think deeply and meditate for a long time to get beyond categorizations and resolve the paradox.

Verse five of the same Upanishad amplifies the above idea further: *'It moves, and It moves not; It is far, and It is near; It is within*

*all and It is also outside all this.'* The Atman, this verse says, may be said to move when looked from the point of view of this visible, changeful universe. But viewed in its own true nature, it does not move. In modern science, too, energy is seen in its two aspects, potential and kinetic, bottled-up energy and released energy; observable motion is predicated of the latter.

Sri Ramakrishna often referred to these two aspects of Reality: one aspect is Brahman, the Absolute and Infinite, the immobile, and therefore, not seen. The other aspect is Shakti, the Divine Energy, the creative power of the Absolute, expressing as vibration or movement. He used the simile of a serpent. Brahman is the serpent coiled up, motionless; Shakti is the same serpent in motion, its energy released. Thus Brahman and Shakti, God and the universe, are not two separate realities, different from each other, but two aspects of one and the same Reality, one reality looked at from two different points of view. Thus it is attempting to explain this fact, the Upanishad resorts to the most paradoxical language.

Even at the level of the electrons and protons of the physical world, the laws of thought breakdown. For example, in trying to describe the nature of an electron or of a photon modern science also uses the paradoxical language. A photon, the smallest unit of light, behaves sometimes like a particle and sometimes like a wave. So, it a particle or a wave? It is therefore known as a '*wavicle*'! It is no wonder that they become mostly inapplicable at the level of mind and more so at the level of Atman.

It seems that this paradoxical way of describing the Ultimate Reality is common to all the religions of the East: Hinduism,

Buddhism, and Taoism. According to Erich Fromm, since Aristotle, the Western world has followed the logical principles of Aristotelian philosophy. Aristotle said: *It is impossible for the same thing at the same time to belong and not belong to the same thing and in the same respect.*

In opposition to this Aristotelian logic is what Fromm calls the *paradoxical logic*, which assumes that A and non-A do not exclude each other as predicates of X. Paradoxical logic has been predominant among the Chinese and Indian thinking. Lao-tse describes the general principles of paradoxical logic: *"Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical."* Chuang-tzu says: *"That which is one is one. That which is not one, is also one."* (*The Art of Loving*, pages 67-68)

The Indian philosophers made the same point through a mixture of positive and negative formulations: *it is and it is not*. The negative formulation is: *it is neither this nor that*. Or as the Bhagavad-Gita puts it, *"It is within and without all beings, ... it is far and it is also near."* (13.15) But from the Aristotelian logic these statements are mutually exclusive and nonsensical.

From the standpoint of paradoxical logic, according to Fromm, the emphasis is not on thought, but on the act. This attitude had several other consequences. First of all, it led to tolerance, which we find in Indian and Chinese religious development. Secondly, the paradoxical standpoint led to the emphasis on transforming man, rather than the development of dogma on the one hand, and science on the other. From the Indian, Chinese and mystical standpoints, the religious task of

man is not only to think right, but to act right, and to become one with the One in the act of concentrated meditation. (Ibid. 73)

No one, however, said so eloquently the paradoxical nature of Reality as did Sri Ramakrishna. When M., the chronicler of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* met the Master the first time, he asked him: “*Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?*”

M. was taken aback and said to himself: “*How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with form? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form? Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can a white liquid like milk be black?*”

M: “*Sir, I like to think of God as formless.*”

Master: “*Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction. (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 80)*

So according to Sri Ramakrishna, God is both formless and also has a form, and much more. This seems quite illogical. But the sages of the East following the ‘paradoxical logic’, in which, as we said before, 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 a parable of an elephant and blind men. (Interestingly enough, Fromm, too uses the same parable, vide, page, 73) One of them touching the elephant’s leg said that the elephant was like a pillar. The other 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.

In a similar vein Sri Ramakrishna used to stress how one has to use contradictions to explain the nature of the Ultimate Reality by a parable of a chameleon that someone saw at a tree nearby and reported that he saw a red animal. Another person who heard this said that he too saw the chameleon, but it was not red, it was green instead. The third person, dismissing the description of the first two persons, said that the animal was blue. Thus they began to quarrel. Then one of them suggested that they all should go to that tree and find out from the man who usually sat under the tree to get the truth of the matter.

So they all went to the place where they saw the chameleon and asked the man sitting under the tree about the real color of that animal. The man heard all what the people were saying about the color of the animal, and said that they all of them were right! He said that the animal had the color sometimes red, sometimes green, and sometimes blue; and sometimes didn't have any color at all! That in fact, is the reality of God which is by its very nature infinite. That is why our sages, and in fact the mystics of all religions, often used paradoxical language of, 'not this - not this' or *neti - neti* in Sanskrit, to explain the nature of the ultimate Reality.

Since Reality can be perceived in contradictions only, any attempt to express it in words will be to limit it; for it is beyond speech, thought, and ideation, admitting that a finite mind cannot capture the infinite. We have already mentioned Sri

Ramakrishna's analogy of a salt doll that went to the ocean to measure its depth, but failed to do so because it became one with the water as soon as it got into the ocean. In fact, like the salt doll, Sri Ramakrishna himself would go into Samadhi, the state of super consciousness, and lose all outer consciousness whenever he tried to tell the nature of Brahman to his devotees. That is why we find in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* innumerable parables and paradoxical statements that tend to convey to the readers the real nature of the Ultimate Reality.

Apart from what we have said above, there is one other paradoxical statement in our scriptures; it is about time. According to monotheistic religions, 'God' created this universe some five or six thousand years ago and would destroy it sometime in the future. Vedanta regards this world as both eternal and changeless, and at the same time, it also regards it subject to change. As Sri Ramakrishna said, "*The Primordial Power is ever at play. (This idea introduces the elements of spontaneity and freedom in the creation.) She is creating, preserving, and destroying, as it were. This Power is called Kali. Kali is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kali. ... When we think of It as inactive, ... then we call It Brahman. But when it engages in these activities [of creation, preservation, and destruction], then we call It Kali or Shakti.*" (The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pgs-35.) Thus Brahman and Shakti are identical (Ibid. 134.)

Aldous Huxley, in his book *The Perennial Philosophy*, points out the paradoxical nature of 'time' in Hinduism and Buddhism, and like Erich Fromm, makes these religions very tolerant. He quotes various verses from chapter 11 of the Bhagavad-Gita :

*"O Supreme Spirit,"* says Arjuna, addressing Krishna whom he now knows to be the incarnation of Godhead, *"I long to see your Universal form"*. (B.G: 11.3). Krishna answers, *"you shall behold the whole universe, with all things animate and inanimate, within this body of mine."* (B.G:11.5). Arjuna's reaction to the revelation is one of amazement and fear.

*After seeing various 'gods' within Sri Krishna's body, Arjuna says (11.32): "Tell me who you are." The answer is clear and unequivocal, says Huxley: "I am come as Time, the waster of the people, Ready for the hour that ripens to their ruin." (Perennial Philosophy, pg. 191)*

Vedanta asserts that our *real essence* is Brahman, which is the same as Atman (or the Self). As we said before that according to the Upanishads, Brahman is of the nature of Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss Absolute. Atman, the Bhagavad-Gita says, is that which no weapon can cut or fire burn, no water can wet or wind can dry (2.23). In other words, the Self is deathless – beyond time – It is eternal, pure and perfect. Says Swamiji: *'It [Atman] always existed; there was never a time when it did not exist, because if the soul [Self] did not exist, where was time? Time is in the soul; it is when the soul reflects its power on the mind and the mind thinks that time comes.'* (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda; Advaita Ashrama, 1991, Vol.2, pg. 217)

Once someone asked Sri Ramakrishna: *"Sir, what is Knowledge?"* His reply was: *"It is to know that God is the only Reality and that all else is unreal. That which is Real is also called Brahman. It has another name: Kala, Time. ...There is a saying, 'O brother, how many things come into being in Time and disappear in Time!' That which sports with Kala is called Kali. She is the Primal Energy. Kala*

*and Kali, Brahman and Shakti, are indivisible.”* (Swami Nikhilananda (tr.), *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by M pg. 585.) Kali, of course, is the presiding deity of this phenomenal world, which Sri Ramakrishna called as the Divine Mother, popularly called Personal God in every religion.

In the Bhagavad-Gita (11:32) Addressing Arjuna, Sri Krishna says: *“I am the mighty world-destroying Time, here made manifest for the purpose of doing so. Even without you [Arjuna], none of the warriors arrayed in the hostile armies shall live”*. One may ask isn't there some contradiction between what Sri Ramakrishna calls 'Time' with regard to Brahman as 'Existence Absolute' and what Sri Krishna says about the world-destroying time in this verse of the Gita? We don't think so. For, in this latter case it is the *relative* existence of the phenomenal world. Brahman is Absolute, and is beyond time space and causation. *'All attempts of language, calling Him father, or brother, or our dearest friends, are attempts to objectify God, which cannot be done. He is the Eternal Subject of everything.'* (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Op. Cit. Vol.2, pg. 134*) So, Brahman is Impersonal God, while Sri Krishna is Personal God or the God of this relative world. Time, too, is both absolute and eternal; and it is also relative.

In other words, Brahman alone is Real while this world of names and forms is unreal, apparent. So, on one hand every being is subject to change and death, but on the other hand, everyone is beyond death, immortal! This is because; one's real nature is the Atman, not this body-mind complex. *The existence of the eternal now,'* says Aldous Huxley, *'is sometimes denied on the ground that a temporal [transient] order cannot coexist with another order which is*

*non-temporal; ... This objection, it is obvious, would be valid if the non-temporal order were of a mechanical substance, or if the changeless substance were possessed of spatial and material qualities.*' (Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers), 1945, pgs. 186-87.) For Brahman, as said before, is beyond space, time and causation.

In other words, Brahman (*Kala*, Time) or Atman, as mentioned above, is not like any other material substance, which could be cut or modified. The verse 2:24 of the Bhagavad-Gita further reinforces the assertion made in the previous verse quoted earlier, and categorically asserts that the Self (Atman) is eternal. Says Huxley: '*... the God who comes so terribly as Time also exists timelessly as the Godhead, as Brahman, whose essence is Sat, Chit, Ananda, Being, Awareness, Bliss; ...*' (Ibid. 191)

That is why Aldous Huxley calls this view of Reality as perennial philosophy. Perennial means eternal. Hinduism was not founded by any prophet like Jesus or Mohammed, or Buddha; all these major religions are historical. Mind you, neither Sri Rama nor Sri Krishna started the Hindu religion, though they both represented the pure spirit of Hinduism. Besides, the traditional name of Hinduism is *Sanatana Dharma* or eternal religion; the name Hinduism has become popular by an accident of history. As has been said above, the Hindu sages have proclaimed that the purpose of our life on earth is to realize this timeless Reality, our Atman or the Self.

Huxley has rightly pointed out that people "*whose philosophy does not compel them to take time with an excessive seriousness, the ultimate good is to be sought neither in the revolutionary's progressive*

*social apocalypse, nor in the reactionary's revived and perpetuated past, but in an eternal divine now ... as a fact of immediate experience (emphasis is ours)."* *Op. cit.* Pg. 194.

Sri Ramakrishna seldom showed much patience about people having discussions about God as it was a waste of time and is futile. He would say that if you have come to the mango garden, then enjoy the mangoes and don't waste time in inquiring about its owner and the number mango trees in the garden. He often used to tell M., the chronicler of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and his very beloved disciple not to ever reason. In fact, he would go so far as to extract a promise from him never to reason. (The Master was once more re-emphasizing the assertion that he made when M. met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. At that time Sri Ramakrishna asked M. if he believed in God with form or God without form. As we pointed out above, the Master said that God with form is equally true as God without form.)

At any rate, we don't think that Huxley is saying that people with eternity-philosophy devalue the life of action; rather they don't make it an end in itself. For, their primary emphasis is on the realization of God and experiencing the joy that follows by such realization. Let us illustrate this by a conversation that took place between Sri Ramakrishna and a devotee in Kolkata on June 15, 1884. The devotee had remarked that the English always exhorted people to remain active, and asked Sri Ramakrishna: *"Isn't action the aim of life then? "*

To this question Sri Ramakrishna's answer always was that *'the primary aim of life is to realize God and the joy that is associated with it; work is only the means not the end in itself. Besides, all work*

*must be done with detachment, so that 'after realizing God one feels that He alone is the Doer and we are but His instruments.'* (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Op Cit, pg. 453) In short, when work is done with detachment, it becomes 'no work'; then it becomes a source of immense joy.

To conclude: The life of Sri Ramakrishna itself was paradoxical. He was married to the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. And yet he was a monk par excellence, and the Holy Mother too was a perfect nun. Once Mother asked him how he looked upon her. He replied: "... Really and truly I always regard you as the embodiment of the blissful Mother of the Universe." Regarding one's wife as one's mother? What a paradox! Truly the Holy Mother was not just a woman like other women; she was indeed divinity incarnate.

"Be satisfied with the bare necessities. Why should you hanker after transient things? The Abiding is but one, which is Brahman. Anything other than that is a jack-O'-lantern. Thus should you discriminate, make the infatuated mind understand by repeated suggestions.

"Continue doing so despite failures; you will see you are gaining in strength and the enemy losing ground day by day."

Swami Adbhutananda

## Knowledge and Devotion

Swami Gambhirananda

Swami Vivekananda once declared at Almora that outwardly Sri Ramakrishna was all Devotion (*Bhakti*), but inwardly he was full of Knowledge (*Jnana*), whereas he himself had Knowledge outwardly, but was Devotion inside; and that was why he was at times mild and tender like women. I do not know what Swamiji meant by this contrast, but it is clear that he had no difficulty in juxtaposing Knowledge and Devotion in the same person. This we have seen in the life of Mahapurush Maharaj, Swami Shivananda. In a letter to Romain Rolland, published in the *Prabuddha Bharata*, he said that he had Nirvikalpa Samadhi thrice during the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna. But we found him in his old age full of devotion towards Sri Ramakrishna and tenderness towards monks and devotees.

The same was the case with Sankaracharya. He was a devotee and a man of Knowledge tied into one. He is known best for his non-dualistic philosophy, his conquest of the enemies of the *Sanatana Dharma*, and his sharp logic forged at the anvil of non-dualism. But people overlook that he visited the Hindu shrines all over India, established temples and monasteries, and installed images of gods and goddesses in them. He also wrote a number of hymns and songs in honour of various gods and goddesses. Sankaracharya flourished between 780 and 812 AD.

Ramanujacharya became famous about two centuries later. For all those intervening two-hundred years non-dualism ruled over entire India. But as days rolled on, the emphasis on *sarvam*

*khalu idam Brahma*, '(All this is Brahman, indeed)', as declared in the Chandogya Upanishad tended to be eclipsed by the "*neti-neti*", '(Not this, not this)', of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The masses of India found to their dismay that their Personal God was being dethroned and devotion eroded. The non-dualists tended more and more towards *maya-vada* (which gives the *raison d'être* for the existence of the phenomenal world, though in reality it is non-entity). Such a philosophy could not satisfy the ordinary mind. Hence Ramanuja and a host of dualistic philosophers who followed gained in power more and more. All the same, the non-dualists followed their own path of negativism, and the *Panchadasi* declared clearly that *Maya* the Cow, had two calves, one of which was God and the other the individual soul. Such a trend offended the pundits, and they declared: '*The theory of maya is bad as a scripture, and it is Buddhism in disguise.*'

Sankaracharya, although he spoke of *Maya*, was not a *mayavadin*; he was a *Brahmavadin* who posited Brahman against the absolute nihilism of the Buddhists. *Maya*, of course, he accepted; but to him *Maya* was a *Shakti*, power of Brahman; which deserved honour. It was not simply to be brushed away as a convenient theory for the justification of the phenomenal world. His famous couplet in the *Vishnu-shatpadi* runs thus: '*O Lord, even when duality vanishes I am Yours, and not You mine. For the waves belong to the sea, and never the sea to the waves.*'

The Upanishads also support the view that *Bhakti* is necessary for *Jnana*. Svetasvatara Upanishad says: '*These things get revealed when spoken to a great-souled one who has supreme devotion for God, and as high a devotion for the guru as for God.*'

The Upanishad also speaks of *Maya* as *devatma-shakti*, '(God's own power)'. Since power and the person possessing the power are identical, *Maya* which is a power of God is not to be spurned but honoured as God Himself. This was the attitude of Sri Ramakrishna as well. In his company even a staunch non-dualist like Totapuri turned into a devotee of Mother Kali and chanted hymns in Her presence at Dakshineswar.

Though Sri Ramakrishna was a little indulgent towards suitable aspirants of monism and often tolerated their boastful declaration that they did not believe in a Personal God, still in the long run he never liked Knowledge to be alienated from Devotion. This becomes clear from the way he trained Narendranath, who at first revolted against monism, saying that it was little different from atheism. But gradually he fell so much in love with it that he avoided dualistic songs and hymns, and sang and chanted non-dualistic ones. Sri Ramakrishna corrected him by saying that Knowledge was dry and could not stir up a man as a whole which Devotion could do. This view was supported by Madhusudana Saraswati who, at the beginning of his annotation on the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gita, wrote the couplet:

*'If the Yogis, with their minds which have been brought under control through the practice of meditation, see some such transcendental Light that is without qualities and action, let them see! But for filling our eyes with astonishment, let there be forever that indescribable Blue (Light) alone which runs about hither and thither on the sands of the Kalindi.'*

The Bhagavata (1.7.10) also finds difficulty in the co-existence of Devotion and Knowledge; rather it declares that devotion

comes automatically to the man of the highest enlightenment. Hari is possessed of such excellent qualities that" *'Even sages who delight in their Self and are free from all bondages entertain selfless love for Him!'*

The Bhagavad Gita (18.55) admits interaction of Devotion and Knowledge inasmuch as any one of these two can lead to the other, and then both continue side by side. It says: *'Through devotion he knows Me in reality, as to what and who I am. Then, having known Me in truth, he enters (into Me) immediately after that (Knowledge).'* This verse shows that Devotion leads to Knowledge. Sri Ramakrishna also said that when one becomes devoted to the Mother of the Universe, She opens the door for him of Knowledge as well. Patanjali, in his aphorism (1.23), stipulates *'through special devotion to God'* makes it clear that samadhi can be attained not only through the Eight-fold Yoga but also through devotion to God as well.

There is another verse in the Gita which says that Knowledge leads to Devotion:

*He who, undeluded, knows Me thus as the Supreme Self' — he knows all, O Bharata, and he worships Me with all his heart. (Bhagavad Gita 15:19)*

The Gita goes even to the extent of declaring a man of knowledge as the highest devotee.

Thus we see that Sri Ramakrishna was quiet correct in his emphasis on devotion when he said that the Bhakti as taught by Narada is the best for the present age.

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# Techniques of Prayer

Swami Pavitrananda

## Part I

**C**an we be sure that our prayers are answered? This doubt arises in almost every mind at one time or another. Once a man approached Ramakrishna with this very question and received the following reply: "*Yes, I will say a hundred times that prayer is answered.*" The same affirmation is invariably and unhesitatingly given by all who have had direct experience of God. They tell us that whatever we ask for we can easily get. So let us see what the different kinds and levels of prayer are and what conditions must be fulfilled in order that we may realize in our own lives the experience of the saints; that God accepts our prayer.

First of all, what is prayer and how is it answered? Philosophically speaking, we may say that by intense thinking we reach the depth of our personality, we touch the indwelling Reality which is one with the all-pervading Existence. Our mind becomes identified with the cosmic mind, which is the source of power behind everything in the universe, and which gives us the answer we seek.

Devotionally speaking, we objectify the same Reality and say that we pray to God and He answers our prayer. According to our conception, God is all-powerful and therefore able to answer any prayer. We establish a relationship with Him as our father or mother, for instance. Even on the human plane, every parent loves his children and satisfies their need. Similarly, whatever we ask of God, we will surely receive. He will withhold nothing from us.

## Part II

We can divide all prayers into three types.

- (i) The first is petitional prayer, wherein we ask God for "this" or "that."
- (ii) Secondly, there is laudatory prayer. We praise God who has created the sun, the moon, the pleasant autumn (although we don't like to think about the fact that he has given us the dreary winter too!).
- (iii) The third and highest kind of prayer is the practice of the presence of God.

Many people pray vocally. Sometimes they pray loudly, as if God is more likely to hear them. Next door to an ashrama in Calcutta where I stayed at one time, there lived a man who used to pray so loudly to the Divine Mother that he would disturb everyone in the neighbourhood at night! But it is not what we say audibly that matters, but what we feel in our hearts. Usually, we begin with verbal prayer; later we feel that no words are necessary. According to a Christian mystic of the eighteenth century, the best prayer is that of inward silence; wherein the soul, abstracted from all outward things, in holy stillness, humble reverence, and lively faith, waits patiently to feel the Divine presence, and to receive the precious influence of the Holy Spirit. And when you retire for this purpose, which should be your frequent practice:

- you should consider yourselves as being placed in the Divine presence,
- looking with a single eye to Him,
- resigning yourselves entirely into His hands,
- to receive from Him whatsoever He may be pleased to dispense to you;

- calmly endeavouring at the same time to fix your mind in peace and silence;
- quitting all your own reasonings and
- not willingly thinking on anything on however good and profitable it may appear to be.
- Should any vain thoughts present themselves, you should gently turn from them; and
- thus faithfully and patiently wait to feel the Divine presence.

We find that all religions prescribe prayer, but different methods of praying may be emphasized. In the Vedic literature, for instance, there are many prayers to various deities or aspects of the one Godhead. In the Upanishads, the philosophical portion of the Vedas, there is a greater stress on meditation which, technically speaking, is an unbroken flow of thought toward the ultimate Reality. This state of unfoldment, the essence of all spiritual life, is expressed in the following verse paraphrased from the Upanishads:

*Through the mind we know Him who is the Ruler of the body and mind, and who is seated within the heart. When, with tranquil mind, one sees Him, one perceives the one all-pervading Reality, which is blissful and immortal.*

There is no mention of prayer in this passage. The Upanishad tells us that when we know God, who is within us, we find that He pervades the whole universe as bliss. This does not mean knowledge in the ordinary sense, for whatever we know intellectually is within the domain of ignorance. The knowledge of the ultimate Reality is beyond the human mind and intellect. What then is meant by the line, "*Through the mind we know Him . . .*"? Here the Upanishad speaks of the pure mind, which is devoted to spiritual practice. When we attain knowledge of the One who pervades the universe and who is within us, we feel immediately that we are immortal, beyond life and

death. This idea is emphasized in the Upanishads, although here and there are passages which deal with prayer.

Buddha also spoke of meditation rather than of petitional prayer. But is there, basically, any difference between prayer and meditation? We may say that meditation is concentration upon the indwelling Reality, "*whose seat is in the heart,*" as the Upanishad says. And in the highest prayer we objectify the same immanent and transcendent Reality and ask that we may know Him and do His will. At that stage of spiritual growth we do not pray any more for material or worldly advantages. To know that He exists is enough. Prayer and meditation, therefore, are merely approaches to the one Reality from different standpoints. On the highest level they are the same.

The question arises, how many of us are able to meditate according to the ideal that Buddha and the Upanishads set before us? The majority of persons require a long process of training before they are fit to meditate. Of course, the minds of those who have known the Truth are normally attuned to the highest. For instance, when Ramakrishna meditated, his mind was in a superconscious state in which he was identified with the Absolute. It could be observed that he was oblivious to the external world. But when he returned to normal consciousness, he prayed to the Divine Mother. A perfectly controlled mind like Ramakrishna's could dwell both on the dualistic and on the non-dualistic level. Ordinarily, an individual passes through many different stages before meditation becomes possible.

### Part III

The four steps required to realize the highest knowledge are described thus :

- (iv) In the first stage one has to perform rituals, such as attending religious services. This is formal religion.
- (v) The next step consists in prayer for devotion and the singing of hymns.
- (vi) The third stage is meditation, the practice of concentration on a particular thought.
- (vii) And the fourth stage is simply awareness of the divine presence. In that state we need not meditate; in fact it is impossible to meditate, for the very goal we were striving for has been attained.

In order to reach this goal, certain conditions have to be fulfilled. It is the same with other pursuits of life like – scientific experiments, for instance. The right methods and conditions make all the difference. Similarly, when the saints tell us from their own experience that prayer is easily answered, they take for granted that certain requirements have already been met.

First, there must be a genuine need for prayer. Why does not the ordinary person pray or believe in prayer? Because he lives on his ego. As long as we think that we can do everything ourselves, we do not need the help of prayer. And, if we do not feel the need, we cannot expect that prayer will, be answered. The urge to pray must come from the depth of the heart.

Psychologically speaking, the two chief problems which afflict man are the sense of insecurity and the sense of guilt. If we really feel that everything in life leaves us unsure of any permanent result, we want to find something which gives us security. The same holds true regarding the sense of guilt. When we find that we cannot do

right and we feel troubled and helpless, we find ourselves seeking something which will give us strength. Then there arises a real need for prayer.

When that urgency is felt, we become earnest. When we know that there is a power which we can reach, our efforts become sincere. For many, God is a mere word, but a true devotee feels a real pang of separation as long as he has not realized Him. When this yearning comes, we will progress spiritually. And when we are so stricken with anguish that our life becomes almost unbearable, we are sure to realize the highest. The same is also true in achieving all material results; when we long for something sincerely, we are bound to get it. When the mind has become persistent, when it has released a great deal of energy, we are certain to find results. At that time no deliberate effort is needed. The effort was necessary in the beginning when an intense feeling of need had to be created; the end follows logically.

Another condition is regularity of prayer. We must pray every day and at particular hours. The question may arise, "*God is everywhere, and he is unlimited by time. Why can't we pray wherever we are and at whatever time we wish?*" But the point is that if we pray today after breakfast, tomorrow before going to bed, and on the third day during the leisure period at the office where we work, our prayer becomes superficial. We cannot make any progress that way. The mind has to be disciplined, and so the habit of prayer must be cultivated. Some people say that they cannot pray. But the only answer for them is just to try to pray regardless; there is no other way.

Moreover, we must carry the effort of our prayer consciously and deliberately throughout the whole day. We cannot afford to be saintly for a half hour in the morning and live the rest of the day in

a way that contradicts our prayer. We should make the attempt to live up to the ideal of our spiritual life at all times; otherwise our prayer is mere show.

Also, we must believe in prayer. Of course, faith does not come all at once. But if we pray regularly, even with a certain amount of disbelief, faith will grow gradually. It is a matter of spiritual unfoldment, and fortunate are those who come in contact with persons in whom faith is very natural. If we are in the presence of a saint, of one who has realized the truth embodied in the scriptures doubt leaves us. With holy association, we may try to develop our own spiritual lives, and belief will come.

Faith increases through practice and the more we believe, the more earnest we will be in our spiritual disciplines. As we begin to get results, we will want to achieve more and more. In the early hours of the morning we see a streak of red light in the east, which indicates that the sun is about to rise. Similarly, if we get a little glimpse of spiritual progress, we gain the faith that the ultimate Reality really exists and are encouraged to make greater efforts to experience it. And if we continue earnestly and sincerely, we can realize the final goal, and all our desires will be fulfilled.

We have been considering the techniques of prayer, the processes by which we can progress toward the knowledge of God. But we do not always advance by means of techniques. When there is a flood tide, the whole surrounding land is covered with water. Then there is no need to dig a well. Similarly, when intense spiritual yearning and genuine devotion arise, techniques become superfluous. Our whole being is swept toward the realization of God, and it comes.

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## On Maya, Yoga, and Service

Swami Saradananda

*[Swami Saradananda, one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, was a man of profound spiritual realization and a great teacher. In 1899, the Swami spent eight days in Barisal, East Bengal, giving a series of lectures and informally discussing religious matters with hundreds of interested men and women. His teachings during this week's visit were recorded in Bengali by Surendra Nath Sen. Some of the highlights of Swami Saradananda's lectures and conversations during his stay in Barisal are given below.]*

### The Concept of Maya

The universe as perceived by us has no independent and absolute existence. It has an empirical reality only as long as it is perceived as such by our mind through the doors of the five senses. Suppose we had a sixth sense, the universe would appear differently. Hence the world appearance has no real existence of its own. It is neither unconditional nor unchangeable. Time, space, and causality are mere concepts of the mind, and through these categories of the mind we see this world appearance. The indivisible Brahman, on the other hand, is beyond the ignorant mind and as such there is neither time, nor space, nor causality in the Absolute. He, the unchangeable Reality, is one without a second. How can He, therefore be, the cause of the universe? This universe is a superimposition upon Brahman. It is a creation of our own mind. Whatever, therefore, is seen or sensed or perceived through the instrumentality of

our ignorant, unregenerate mind is said to be Maya. But as long as the mind remains unregenerate, it is not possible to go beyond Maya. This fact of world-appearance is illusory, is not realized until one goes beyond Maya by attaining Brahman. But again, the finite, impure mind cannot reach the pure, infinite Brahman. By the purified mind alone He becomes known, and the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman. When one is thus established in the knowledge of his true being, Maya bids him good-bye. Then he does not make the mistake of seeing the snake in the rope. The world-appearance vanishes for him. Only Brahman remains, shining in his own self-effulgent glory.

### The Balance of The Yogas

A full life cannot be one-sided. It needs proper balance. If man wants to achieve perfection, he must harmonize in his life the three paths of knowledge, action, and devotion. They are not antagonistic but complementary. The truth of this statement can be verified in the lives of the great spiritual teachers of the past. According to place, time, and circumstance, some may have shown a preponderance of knowledge. Some may have revealed intensity of love. Some may have exhibited wonderful enthusiasm and great passion for work. Seen superficially, these paths seem to be mutually exclusive. But if we probe deeply into the lives of the world teachers, and study their conduct with greater understanding, we will find a perfect blending of these three approaches to Reality. Behind the shining wisdom of such souls lay unity. The edifice of their spirituality was built on the rock of harmony. The goal of all these three paths is the same.

Each path is equally powerful. But none should be undertaken to the exclusion of the others. Knowledge must unite with devotion. And this unity must be expressed through action. Knowledge without love is dry. Love without service is pure sentimentalism.

### The Ideal and Application of Modern Vedanta

The present Vedanta movement has manifested itself in two currents of endeavour: (i) the harmony of all religions and all religious moods, and (ii) the service of man as God. In the past, the highest ideal was to remain absorbed in Samadhi. But the present ideal is to forego that bliss, forcibly drag down the mind from the transcendental plane of consciousness, and plunge into activities for the good of the many. In order to do this, one has to merge one's will into the divine will. Being established in the plane of consciousness which is beyond the realm of duality and non-duality, and at the same time living a life of self-dedication and service is considered to be the highest ideal of our age.

How is this ideal to be translated into practice? Through the purification of the instruments. There are different states of consciousness. From the study of psychology we know that every feeling has a similar counterpart in the body. As we develop our consciousness, simultaneously we will feel different reactions on the body. Both body and mind are to be purified. When mind, intellect, mind-stuff, and egoism have passed through the process of cleansing, there arises an unbroken recollectedness of God. The more one purifies these internal organs, the more one is able to detect and interpret correctly the

will of the universal mind. This knowledge has a transforming effect on the life and character of the individual. His unripe ego dies forever. Like a machine moved by the operator, he is like a tool in the hand of God. He becomes incapable of doing anything wrong. He does not take a false step nor do his feet slip from the path.

As long as there is a tinge of lust, as long as one is aware of the distinction between man and woman, it is not right to say, *"I am working under divine inspiration. I do everything as He makes me do."* Religious life has not begun until one has completely effaced the idea of sex and of all carnal desires. To carry this ideal into practice is difficult, no doubt, but it is not impossible. Saints and divine incarnations have demonstrated the truth of this principle in their own lives. They are our exemplars.

Religion is not in temples or in churches. It is not in holy places or in scriptures. Religion is essentially a matter of realization. Therefore one must not search for it in external things. The core and kernel of religion is in practice. It has to be practiced every day, in every act and in every phase of life. It is to be firmly established in our character, so that the divinity within may be manifested in all its beauty and grandeur.

Meditate regularly. Sri Ramakrishna used to say *"Don't forget to call on God. Meditate every day twice—in the morning as well as in the evening. This will quicken your spiritual progress, and lead you to the goal."*

(Reprinted from *Vedanta and the West*, Issue 107)

## An Eckhartian Dialogue

Philip L. Griggs

A number of mysteries and surprises surround the figure of Meister Eckhart, thirteenth-century monk and mystic. One of these is the fact that although so many of his teachings have come down to us, we know very little about his life. He seems to have lived between the years 1260 and 1328 A.D. But just what the forces were which went into the making of his singular character and how he became what some regard as the greatest teacher in Christianity since its Founder, we do not know. When he was about fifteen years old we see him entering a Dominican monastery to study for the priesthood, and we see that in 1300 he was appointed "Prior of Erfurt, Vicar of Thuringia," and was a popular preaching monk, and author of tracts. His neatly reasoned and lofty sermons were noted more for their power and directness than for their scholastic niceties, and filled the churches with common working people whose interest in theology appears to be comparable to the modern worker's interest in politics. He gave these in the German language, instead of Latin, and is often called the first man to use this vernacular for metaphysics. Although we have no direct knowledge of his religious experiences at any time, it is significant that when teachers in the Vedantic tradition come to study the message of Eckhart they recognize in him a Christian who must have experienced *Niroikalpa samadhi*. There is certainly nothing in his life to contradict this, and much to suggest it. He was sent on many preaching missions, given honorary degrees, and was soon made Provincial (local head) of the Order in Saxony and later also for Bohemia. He must have been at this time a tremendous worker. But now the Church which made and honoured him began to disclaim him. His teachings struck some unfamiliar notes, and

detractors sought to connect him with certain "wild" mystical sects which were under inquisition; a list of his "errors" was drawn up by Church authorities. In 1327 Eckhart made a brilliant public defense in the Cologne church, in which he denied any heresy or unbecoming conduct, and offered to retract any errors proved. He failed to convince the Papal appointees, however, or perhaps he only fanned the flames of their suspicions. For a Papal bull was issued in 1329 condemning Eckhart as one deceived by the devil and deceiving others. But the good Meister never had to read his own final condemnation; death had intervened. We are told nothing of the circumstances of his death. The influence of his teachings is to be seen in mystics who followed him—Tauler, Suso, Ruysbroeck, and so on—but his own writings and recorded sermons lay nearly forgotten for five hundred years, until they were uncovered in the last century.

The real problem one faces, in gleaning from a field as rich as the works of Meister Eckhart, is how to discard. It is all wheat, so to speak; there are virtually no tares. But in making this selection I have had in mind three principal points of reference. And, inevitably, I have chosen what I liked best.

The first was to show that Meister Eckhart is no medieval antique, but very much of a man of our own time—in fact, it may even be fairly said that he was much ahead of his time. Perhaps only now, with the message of Vedanta spread worldwide, are we able properly to understand and appreciate Eckhart's particular facet of the perennial philosophy.

Secondly, this master has long been considered and reported as a *jnani*, one who emphasizes the path of reason. This may indeed have been his emphasis, but it should be quite evident from what follows that he was a well-rounded spiritual personality, equally at home in the paths of action and devotion

also, and well qualified thereby for his monastic position as spiritual director of hundreds of monks and nuns.

Finally, I have hoped to show how far Meister Eckhart transcended the limitations of his Christian tradition. Eckhart climbed about as far out on the limb of the Christian Church and its doctrine as a man could; but he was too simple and pious to cut clean through that limb by his own choice. He outgrew the dogma which nurtured him, but so gracefully that he was hardly conscious of having done so. Of course his excommunication is only one dismal landmark in the Christian Church's general tendency to discourage mysticism; but it was a fateful and perhaps fatal decision for the Church. It is interesting to speculate what might have happened if, instead of being condemned and set aside, Eckhart had been permitted to do for the whole of Christianity what Sankaracharya did for Hinduism.

At any rate, one familiar with the Vedantic tradition will find in this discourse many familiar phrases, and perspectives which he may never have expected to see in the West. See how Meister Eckhart urges the practice of "*neti-neti*"—"not this, not this." Hear him as he describes what Hindus clearly know as *samadhi*, and assures us that unitive knowledge of Godhead can be had here and now. How reminiscent of Swami Vivekananda are his stirring notes of nondualism, and the complete renunciation of ego! Note his understanding of the mother-principle in the Deity. His doctrine of the Word which is eternally being spoken in us is the heart of his cosmology, and reminds us of the Indian emphasis on the Divine Name. Again, Eckhart knows that real religion is far beyond mere *dharma* (righteous living)—his word is virtue—and assures us that it should be fun, not long-faced. Many such parallels the reader will see: his description of the unconventional behaviour of saints, his matter-of-fact attitude toward heaven and

hell, and how the perfect knower, 'even if there were' many Persons in the Godhead, 'would see them all as One.'

Here then is proof of the claim of Vedanta itself, that in the highest religious experience time, culture, and geography play no part; that all men who know God, who have become God, speak the same language, the language of the spirit.

All the teachings here have been drawn from recorded and translated material attributed to Eckhart; only the style of speech has been somewhat modernized, and they have been arranged in the form of a dialogue. The conversations are conceived as having taken place sometime between the years 1311 and 1320, between the Meister and one or another of his many monks.

Q. How can I find God?

A. No man ever "found" God; he gave himself away.

Q. Ah! Then let me put it another way. What prevents us from knowing God?

A. Three things. The first is time; the second is body; and the third, multiplicity. Remember, if you seek anything of yours, you will never find God, for you are not seeking God merely. You are seeking for something with God, making a candle of God, as it were, with which to find something, and then, having found it, throwing the candle away. Creatures have no real being, for their being consists in the presence of God. If God turned away for an instant they would all perish, and having all creatures without God is no more than having one fly without God. God must give me himself, which he can do only when I have renounced myself wholly; only then shall I know God.

Q. Is this knowledge like our present knowledge?

A. No. Do not foolishly imagine that your reason can grow to the knowledge of God; no natural light can bring it about that God shall shine divinely in you; it must be utterly extinguished

and go out of itself altogether, then God can shine with his light, bringing back with him everything left behind, and a thousandfold more, besides the new form containing it all. To know God God-fashion, your knowledge must change into downright un-knowing, to a forgetting of yourself and every creature.

Q. But, sir, if God is beyond knowledge, and therefore unknowable, and we can know nothing of the unuttered Godhead, what then shall we do?

A. You must lose your your-ness and dissolve in his his-ness. You see, God is said to be unknown because no creature knows him as he knows himself. Nothing we can say of God is really true. When I say "man," I have in my mind human nature. When I say "grey," I have in mind the greyness of grey. When I say "God," I have in my mind not any of his qualities. God is such that we apprehend him better by negation than affirmation. The more we can impute to him not-likeness, the nearer we get to understanding him. Thus God and I are not like, but one in knowing.

Q. One in knowing? Then just what is the relationship between God and the soul?

A. My child, God and the soul are so near together that there is really no distinction between them. Nothing but God finds its way into God, and once the soul is in God, she is God, borne into God on his eternal Word. Soul [Eckhart, like many other Christian mystics, often uses "soul" for what Vedantists would call mind, especially the higher mind.] is in the middle, between God and creature. If she prefers the lower powers of her five senses to her higher ones whence comes her knowledge of spiritual things, then she grows ignoble and base. The worldly pleasures of the soul God has no stomach for, and when she realizes this, she discards the joys in which God has no share. Therefore, for God and the

soul to be one, the soul has to lose her own life and nature. They are one as regards what is left. But for them to be one, one must lose its identity and the other must keep its identity; then they are the same.

(To be Continued)

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, Issue 115)

A devotee: "Is there any higher state than the attainment of peace?"

Latu Maharaj: "Look, is peace the end of sadhana? There are many states higher than peace. But if you want to experience those states, you need to attain peace first of all. Do you know what that peace is? One is then, as it were, satisfied with his life, and external trials and tribulations do not disturb the mind. The door to the spiritual path does not open unless the aspirant is filled with peace externally and internally. But once the door to the spiritual realm opens, discontentment again begins.

However, this is a mysterious kind of discontentment which I cannot explain to you. In this state the aspirant can neither sit idle nor can he progress quickly."

"Maharaj. I do not understand what you are talking about. Please explain."

Latu Maharaj: "Spiritual disciplines and austerity are necessary to understand this. You have practiced very little austerity: hence. I may explain it to you a thousand times, but it will still remain a mystery to you."

Swami Adbhutananda

## **Programme for September - October 2016**

Sunday discourses begin

at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - [www.vedantauk.com](http://www.vedantauk.com)

Sep 4	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 11	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 11	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 12	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 18	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 13	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 25	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 102	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 2	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 103	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 9	Durga Puja	
Oct 16	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 104	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 23	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 105	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 30	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 106	Swami Dayatmananda

## **Durga Puja**

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October**

**At Bourne End at 4:30 pm**

Bihari Babu: "Then should we give up family life and call on God only?"

Latu Maharaj: "Why should you give up your family? Doesn't one's family belong to God? Therefore, call on him who is the real head of the family. One will have to do one's duty in this world. How can you escape it? Wherever you go, the world will follow you. Does it exist outside us? No, everything is in our own minds. If your mind desires enjoyment, you will seek enjoyment even in the forest; and if you don't have that desire for sense objects, you will not want them even if you are surrounded by them. Whether you live in a household or in the forest, you must call on God; otherwise all is in vain.

"Be pure. Be pure. Be pure. You cannot comprehend God without purity. If you are not pure, you won't realize God, who is the embodiment of purity. In order to serve God, the true Master of all, one must purify one's mind."

Swami Adbhutananda

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*Editor:* Swami Dayatmananda

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"No life is ever lived in vain. Remember only one thing: Lead a God-centred life. Then the Lord will guide you as he likes. He knows our past, present, and future. The wisest course is to surrender to him completely. Whether you hold onto the Lord's hand or not does not matter, he is always holding onto yours. There is no doubt about that. He will never abandon you. He is all-merciful."

"Never forget the goal of monastic life. Don't wear the gerua cloth [the ochre-coloured cloth of a monk] for outward show. The gerua cloth may bring you name and fame, but that will not help you realize God. Go into solitude and practice your spiritual disciplines with all your heart.

Swami Adbhutananda

