

Vedanta

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M.'s Ramakrishna-Sadhana

R. Das

Krishna, Our Guide Eternal

Swami Ritajananda



Divine Wisdom

Sayings of the Direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

On Action

Swami Brahmananda

Pain follows pleasure and every action brings its own reaction. It is easy to do great deeds, the deeds that bring name and fame. But it is by his small, everyday actions that a man's character is known.

If you can perform every action as worship of the Lord, then only will you like to work and feel no attachment to the fruits of your actions. Be active, but keep the constant recollection of God.

Certainly it is easier to do a noble deed for the sake of name and fame. But by such deeds a man's real value cannot be measured. To know the real man, examine his daily actions; for it is his everyday actions which reveal his true character. A true karma-yogi will lose himself heart and soul in any undertaking, even though it is of a very menial kind. He is never motivated by the least desire for popular approval. Truth is the pillar to which you must always hold while performing any action. But of course there is the effect of Karma. if you do any wrong action, you must suffer from disquiet of mind and other consequences.

Swami Shivananda

Every man should do something good, that is, some selfless deed. All by nature work to support themselves and their families. By something good I mean activity done without any attachment. If you can help a poor man by giving him food, or educate a needy boy by providing his board and lodging according to your means, that will be sufficient. In cases that are beyond your means you can engage in such good deeds in cooperation with friends of yours. Many activities of this nature you will find close at hand. If you wish to do them, you can easily do so.

[To the question: "Can I continue to be pure and spiritual irrespective of my actions, good or bad?"]

Certainly not. Your good actions contribute to make you more and more spiritual, while the bad ones go to drag you down to *samsara* and prevent your freeing the soul from the bondage of birth and death.

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Editorial

Worship of the Divine Mother-13

The most important part of the puja ritual is mental worship, known as *Manasika Puja*. This is followed by external worship (*Bahya Puja*). In this the worshipper begins offering various items known as *Upacharas* to the chosen deity. The items could be five, ten, sixteen or thirty-two, though offering ten items (*Dasopachara*) is the usual practice.

On special holy days sixteen items including some special items like clothes, Vermillion, and ornaments are offered, and is often, followed by a special fire-ceremony called *Homa*.

The common items that are offered in the ten-itemed puja are water for washing, bathing etc., sandal paste, flowers, incense, light and finally food such as fruits and sweets. If a worshipper is unable to procure any of these items he may perform puja with flowers alone as substitute for all the other items.

The Symbolism of Puja

When we observe closely at the ritual puja it appears as though the worshipper is honouring God as one honours a beloved guest. But a spiritually developed worshipper attributes a higher spiritual meaning to every one of these acts and objects connected with the ritual and thereby remind himself of the fundamentals of spiritual life. In course of time a devotee realizes that worship is a ritual pregnant with deep meaning; as he advances in his sadhana so also will his understanding deepen. When we delve deep we are astonished with the revelations. In practice, worship is one of the most helpful ritual taking us nearer to God. Let us see what the symbolism of puja is.

Welcoming (*Avahana*) and immersion (*Visarjana*) of the image are parts of the ritual called worship (*Puja*). Welcoming the Deity is meant to make the worshipped conscious of the presence of the Deity both in his own heart as well as in the outside world. In the ten-itemed worship one offers

a beautiful flower smeared with sandal-paste to God as an act of welcome. Then one's pure mind is offered as the best seat for God to sit on.

The Immersion ceremony signifies that the worshipper is now able to see the Divine within one's heart and does not anymore need an external image. Hence in this final act the Deity is requested to return back to the worshipper's heart.

Among the articles offered in worship waters represent cleansing and purifying power, and faith (*Sraddha*); flowers represent devotion, and spiritual qualities; light represents knowledge, food represents the body, the conch stands for the sacred syllable OM, the bell for the unsounded sound which only Yogis can hear (*Anahata*); incense stands for all positive thoughts; prostration (*Pranama*) represents humility and self-surrender. By the process of circumambulation the worshipper is made conscious of the presence of the Deity not only in the image and in his own heart but in everything around him.

In salutation (*Namaskaram*) one is taught humility and is made to feel his utter dependence on God and it leads to the killing of egoism gradually. *Namaskaram* is considered a stand-alone sacrifice (*Yajna*). *Yajna* symbolizes the understanding that the world belongs to God and is God; hence the act of gratitude and thanksgiving to God for everything.

The offering of fruits, sweets etc. to the deity stands for the offering of all one's possessions and one's heart and soul to God; it also symbolizes utter detachment from the world.

The temple or the shrine stands for the body and the enclosures (*prakaras*) for the three bodies—gross, subtle, and causal. Realization consists in perceiving the identity of oneself with God; Puja is to be done with the feeling of identity of oneself with the object of worship.

The non-dualist (*Advaitin*) also performs worship but to him the meaning of Puja is absolute identity with Brahman or *Paramatman*. Hence the non-dualist is only worshipping himself. (While worshipping

Mother *Kali* Sri Ramakrishna used to worship himself with items meant for Her.)

The *Aratrikam*

Popularly known as *Aratrikam*, this is a special ritual done after the worship is over. It is the symbolic act of the soul's surrender to God. Often five articles (in the order given below) are waved in *Aratrikam*: light, water, cloth, flower and *chamara* (a kind of fan). These five items symbolize the five elements – fire, water, ether, earth and air, respectively. According to Vedanta the whole cosmos is constituted of the five subtle and gross elements known as *Pancha Bhutas*. Again these elements are the manifestations of *Brahman*.

When a spiritual aspirant worships God with devotion, he obtains God's grace and as a result he understands that the whole world, including himself, belongs to God and that he has nothing of his own to offer to Him. This understanding makes him surrender himself to God. Surrender brings the highest knowledge '*I am That*'. Thus he becomes liberated.

Though *Aratrikam*, usually, is done as a vesper service, it is done at other times too, especially, after a sixteen-iteded worship.

We should remember that the main purpose of worship is to establish a loving relationship with God, culminating in complete self-surrender, leading to the realization of oneness with God. After this the life of the worshipper becomes an unbroken worship fulfilling the dictum that God alone can worship God.

Offering of flowers (*Pushpanjali*)

The conclusion of puja is, often, marked by a special offering of handfuls of flowers called *pushpanjali* symbolizing the successful conclusion of the worship.

Homa

In the ancient times Vedic rituals like the fire-sacrifice (*agnihotra*) used to be performed regularly. But this is no longer in vogue. The only fire ritual which is still performed on special occasions is the *homa*.

The *sandhya*

Another form of Vedic worship which is still surviving, though, in a shortened form is the *sandhya*. This is a ritual performed at the junction of day and night in which the famous *Gayatri mantra* is repeated a number of times. This is the daily obligatory duty of every twice-born, specially of the Brahmins. Swami Vivekananda felt that all Hindus are entitled and must perform the *Sandhya* ritual. In this ritual a hearty prayer is offered to the Divine (specially felt in the Sun god) for guidance and right understanding.

Gayatri Mantra

*Om Bhuh Bhuvah Svah Tat Savitur Varenyam,
Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi Dhiyo Yo nah Prachodayat.*

"We would like to realize the Divine. We meditate on the Divine. May the Divine endow us with right understanding".

Commenting on the formalities and essentials of religion Sri Ramakrishna says: *"When, hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya any more. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves. Then it will be enough if you repeat only the name of Rama or Hari, or even simply 'Om.' Continuing, he said, 'The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, and the Gayatri merges in Om.'"*

Every act in the life of Sri Ramakrishna has a deep significance. He started his spiritual practice with the worship of the Divine Mother. He proved conclusively that rituals are not meaningless mumbo-jumbo, but done with devotion they slowly but gradually help a devout seeker to dive deep into the ocean of God and obtain the priceless jewel of God. It is a fact that no one can advance in spiritual life without first going through rituals.

(Concluded)

M.'s Ramakrishna-Sadhana

R. Das

(Sri Ramakrishna was a supreme artist. He could mould not only common clay into lovely images of gods and goddesses, but also mould men into divinity. His 'Boswell' Mahendranath Gupta, more familiarly known as 'M', came to him on the verge of suicide.)

M. meets Sri Ramakrishna

Mahendra Nath Gupta (1854-1932), known by his pen-name 'M', was the author of the celebrated work: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Bengali, the English version of which is known as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Some family squabbles in the prime of his youth caused him such intense mental agony that he decided to end his life by committing suicide. Right at this juncture, he came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar temple, near Calcutta.

At this first meeting M. found Sri Ramakrishna speaking on God to his devotees. He was highly impressed with the inspiring words flowing from his lips. His restless mind became calm and he felt imperceptibly drawn towards this holy man.

Being deeply influenced, M. went again after a couple of days to the Dakshineswar Temple to see Sri Ramakrishna and to hear his nectar-like words. On seeing M. Sri Ramakrishna was very glad and asked him to sit down. Little did M. know then that he was sitting before a divine Incarnation! But Sri Ramakrishna through his intuitive vision at once recognised him as one who was destined to fill an important role in his Divine Lila. "You see, you have certain good signs," said he to M. lovingly. "I know them by looking at a person's forehead, his eyes, and so on. It seems to me that a Yogi has just left his seat of meditation and has come to me."¹ M. was thrilled to hear such words. He suddenly regained his self-confidence which he had altogether

lost in the family conflict and the struggle for existence. He was won over by Sri Ramakrishna's divine personality and felt a longing for spiritual realisation.

M. opened his mind to him and put four questions, namely:

How may we fix our minds on God?

How ought we to live in the world?

Is it possible to see God?

Under what conditions does one see God?

With great compassion Sri Ramakrishna told M. that God could be realised in this very life. For this, one must repeat His Name, sing His glories and keep holy company. The mind refuses to dwell on God if it is kept immersed always in worldly thoughts and duties. It is essential to go into solitude occasionally to meditate. While performing worldly duties one should keep one's mind fixed on God, just as a maid servant in the house of a rich person keeps her mind on her home in the village, while doing all her household duties. Together with this, one should discriminate that God is the only Reality and all other things are transitory. Furthermore, one should have a sincere yearning for God in one's heart. *"People shed a whole jug of tears for wife, children and money, but who weeps for God?"* he said. *"Cry to Him with a real cry. Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn, out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God."*²

M's Sadhana begins

Thus M. acquired a new meaning and purpose in life—to live in God for the sublime purpose of God-realisation. He began to follow his Master's words in letter and spirit and devoted himself entirely to spiritual life. He lived with all sincerity the householder's life but in a detached manner like the 'maid-servant' of his Master's story. So far he had been living in the outer world which led him to the verge of annihilation; now he turned inward with a view to get inner spiritual revelation.

Sri Ramakrishna told him to keep holy company for constant self-renewal. And what holy company could be better than that of his Master's? He would visit the Dakshineswar temple on Sundays and holidays and quietly take his seat in a corner of the room to drink deep the ambrosial words dropping from the lips of his Master.

Sri Ramakrishna emphasized the need of meditation in the *Sadhaka's* (Spiritual aspirant) life. He said; *"You should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest to meditate."* What better spot could be found than the Dakshineswar temple premises under the divine guidance of his Master?

M.'s favourite place of meditation was under the *Bel* tree in the Dakshineswar temple, the spot where Sri Ramakrishna had spent days and nights in meditation. The famous picture of M., sitting in *virasana* (yoga position) with a wrapper on, was taken there.

M. was then a lecturer in a college. How could he come to Dakshineswar frequently? At the college, he would retire to the staircase room at the top of the college building during recess and meditate there. ³ Singing the glory of God and of his Master became almost a habit in his life. He had a melodious voice and used to sing songs in praise of God, particularly those which his Master loved to sing. M. longed to realise God. He was restless for God-vision He remembered the Master singing in his sweet voice:

"Cry to your Mother Shyama with a real cry, O mind.

And how can She hold Herself from you?

How can Shyama stay away?

*How can your Mother Kali hold Herself away?"*⁴

M.'s spiritual progress

After about six months of his spiritual *Sadhana* (spiritual practice), M. asked the Master one day: *"Is it necessary to practise discipline all through life?"* The Master said: *"No. But one must be up and doing in the beginning. After that one need not work hard."*⁵

M. continued his Sadhana with great intensity and zeal. A new sense of consecration awakened in his heart. It gradually purified his soul. His love for the Master developed silently. Sri Ramakrishna was happy with M.'s progress in spiritual life. About a year after, the Master remarked: *"I see that you have grasped the idea of unreality."*⁶ So M. became aware of the truth that God alone is real, the Eternal substance, all else is unreal, that is, impermanent. This itself, was an astounding progress in his spiritual life.

M.'s love of God grew fast under the Master's abounding grace. Once M. was seated on the veranda of the *Nahabat* (a music tower in the temple) absorbed in meditation. Sri Ramakrishna was passing that way. Seeing M. there, he spoke out: *"Hello! You are here! You will get results very soon. If you practise a little, then someone will come forward to help you."*⁷ M. looked up at the Master and was startled. Who was that 'someone'? Was it not his Master himself? He remained sitting. The Master continued: *"The time is ripe for you. The Mother bird does not break the shell of the egg until the right time arrives!"* He added: *"You are my very own, my relative; otherwise why should you come here so frequently?"*⁸

Being thus inspired, M. decided to spend his Christmas vacation at Dakshineswar to practise intensely his spiritual discipline under his Master's guidance. M. came to Dakshineswar on December 14, 1883 and remained there till January 5, 1884.

On December 15, a great event took place in M.'s life. Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by M. went to the Kali temple. He sat before the image and asked M. to sit by his side. He then offered a flower or two at the feet of the Divine Mother, and put one on his own head and began to meditate. He then sang:

*"Thy name, I have heard, O Consort of Siva, is the destroyer of our fear.
And so on Thee I cast my burden:
Save Me! Save me, O kindly Mother!"*⁹

M. said later that thus the Master dedicated him at the feet of the Divine Mother on that day. M. began a new life of devotion, true to his Master's ideal.

During this period, Sri Ramakrishna gave him intense spiritual training and disclosed a few secrets and hints relative to his Sadhana. Here are mentioned a few of them:

*"One cannot realize God without renouncing 'lust' and 'gold' (greed)."*¹⁰

*"It is the thought of worldly objects that prevents the mind from going into Samadhi."*¹¹

"The Kundalini (primordial force) is speedily awakened if one follows the path of Bhakti."

Sing earnestly and secretly in solitude:

'Waken, O Mother! O Kundalini, whose nature is Bliss Eternal!

*Thou art the serpent coiled in sleep, in the lotus of the Muladhara!'*¹²

*"Everything can be achieved through Bhakti alone."*¹³

M. was a scholar and well versed in logic and philosophy. So he had developed a habit of reasoning and arguing about God. The Master had earlier discouraged him from futile reasoning because that, being limited to only intellectual understanding, would not lead him to God-realization. Could a one-litre pot hold four litres of milk? Not petty reasoning on God but to live in God with a burning faith, was what his Master demanded of him. Observing that M. was still continuing his old habit of reasoning, Sri Ramakrishna one day said to him firmly: *"I have been telling you not to reason any more. I came from the pine grove to say that to you. Through too much reasoning your spiritual life will be injured. I used to roam at nights in the streets, all alone, and cry to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, blight with Thy thunderbolt my desire to reason.'"*¹⁴ The Master then asked him whether he would still continue reasoning. M. was stunned and speechless. He now rightly understood the real import of his Master's words and promised that he would never reason any more.

Jan. 5, 1884 was the last day of M.'s retreat. He was ready to take leave of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna's love knew no bounds. With tearful eyes and choked voice he prayed to the Divine Mother: *"Mother, may those who come to You have all their desires fulfilled."*¹⁵ Then, like a loving mother who sends her son to a distant land, he blessed M. with a tender voice: *"Now go home and live there. Let them know that you belong to them. But you must remember in your heart of hearts that you do not belong to them, nor they to you."*¹⁶ M. returned home spiritually evolved in the inspiring company of his Master.

The all-loving Master was keenly observing his disciple's spiritual progress. After a lapse of ten months he expressed his satisfaction on this steady progress in the following words: *"Pure devotion has no desire behind it. You don't want anything from me, but you love to see me and hear my words. My mind also dwells on you. You don't want anything from God but still you love Him."*¹⁷

This is pure and disinterested love of God; It is *ahaituki-bhakti* (love for love's sake). Sri Ramakrishna used to say that such devotion is a rare thing; it hardly comes to an ordinary man. Sri Ramakrishna would often sing:

*"Salvation I grant with little hesitation,
But in granting pure love I hesitate!"*

Inspired by a new zeal for God realisation, M. desired to be relieved of worldly duties and become a monk. Not approving M.'s idea, the Master smilingly said that through the grace of the Guru, he could attain self-knowledge even by remaining a householder and not by escaping from worldly duties. Real renunciation is the renunciation of 'lust' and 'greed'. But M. still insisted on his Master bestowing *Sannyasa* (monkhood) on him. One evening when M. was alone, the Master, in his ecstatic mood, said: *"Let nobody think that if he does not do the Mother's work, it would remain undone. The Mother can turn even a straw into a teacher."* Thereafter M. relinquished the idea for ever and remained a '*grihastha-sanyasi*' (householder

monk)—living a life of an ideal householder in which intense love of God, complete detachment and spirit of service to family and society are all combined in one. Sri Ramakrishna used to call such a devotee a ‘real hero’.

The Master revealed his Divine nature to M.

Sri Ramakrishna was an *Avatara*, an Incarnation of God. But was M. aware of it? Sri Ramakrishna used to say that an ordinary man cannot recognise an Incarnation of God. Only a few of His close associates can recognise Him. Twelve *Rishis* only could know that Sri Rama was an *Avatara*. Was not M. one of his Master’s own? No doubt he was. Still he could not recognise, in the beginning, the true nature of His Master, although he felt an urge to accept him whole-heartedly. “*One needs spiritual practice in order to know God and recognise His divine Incarnation,*” said Sri Ramakrishna.

A sun-flower bud cannot see the sun; but as it begins to blossom it sees the sun more and more clearly, until at last when it fully blossoms, it beholds the sun with its eyes open, as it were. Likewise as M. proceeded in his *Sadhana* he began to perceive more and more the divine nature of his Master. But ultimately, unless the *Avatara* reveals Himself, His real nature cannot be known. The gracious Master was anxious to reveal Himself to his beloved disciple. So from time to time, he was giving hints, and finally when the ‘right time’ arrived, he revealed his divine nature to him.

On March 7, 1885 Sri Ramakrishna was in his room at Dakshineswar conversing freely with his devotees. Suddenly he became serious as if to reveal a secret. Addressing M. he said: “*The other day when Harish was with me, I saw Satchidananda come out of this sheath (body). It said I incarnate myself in every age! I thought I myself was saying these words out of fancy. I kept quiet and watched. Again Satchidananda Itself spoke saying, ‘Chaitanya, too, worshipped Sakti’...*”

*I saw that it is the fullest manifestation of Satchidananda: but this time the Divine Power is manifested through the glory of Sattva.”*¹⁸

M. listened to these words in amazement, and was spell bound. Could he perceive that externally his Master had the human form, but within was the all-pervasive Satchidananda?

On July 28, 1885, there was the following conversation:

MASTER: *“Well, after seeing all this what do you feel?”*

M: *“I feel that Christ, Chaitanya Deva, and yourself—all three are one and the same. It is the same Person that has become all these three.”*

MASTER: *“Yes, yes! One! One! It is indeed one. Don't you see that it is He alone who dwells here in this way. As he said this, Sri Ramakrishna pointed with his finger to his own body.”*

M: *“You explained clearly, the other day, how God incarnates Himself on earth.”*

MASTER: *“Tell me what I said.”*

M: *“You told us to imagine a field extending to the horizon and beyond.*

It extends without any obstruction; but we cannot see it on account of a wall in front of us. In that wall there is a round hole. Through the hole we see a part of that infinite field.”

MASTER: *“Tell me what that hole is.”*

M: *“You are that hole. Through you can be seen everything—That Infinite Meadow without any end.”*

Sri Ramakrishna was very much pleased. Patting M.'s back he said: *“I see you have understood that. That's fine.”* He was extremely delighted to see that his beloved disciple had reached a full understanding about him. He then joyfully sang a song:

*“Oh, no one at all has found out who He is;
Like a mad man from door to door He roams;
Like a poor beggar, He roams from door to door.”*¹⁹

M. later on said to his devotees: *“My Master told me to hold to him fast. The rest he would do himself. It was he who bestowed God-realisation*

on me. He said that to recognise an Avatara was the same as to realise God. He told me that he himself was an Avatara and it would be enough for me if I meditated on Him only. He further said: "Who I am and who you are—to know this much is enough. That is, I am God and you are my children. That's all. This will lead to success."'²⁰

M. full of Ramakrishna-Spirit

A man of realisation, M. became full of the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna. His mind became identified with that of his Master and his I-consciousness was replaced by 'Ramakrishna'-consciousness. He was completely free from the sense of ego and his individuality was merged into that of Sri Ramakrishna. He became one with Ramakrishna.

Once he went to Kamarpukur, the birthplace of his beloved Master. How he was overwhelmed with emotion when he visited that holy place, which he found permeated with divine Consciousness! The same Consciousness shone even through trees, birds, animals, men, women and children of that place. He bowed down his head with humility before every one he met on the street. Once he prostrated himself before a cat in which he saw Consciousness Itself.²¹

For him the Dakshineswar Temple, where his Master had lived for years, was the holiest spot on earth. He used to say that every particle of dust in that holy place was surcharged with spirituality. He felt that the plants, creepers and trees of that place were all standing like *Rishis* of old to enjoy the bliss of Sri Ramakrishna's Divine-*Lila*. Absorbed in his spiritual mood, he would often embrace them with a deep sense of love and veneration.²²

To M. every spot where his Master set his feet was holy, a place of pilgrimage. In his later days, the terrace of the Morton Institution, where he lived, was virtually turned into *Naimisharanya*, the ancient place of the sages where the *Bhagavata* was narrated. There he would

regularly speak on his Master to the devotees, brahmacharins and the young monks of the Ramakrishna Order, who used to come to him very often. Whenever he spoke of his Master, his voice choked and tears rolled down his cheeks. Such was his divine love for him!

Sri Ramakrishna himself was highly impressed to see M.'s profound love and one-pointed devotion. Referring to this, M. once quoted his Master's remarks with emotion: "*Mahendra (M.) does not know anybody else except me.*" Who made this remark? None else than that Satchidananda Brahman who manifested Himself in this human form as Ramakrishna. Oh! What an utterance! '*He does not know anybody except me!*' ²³

M.'s Divine fragrance

The lotus of spirituality in M.'s heart blossomed fully. Is the function of a lotus only to blossom itself? No, it gives out sweet fragrance to all as well. M. attained both Bhakti and Jnana, and acquired all qualities of an ideal householder. He became Sri Ramakrishna's ideal man. From him also emanated a divine fragrance which spread far and wide in the shape of his immortal work, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* ²⁴, the Bhagavata of the modern age, which gives solace and peace to the readers and quenches the blazing fire of worldly life. Did not Sri Ramakrishna tell him: "*Mother has told me that you have to teach the Bhagavata to all*"? Whenever any devotee would call on him for spiritual guidance he would often say with humility: "*I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean and I keep with me a few pitchers of the water of the ocean. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak but his words?*"²⁵

References;

1. M: The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (1974) p. 4 The last sentence is not in the Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita. Instead there are dots signifying deliberate omission on the part of the author out of humility. Swami Prabhananda of the Ramakrishna Order has filled up the gap after looking into the original Diary of M.

2. M : The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 974) p. 5-7; 3. Udbodhan, Vol. 62, p. 305; 4. The Gospel p. 7; 5. ibid p. 39; 6. ibid p. 223; 7. ibid p. 275; 8. ibid p. 275; 9. ibid. p. 286; 10. ibid p. 296; 11. ibid. p. 296; 12. ibid p. 310; 13. ibid p. 324; 14. ibid. p. 324; 15. ibid. p. 330; 16. ibid. p. 330; 17. ibid. p. 555-56;

18. ibid p. 694; 19. ibid. p. 809-810.

20. Swami Nityatmananda, Sri Ma Darshan Vol. 12, p. 64;

21. ibid. Vol. 9, p. 167-68.; 22. ibid.; 23. ibid. Vol. 13, p. 220;

24. Published in English by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras in two volumes.

25. Taken from the note below M.'s picture at page 294 of the Gospel.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, July 1985)

Who is an outcast?

When the Buddha dwelt at Savatthi he went out with his alms-bowl to beg for food and approached the house of a Brahman priest while the fire of an offering was blazing on the altar. And the priest said: "Stay there, shaveling; stay there, wretched monk; you are an outcast."

The Blessed One replied: "Who is an outcast? An outcast is the man who is angry and bears hatred; the man who is wicked and hypocritical, he who embraces error and is full of deceit. Whosoever is a provoker and is avaricious, has evil desires, is envious, shameless, and without fear to commit wrong, let him be known as an outcast. Not by birth does one become an outcast, not by birth does one become a Brahman; by deeds one becomes an outcast, by deeds one becomes a Brahman."

Krishna, Our Guide Eternal

By Swami Ritajananda

I

Krishna! What a charming name! The very utterance of it immediately brings before us all that has an aesthetic appeal in our culture with a spiritual background. It reminds us of all the great souls to whom Sri Krishna was the very life-blood. We see before us the galaxy of saints, like Sri Chaitanya and Meera Bai, whose profound influence are felt to this day. We begin to marvel at his wonderful personality the like of which has yet to be seen. No literature has produced such an interesting life-sketch appealing to young and old alike. Numerous *Puranas*, besides the Bhagavata tell us about Sri Krishna and all are proclaiming the sublime character of the Lord. But at the same time, how difficult it is to have a clear understanding of his life and teachings? Because of his becoming the very embodiment of his teachings our imagination staggers to grasp his full personality and so it is no wonder that the author of the Bhagavata should say, that he is the Lord Himself. Such a great statement is full of significance, when we begin to consider his message in the light of his wonderful life.

The attractive features of the Hindu religion are its broadness of outlook, its eagerness for the harmony of various sects and its fear of closing its eyes against the needs of all in the society. All the great teachers, who have preached religion had these ends in view and it is this feature that has endeared them to the masses, who have accepted them as the Incarnations of the Lord and begun to worship them. And of these gigantic prophets, Sri Krishna occupies a very high place, since he has given us the essence of religion. It is not a sectarian religion or a single mode of approach to God, which he preaches. He expounds the numerous roads towards the one goal of Yoga or union with God. In his masterly way he has shown us, at the

same time how intimately our daily life can be connected with religion and how religion serves to solve the problems of our daily life. He instructs us as to how we can develop, a harmonious personality and make a heaven of the earth by adjustment of ourselves with the society. Intellectual understanding, emotional appreciation and the performance of one's duties all have a place in his teachings and at the same time he constantly reminds us of the core of all religions, an outlook transcending our little selves.

Numerous commentaries have been written on his masterpiece the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which Edwin Arnold rightly calls The Song Celestial, and interpretations have been given to make the whole book teach particular types of philosophy; and thus it is clearly proved that Sri Krishna would never have considered any system entirely wrong or exclusively sufficient for all. '*Those, who worship other Gods are also my devotees,*' says he. Choosing the battle field as the place for his teachings, he has shown how a spiritual outlook will help one in fighting the battles of life.

The identification of one's Self (*Atman*) with the body is the root cause of all our miseries and so he takes up this point in the very beginning of his discourse. He paints the superb glory of the Self, unattached, to things mundane, ever pure and ever blissful and of eternal life. This has been the bold message of the Upanishads, which shows the attitude we ought to cultivate to overcome distressing situations. Once we reach that noble state of going beyond the ego-consciousness, we become a *Sthita-prajna* or a man of steadfast wisdom. It is indeed a highly enviable state, when one is not shaken by adversity, one hankers not after happiness, one is free from affection, fear and wrath. Neither praise nor blame affects his serene mind well established in the Atman) "*Such a man, devoid of 'I' and 'mine' attains peace*" Says Sri Krishna. That man who lives devoid of longing abandoning all desires, without the sense of 'I' and 'mine,' he alone attains peace and Bliss.

Now it may appear that when there is this method of getting peace, where is the need of action? Although it may seem very easy to say, 'I am neither the mind, nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor the chitta—' repeating these words of *Nirvana shatkam*, a famous hymn of Sri Sankara, the actual realization comes only after a hard struggle and Sri Krishna did not overlook this fact.

Consequently he began to teach a method how this can be achieved. He explained the secret of work, the method by which one can attain astonishing results, when one gets rid of the idea that 'one is the doer'.

'Only egotistic fools think that they are the doers' he says; People are to be constantly engaged in work, but should perform them without attachment to its fruits. Work for work's sake should be the ideal. Thus, when there is no attachment to the work the mind remains calm and is unruffled, helping itself to concentrate more and do the work more perfectly. All works are to be offered to God. The mind brought to rest, a man slowly frees himself from the attachment to his ego. We are to consider ourselves as the instruments of the Lord and work for Him.

But the knowledge of the nature of Atman and the proper way of doing work does not meet the religious needs of all people. They want the Personal or Impersonal God, whom they will like to worship and adore; and there is no religion which completely excludes this factor, since faith in God stirs a person to his inmost depths and helps him to attain his goal of life. So we find Sri Krishna devotes many chapters on how one can develop faith in God with or without form, how he can meditate on Him and develop one-pointed devotion.

This *Bhakti yoga* is elaborately dealt with since it helps all people, irrespective of sex or caste. Krishna advises Arjuna to fix his mind on him, which will solve all his problems and help him to attain Him.

"Fill thy mind with Me, be My devotee, sacrifice unto Me, bow down to Me; thus having made thy heart steadfast in Me, taking Me as the Supreme Goal, thou shalt come to Me."

Such a form of devotion, if one can cultivate, even relinquishing his duties he will not come to grief. This indeed is the highest form of devotion, where the devotee completely forgets the world, even himself, in the adoration of the Lord. There is no better example for this type of devotion than that of the Gopis of Vrindavan. When the thrilling notes of Krishna's flute reached their ears, they forgot where they were, what they were doing. A strange madness seized them. Krishna stood as the consummation of their desires and they needed nothing else. In their love for God, they even forgot their duties as wives and mothers; for they felt Sri Krishna was God incarnate. They had no need for the study of scriptures nor was there the necessity of the performance of duties. Their simple nature helped them to reach God without any difficulty.

The God, about whom Sri Krishna teaches is not a supernatural being sitting in heaven but He, who resides in all beings. So, the devotee should think of Him as dwelling in all beings :

"He who being established in unity, worships Me, who am dwelling in all beings, whatever his mode of life, that yogi abides in Me."

The devotee tries to feel the miseries of all others and tries to be compassionate, since the Lord says, *"I am the origin of all, from Me everything evolves—thus thinking the wise worship me with loving consciousness."*

When we contemplate on these teachings we see what true religion is. It is not the shutting oneself from the society, not the ignorance of the sufferings of others, but to feel the presence of the Lord everywhere and think of Him as the ALL. So, one, who has controlled his senses, works for the good of all creatures. By the faith in the universal aspect of the Lord, one works being freed from all selfishness.

When we study closely the teachings of Sri Krishna, we find that he always advocates living for others, working for others. The development of the higher conception of life beyond one's own smaller self, is indeed the teaching of all great religions.

This is the ideal by which we can bring in peace. Sri Krishna lived as a beautiful example of this ideal and his whole life was spent in doing good to others. He had no personal ambitions, no desire to build great empires, but only to bring peace, happiness and solace to the suffering. His love was for all. The simple cowherds, the poor Sudama and Vidura felt him as their own. Though he had nothing to gain he led a very active life. None, who took refuge in him missed his grace.

Thousands of years have rolled on since this great man left this world and the exact facts of his life are covered up with many legends and tales. But he had been constantly the Chosen Ideal of many, who reached great heights of religious experiences, thereby showing how he appears to the Hindu — as the very embodiment of Divinity. Numerous poets composed lyrics on his glory, which are gems in those languages. A study of the compositions of the Alvars, the Maharashtra saints and the Gita-Govinda of Jayadeva and the songs of Purandaradasa, to mention a few, will show how intensely these saints were moved with love for Krishna. Such is his greatness that he has become the most popular manifestation of God and has the largest number of devotees throughout India. Why should it not be so? He has shown us how we should work for the sake of work, do duty for duty's sake and love for the sake of love. He came to us as the great teacher of harmony as Swami Vivekananda calls him, trying to harmonise all the conflicting sects of his times.

"We worship him as God incarnate, the greatest, the boldest preacher of morality that the world ever saw, the great Karma-yogin."

The message of the Gita, though given to us centuries ago is still fresh and it has been the primary source of inspiration for many illustrious men all through their lives.

Now, considering the hard times we are living in and low state of ethical and spiritual ideals, we cannot but feel that it is the message of Sri Krishna alone that can bring lasting peace.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari,, September 1050-51)

Self-Assertion in A Higher Sense

Swami Yatiswarananda

There is a great, even a physical, pleasure in perfect sense-control, in perfect chastity. The gross-minded man does not know what an immense pleasure it is, an intense and lasting form of enjoyment. This enjoyment is far greater than that attained by giving in to the sense-impulses. That is why a life of renunciation is also a life of the highest enjoyment and greatest joyfulness.

The essential point is mental dispassion. One may give up the things of the world outwardly and may yet have inordinate passions for the things of the world. Giving up all desires is the common point between a man leading the active life and one following the path of meditation. Without perfect mental control none can be a yogi of any type.

The meditative type does not work physically, but on the thought plane he is active in a most concentrated way, tremendously so. If people were able to have a peep into his mind while he is on his way to the goal, they would be scared away. They cannot even imagine such tremendous activity. Sri Ramakrishna has nothing to say to the thoughtless idiot, the person who is not willing to pay the full price for what he wants. Spirituality is dynamic; it is not passivity. Struggle is good and always to be welcomed if directed towards something higher. Most of us are not ourselves, we are somebody else. The first task of the spiritual aspirant is self-assertion in a higher sense, becoming an active, free agent, and not being a slave. First of all, learn to become yourselves.

Create we must. Unless we create something noble, we create something ignoble. Sri Krishna stresses the creative aspect.

We have clay in our hand, and we are at liberty to make a god out of this clay or a monkey, but mostly we make a hideous monkey out of it.

Man receives shocks and blows, but he remains unruffled. All this is inevitable so long as there is the body and any form of body-consciousness, but the man of knowledge does not become disturbed thereby.

Without strict continence, Brahmacharya, without ethical culture, and steady uninterrupted spiritual practice there cannot be anything that is called religion.

If someone tells you that he has come in touch with Sri Ramakrishna, but does not lead a life of perfect continence and renunciation, never believe him. He has not come in touch with Him; he may have come in touch with a monkey. He whom Sri Ramakrishna has really touched, never has any carnal relations. He always leads a life of perfect continence, renunciation and of the highest ethical culture. This is a sure sign. Such a man has been caught in Sri Ramakrishna's net. No one who is impure belongs to the Master, and everyone who has really come in touch with Him, is transformed and made pure. Only Sri Ramakrishna watches the devotees a long time to see their sincerity and worth. His grace cannot be attained by half-hearted cowards or by hypocrites, neither can it be attained by now and then performing some haphazard practices. It is so very easy for us to make headway if we only allow ourselves to be carried along by His current and now and then do a little swimming of our own, but what we generally do, is showing resistance, clinging to the shore of the world so that His current cannot sweep us away to the goal. That is the whole trouble. His grace and mercy are so infinite if we are willing to follow His path.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, January 1945-1946)

Sayings of Bulla Shah, the Sufi

Swami Jagadiswarananda

1 . You look upon yourself as learned with a little knowledge of the external world, though you are ignorant of your own Self. But alas! The external world is an appearance only, whereas your being is the ultimate Reality. As a boy, seeing a painting of tiger on a canvass, becomes afraid and cries, so you are afraid of the world. Your Self is never tainted with sin. Why then look upon yourself as a sinner?

Bulla Shah says: *"Why do you worry so much? Your soul is never contaminated by any evil!"*

2. There is no doubt that your soul is ever established in its true nature even in the state of ignorance. As the sun has no shadow, so your Self has no sin. Waking experience is as much false as a dream seen in sleep.

Bulla Shah says: *"Discriminate between the real and the unreal and realise the Real. On realisation you will see that one Reality alone exists and there is nothing other than that."*

3. Do not grumble over sorrows and sufferings that your own past deeds allot for you. Make not your mind fickle with the enjoyments and temptations of life. Everything is unsteady. Everything comes and goes; nothing remains long. Do not pin your love to them. The earth is full of beautiful flowers, fruits and foliage. Do not look at them, for they will wither tomorrow.

Bulla Shah says: *"He who has once tasted the sweetness of sugar will never relish bitter things."*

4. Put a full stop to all your mentation and withdraw from all thoughts. Cessation of mentation is what is called the state

of Self-knowledge. The first and the foremost step to knowledge of Self is the firm conviction that no second entity other than the Self has ever been born.

Bulla Shah says: *“The One conscious entity is your true Self, and that entity is undivided and uncompounded.”*

5. Whosoever knows the Self which is dearest to us is withdrawn from all sense-objects. The earth or heaven loses all charm for him. Once the mind is attached to Self, it is never separated again from the Self; atheism can never defile his mind any more. A knower of Atman wanders like a mad man, always intoxicated with the wine of eternal wisdom.

Bulla Shah says: *“Such a person is a moving image of the Infinite. His over-soul is ever free from all ignorance and is always a fountain of wisdom.”*

6. The *Atman* is not separate from your being. Why then do you seek the Atman without? Seek the Atman within. Seek the seeker, Know the knower. My friend, the ultimate Reality you seek in forests and mountains is seated in your heart. You are that Reality. You are the Self of all creatures.

Bulla Shah says: *“You are the Supreme Self. You are the Ultimate Being. Forgetting that, whom else do you seek?”*

7. My dearest Self is ever blissful and devoid of all adjuncts. It is as transparent as the mirror. As no dust can permanently cover the transparency of mirror, so also, no sin can contaminate the Self. Happiness of heaven is insipid to a knower of Atman. He transcends all doubts and dualities.

Bulla Shah says: *“As a mad elephant tears asunder all bonds of chains and ropes and roams like a free bird, so a knower of Atman wanders losing all fascinations for home, place, objects and individuals.”*

8. The thought of attaining the Dearest Self has maddened me day and night for months and years. In search of my dearest Self I have forgotten food, sleep and drink. As the Supreme Being pervades all places, I remain with folded hands everywhere with devotion. All my earthly companions— lust, greed, anger, etc., have deserted me. Only *Buddhi*, the determinative faculty, has not forsaken me and will lead me to realisation.

Bulla Shah says: *“When the Self becomes dearest to us, all organs internal and external are withdrawn from objects, and outwardness of our life goes away.”*

9. My dear friend, all my doubts are dissolved. I am now aware of who am I. Fascination for the body is gone. Out of the dusts of name and form I have searched out the jewel of Self-knowledge. Realizing the world as illusory, as mere mist, I have banished the ideas of defeat and victory from my mind.

Bulla Shah says: *“I have got eternal satisfaction by drinking the nectar of knowledge that I am the one absolute Truth and Bliss without a second.”*

10. The Self, the only conscious entity, is the sole knower of thoughts and things. How can the Self, the illuminer of the determinative faculty, be known by any other organ? Self-knowledge is evident and does not require any proof. The Self has been described by the four Vedas as *“not this, not this”*. Like it there is no second thing.

Bulla Shah says: *“By means of discrimination when you will be endowed with the knowledge of Self, you will see only the Self everywhere and nothing else.”*

11. Oh mad one, by the power of Self-knowledge be equal to honour and dishonour. Your “I” is the same as the “I” of all

men and creatures. By means of Self-knowledge look upon the body as a mere log of wood, or a slab of stone fallen on the wayside. Your Self being consciousness itself, it is devoid of movements.

Bulla Shah says: *“By the power of discrimination, give up the idea of body and be indifferent to your body as you are to other’s bodies.”*

12. Oh dear one, be inspired by my success and strive for self-knowledge. Arise, awake and sleep no more. Understanding all this, why do you suffer? Make up your mind for the highest attainment. Without refraining from bad deeds, do not utter words of wisdom. The wise ones renounce sense pleasures like poison. Why then take them as pleasant?

Bulla Shah says: *“The Self is also the mover of the internal organs. Though you know that the Self is seated as a luminous entity on the altar of the heart, how could you entertain ill-thoughts and deeds?”*

13. The Lord is omnipresent. See His charming beauty in every form. As one seed manifests as various forms of leaves, flowers, fruits and branches, so the one Self manifests as the multiform universe. Creation and destruction is a pleasant sport of the Self. Men and women, animals and birds are its moving bodies.

Bulla Shah says: *“Transcendentally, the cosmos is a mirage, but pragmatically it is real.”*

14. If you remove from the seen the curtain of name and form, what remains is the One Absolute Existence, the Seer, the Self. All mentations except that of the Self are to be set aside and must be made to die. You are the eternal witness of waking, dream and sleep states. Give up all ideas of egoism and be the witness of experiences sweet or bitter.

Bulla Shah says: *“Like an emperor, you are installed in the city of the heart. Witness the charming dance of nature before you with an air of detachment.”*

15. Do not waste time any more. The past moment will never return even if you pay a million for it. If you struggle wholeheartedly, Self-knowledge will be in your palm like an *amalak* (Indian gooseberry) fruit. Self-knowledge is quite possible of attainment for a sincere aspirant. But it is strange that you are engaged in the drinking of the poison of sense-pleasures. You have accepted the glass-piece of body idea instead of the jewel of Self-knowledge.

Bulla Shah says: *“Your Self is in fact not conditioned by time, space or causation.”*

16. My beloved has put on various playful appearances to enchant me. He has forgotten himself in men and women and embraces endless suffering according to his past Karmas. But when he remembers his divine state, he remains absorbed in his own joy and radiates joy to others.

Bulla Shah says: *“The bubble has dissolved into its original form, the water. What I was before manifestation or embodiment I have become in the end even in this body. My dear, liberation is attainable in this very life.’*

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The Power of Thought

Umesh Gulati

In one of the lectures that Swami Vivekananda gave at Madras [now Chennai] after returning from America in 1897, the title was 'My Plan of Campaign' (The Complete Works Swami Vivekananda, V. 3, 226-27). In that lecture, He says, "... *Have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstructions? If the whole world stands against you sword in hand, would you still dare to do what you think is right? ... If you live in a cave, your thoughts will permeate even through the rock walls, vibrating all over the world for hundreds of years, maybe, until they will fasten on to some brain and work out there. Such is the power of thought, of sincerity, and purity of purpose.*" What a great statement Swamiji had made! In fact, there is a great saying, '*as we think, so we become.*' This indeed is the gist of this essay, as we will see in the following paragraphs.

Most people are familiar with the constitution of UNESCO, which says, "*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed.*" Given this great statement, it won't be an exaggeration to say that in view of the turmoil that is going on these days in the world that the title of this essay is very appropriate and timely.

There is a very close relationship between our thoughts and our lives. Indeed, many thinkers believe that whatever we think affects our personality at large.

Let us begin by quoting a passage from the Raja Yoga by Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji says: "... *Every vicious thought will rebound, every thought of hatred, which you may have thought, in a cave even, is stored, and will one day come back to you with tremendous power in the form of some misery here. If you project hatred and jealousy, they will rebound on you with compound interest. ... Remembering this will prevent you from doing wicked things.*"

To illustrate the above point, we would like to mention an episode from the Mahabharata. King *Drupada* of *Panchal* became proud and arrogant when his classmate, *Drona* went to him for help. Drona was very poor. They were classmates and the king had promised Drona, “any time you want any help I am ready to give you”. But as soon as Drupada ascended the throne, he changed! He became arrogant and proud. And he insulted Drona. The whole of later tragedy of Mahabharata and the Kurukshetra war began from there (cf. *Swami Ranganathananda: Universal Message of the Bhagavad-Gita*, v 1, 349).

Besides, we know from experience that every thought or act, good or bad, has at once an effect on oneself (as it shapes our character), apart from its effect on others or on the outside world. ‘Every motion of the mind deals a stroke as with a goldsmith’s hammer on one’s character, and whether one wants it or not, alters its shape for better or worse. ... Every act of ours and every thought creates a tendency and according to its nature add or take away from our free will to a certain extent. If I think evil thoughts today, I think them more readily and more persistently tomorrow. Likewise it is with good thoughts. ...’ (cf. *C. Rajagopalachari, Hinduism Doctrine and Way of Life*, pages 81—82).

Swamiji stated just so in his lecture: “If you project hatred and jealousy, they would rebound on you with compound interest ...” So, by the same token, if we think good thoughts, putting others first, and thinking always for the welfare of the whole world, the world would respond in the same manner. During his wandering days, he was once in Madras, and made many disciples. A disciple writes, “He [Swamiji] would often anticipate several questions ahead and gave answers that would satisfy the questioners at once. ... The moment a bad thought entered one’s mind, it would flash across his also. One could know it from a peculiar smile that lit his lips and from the words that would casually escape from his mouth in the course of conversation. ...” (*The Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western Disciples*, 370 – 371)

Let us illustrate our assertion regarding the power of thought still further by the experience of Swamiji at the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 11, 1893. He began thus: *"Sisters and Brothers of America."* Hardly had he finished speaking these five words when thousands among the audience of several thousands rose to their feet and clapped for full two minutes. It was for the first time in their life they had heard a speaker who, discarding the formalities of a speech, echoed their own feelings of being sick and tired of religious hatred and bigotry.

For Vivekananda, those five words came naturally, and provided the gist of his speech to follow: *"All humanity is the product of one God, though sages call Him by different names; He alone is our Father and Mother."* Therefore, we are all related to each other as sisters and brothers. He told the assembled gathering that India had given protection to religious refugees from time immemorial. He went on to quote two hymns from our ancient scriptures, which he said are repeated by millions of Hindus every day.

The first one was a hymn composed by Pushpadanta, which says, *"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths that men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."*

The other from the Bhagavad-Gita that Swamiji quoted was, *"Whosoever comes to Me [the Lord], through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me."*

The concluding remarks of Swamiji also ended on a note of quick end to bigotry, fanaticism, and sectarianism. Overnight Vivekananda became a celebrity; for not a single word of condemnation of other religions came from his lips. His message focused on the divinity of soul, the oneness of existence, the non-duality of the Godhead, and harmony of all religions. Strangely, it is left always to America to draw

out the latent greatness of other people. America discovered Vivekananda and made a gift of him to India and the world!

The Swami who had come just to attend the Parliament, which ended on September 27 of the same year, 1893, stayed here nearly three years, commuting between New York and London, and spreading the ancient science of spirituality that Vedanta is, and made several disciples. The unprecedented success that Swamiji achieved and the love and friendliness that the American public showered on him were the direct result of his noble thoughts of harmony and peace. Such, indeed, is the power of thought.

The Upanishads declare, '*All this is Brahman*', which is of the nature of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss Absolute. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Brahman is identified with the Atman or the Self. So, while our individual self is a function of body-mind complex, which is nothing but matter, the Atman or the Self is the Spirit, and therefore divine. According to the Bhagavad-Gita (2.23-2.24) '*no weapons can cleave this Atman, no fire can burn it, no water can wet it, and no air can dry it. It is changeless, all pervading, unmoving, and immovable; this Self is eternal.*' The Gita also says that death is like a person discarding old and worn out clothes for new ones. (Gita: 2.22) So the death is only of the body, not of the Self, which is without birth and death, eternal and immortal, and is our true essence. It is for this reason, the Hindus, and also Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, cremate the bodies of their dead ones rather than bury them as those belonging to other religions.

If '*all this is Brahman*,' then it follows that we are all one; there is '*no other*'. And, as Swami Vivekananda once said, "*this separation between name and form is not real, but only apparent.*" It is for this reason he once told Josephine Macleod, a great admirer and friend of the Swami, "*You are incidentally an American and a woman, but [in reality] always a child of God. Tell yourself day and night who you are [I am the Self]. Never forget it.*" (Swami Nikhilananda: Vivekananda: A Biography, 257–58). For the same reason, we should always remind ourselves that we are *Brahman*

or *Atman*, and not so and so, Indian or American. Once again the reason for all the turmoil, violence, and killings that are going on in the world today is that the thoughts of hatred and violence have been accumulating in the minds of some people for so long that they burst out into committing an actual violence after a little suggestion from outside.

Many of us want to lead a spiritual life, but fail to achieve this desire. The reason is obvious. Most of us cannot but spend our time thinking about '*woman and gold*' (Lust and Greed), to use *Sri Ramakrishna's* words, and worldly things, and expect to have peace of mind, necessary for prayer and meditation. As we said above, a person is what his or her thoughts are. If we think of worldly things, we cannot be spiritual; we will remain worldly. On the other hand, if we read and think about spirituality, we will feel joy and peace.

Besides, Sri Ramakrishna often used to get irritated when any one of his devotees from *Brahmo Samaj* (one of the reforming sects in Hinduism and very active in Bengal of the nineteenth century), said that he was a sinner. His response to that assertion always was that if you keep repeating, "*I am a sinner, I am a sinner*"; you will certainly be drowned in the worldliness. "*One should have such burning faith in God,*" he once said, that "*one can say, 'what? I have repeated the name of God, therefore can sin cling to me? How can I be a sinner anymore? How can I be in bondage anymore?' ... Why should one talk only about sin and hell, and such things? Say but once, 'O Lord, I have undoubtedly done wicked things, but I won't repeat them.' And have faith in His name.*" (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 138).

The concept of sin is basic to Christian belief. We find in Christianity the doctrine of '*original sin*', which has its roots in the story of Adam and Eve, living happily in the Garden of Eden. God told them to eat whatever fruit, etc. they liked, but forbade them to eat the fruit of a certain tree, called the tree of knowledge. But in the midst of paradise, Satan appeared and persuaded Eve not to worry

about God's command and eat the fruit of that tree of knowledge. So, Eve ate half of that fruit and gave the other half to Adam to eat it also. The effect of eating that fruit from the tree of knowledge made them conscious of their nakedness, and therefore, they hid themselves behind a bush. When God appeared in the Garden of Eden, and asked Adam and Eve why were they hiding behind the bush, they told Him that they could not come out because they were naked. God then, knew that they had disobeyed His command, and because of their disobedience, He banished them to the earth below; and we all, being the descendants of Adam and Eve, have inherited their sin. So like them, we are sinners too! According to the Christian belief, only Jesus Christ can save us from that original sin.

According to Hinduism, however, while people do make mistakes, they are not inherently wicked. Vedanta asserts, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal.

We want to conclude this essay by pointing to what Swami Vivekananda said that is very relevant in this connection. But interestingly he was speaking on Karma Yoga, "*Non Attachment Is Complete Self-Abnegation*," was the title of his talk! He says, "*Just as every action [or thought] that emanates from us comes back to us as reaction, even so our actions [or thoughts] act on other people and theirs on us. Perhaps all of you have observed it as a fact that when persons do evil action, they become more and more evil, and when they begin to do good, they become stronger and stronger and begin to do good at all times. This intensification of the influence of action cannot be explained on any other ground than that we can act and react upon each other. ...*

If there are different musical instruments tuned alike in one room, all of you may have noticed that when one is struck, the others have the tendency to vibrate so as to give the same note. So all minds that have the same tension, so to say, will be equally affected by the same thought. Of course, this

influence of thought on mind will vary according to distance and other causes, but the mind is always open to affection. ...; And this power of mind upon mind is more or less according to the force of the tension is greater or less. (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, v. 1, 81)

Therefore, one of the chants, which our Vedic Rishis left for humanity was: *'Happiness be unto all, perfect health be unto all, may all see good in everyone, may all be free from suffering.'* Such a thought alone is the recipe for love, joy and peace in today's world.

Sri Ramakrishna once told a story of a tigress that saw a herd of sheep and jumped on them. The tigress was pregnant, and as she jumped, she fell and died. But before dying, she gave birth to a cub. The flock of sheep raised that cub as a sheep. Like the sheep, the cub ate grass and like them bleated also. The tiger-cub, like other sheep, ran in terror when a tiger from outside attacked the flock. One day this tiger, finding an opportunity seized the cub, dragged him to a lake, and showed him his reflection in water. *"Look at your face,"* he told him, *"and now look at my face. Aren't we the same?"* At first the cub trembled in fear, but as he continued to gaze, alternatively, his own reflection in the water, and also that of the tiger's, he realized that he was not a sheep after all. Presently, the tiger pushed a piece of meat into the cub's mouth, which the cub found very delicious! Then the tiger gave a mighty roar, and the cub followed suit; and he was sheep no more. (The Gospel, 359-60).

The 'tiger-sheep' that lived in the company of sheep, eating grass and bleating like sheep, began to think that it was sheep. But it never remained so; guided by a real tiger, the tiger-sheep realized its identity, and it was sheep no more. We too can transform our personality by the *'power of our thoughts.'* Let us quote Swami Vivekananda again: *"Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them that they are glorious children of immortality, ... Let positive, strong helpful thoughts enter into their brains from very childhood. ... Say to your own minds, 'I am He, I am He [the Atman].'* (The Complete Works, Vol. 2, 87)

From what we have said above, it follows that we are the sum total of all our thoughts. In fact, what I think in this life will forge my future life. Once again to quote Sri Ramakrishna (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (pg. 138)): *“The mind is everything. ... Bondage is of the mind, and freedom is of the mind.”* Besides, in the Bhagavad-Gita (8.5), Sri Krishna says: *“And he (or she) who at the time of death, meditating on Me alone, goes forth, leaving the body, attains My Being: there is no doubt about this.”*

This verse from the Bhagavad-Gita asserts that what we think at the last moment of our life, determines our future life. As pointed out before, death is not the end of everything. Death means that the Atman or the Self drops the body, which then takes a new body. However, the nature of the new body is determined by what we thought at the time of death. So if I think of Sri Krishna at the last moment of my life, I will attain Sri Krishna’s being or go to the abode of Sri Krishna.

It is for this reason that at the time of death, the relatives of the dying person recite mantras, or sing devotional songs. However, the capacity to lift the mind to the Divine at the last moment comes only if we have been thinking good spiritual thoughts throughout our life. So one has to train the mind throughout one’s life for the last moment; otherwise, we won’t be able to fix the mind on the Divine at the last moment of our life.

As the Bhagavad-Gita (2.20-21) has said that death is just like casting away worn out clothes; the Self or Atman has no death. Our real nature is Brahman or Atman. We are sparks of that Divine Reality. It is because of this understanding the practice arose of burning the body after death of a person.

But the important thing is that as Sri Krishna has said in this verse (BG: 8.5) *‘one who passes out of life, by consciously thinking of Me at the last moment, will certainly reach Me.’*

Goal of Human Life according to Jnana Yoga

Swami Gnaneswarananda

The highest goal of human life has been considered by the Jnana Yogis as total absorption into the Infinite Reality. We are warned that there is danger as long as any consciousness of separateness from that ultimate Reality exists. There is always cause for apprehension if there are two existences. If God and I are separate and distinct, then there could be union and separation. There could also be so many moods flowing from one to the other. Furthermore, there is time, space and causation; and as long as there are these three, there is the possibility of transformation and change. So where is security, peace and perfection in the presence of two, God and I?

It certainly is a wonderful state to remain concentrated and absorbed in the love of God, to enjoy the presence of the Divine Being; but from the viewpoint of security one cannot say that one is absolutely safe. Complete safety is attained when the worshipper and the worshipped, the human and the Divine Existence, become one and identical. We are not considering the question from the viewpoint of enjoyment. If we ask for that enjoyment, then we must stay in the dualistic state. But enjoyment is not always to be sought. A time will come when one is concerned more about security than mere enjoyment and there is no security, no rest, until one has transcended all consciousness of duality. It is true, of course, that by going through the state of enjoyment of God, one can eventually attain the state of Oneness. Man may start as a dualist adoring His Divinity, loving his God with his body, mind and soul; enjoying the love of God showered upon him; but a time must come in the course of the unfoldment of that soul when he will attain that state of unity.

Now that unity, which is the goal of Jnana Yoga, if it is unity at all, cannot be attained. Unity really cannot be attained. It must either exist all the time or it can never be found. If I am not one and the same with the divine Principle now at this present moment, I cannot be so two years from now. If I am not one and identical with that Principle at this present spot travelling throughout the universe, I shall never be able to reach a spot where I shall be able to become one with the Principle. So, if we admit this proposition at all that finally we have to attain our unity with the divine Principle; we must admit that we are one with it now. No separation ever took place. It is only our false conception regarding our self that has created this monstrous blunder that we think we are separated from the divine Substance.

As a result of ignorance we are compelled to think that that divine Perfection is far, far away from us. When ignorance is removed we shall find that all the time, always under all circumstances, we have been one and the same with it.

Herein comes the question of removing the obstacles. In other words, purification of the mind. Our mind is heavily burdened with impurities. As soon as those impurities clinging to the surface of the consciousness are eliminated, the inner lustre, the perfection, shines without hindrance. If we can successfully eliminate the impurities clinging to this so-called individual consciousness, this consciousness which I am calling 'mine', calling finite and imperfect, will attain the state of absolute Consciousness. This truth must be very well assimilated. Look within and you will find that you are conscious of the existence of something within; a power, a light, a force, (call it by any name), but of course we are reluctant to admit that that power within us is universal, is omnipotent. And the reason for that reluctance is that the self has accumulated dust and dirt, as the result of which its inner absolute nature has been

completely hidden. It is the same Self, appearing as a finite imperfect entity. This consciousness of ours which we sometimes call our mind, our intelligence,— is the divine Substance. One does not have to go anywhere to seek it. This is one hundred per cent divine. We have to eliminate the accumulated imperfections.

A beautiful illustration has been given of the purification of gold. Gold intrinsically is pure and brilliant, but when it is mixed with other substances it may appear devoid of lustre; it may look like an ordinary metal. In order to make gold shine in its own purity we must know the process of purifying it. This substance which we are handling every day— our inner consciousness, is like a pure, precious metal. What we have to do is to eliminate the impurities from the ore.

By analysing this 'ore' of our consciousness, expert mineralogists have come to the conclusion that there are three things very impure that cling to it.

One is of a very gross nature. It is not compounded with the ore but it clings to it as a coating, just an external coating. To get rid of it one has to put the ores on the anvil and hammer it.

There are other types of impurities that cannot be eliminated by the hammering method because these impurities have almost formed a chemical compound. A strong chemical has to be used to eliminate them.

Then a very subtle form of impurity still persists. That can only be eliminated by putting it into the fire. When it comes out of the fire, it is as pure as the gold.

We are all going through these processes, willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly. I do not believe that the path to perfection is strewn with petals of roses. It is beset with many difficulties. That is why perhaps, we find in all forms of religious and philosophical thoughts, glorification of suffering. But mere

suffering as suffering is no glory! When suffering becomes a conscious process of purification then it is no more suffering. Only by going through that state of suffering can one attain perfection, but mere suffering will not do. If that were so then all the homeless, suffering, starving people would be the holiest. We cannot say either that those who have lived in luxury are nearer perfection. We have to go through that conscious process of purification. No soul can enter into the kingdom of heaven without it. Gradually going through that process of purification, this consciousness gets rid of the different layers of imperfections but even at the last stage of this process it has some defect still clinging to it. Although it might appear to be absolutely pure and clear; if it retains the individual character it is still a unit by itself, blessed but not safe. Again a whirlwind might overcome it and throw it again into a dust bin, because it is not yet 'the All'. Unless and until it has become 'the All', it is not safe.

That state of being, the All, has been called the state of *Niroikalpa Samadhi*; a state where there is no duality of any kind. Even if your consciousness which is now full of grief and complaints becomes pure and abounds in happiness and power, that consciousness will still be the consciousness of an individual, in spite of the possession of those qualities. One may think, 'My consciousness is full of bliss and peace.' Yet it is still an individual consciousness. Do not think that what has been attained will last forever. Absolute security is attained only by non-dualistic consciousness. If our ideal is one of enjoyment, we will hate the thought of the non-dualistic state. We will repeat with the Bhakta: "*I do not want to be sugar; I want to eat sugar.*" All right go ahead, eat sugar but we might get a stomach ache! We are not secure. Security is attained by being sugar.

That state is extolled in the following verses. We will find that *Sankaracharya* is encouraging us not to stop until that final goal of

Nirvikalpa Samadhi has been attained. Totally merge into that infinite ocean of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. There is no compromise; that is the goal. There this container our consciousness will melt, will exist no more and there will not be any tendency to come back.

If that state were suddenly given to us, most of us would resist it with all the force at our command. I am sure many have studied the life of Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna, by a mere touch, brought that condition of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* to Swami Vivekananda when he was a young boy — and how he resisted! He has described what happened then in words something like this:

“There was a whirlpool that was moving the entire universe. I could see the heavens, the planets, being merged. My body was being disintegrated, and mother, family and friends had vanished.” And he cried out: *“What are you doing to me?”*

Those who have gone into that *Nirvikalpa* state rarely come back. In history there is record of only a few who have done so. Shiva, for instance, and *Sukadeva*. Of course, Ramakrishna could enter at will into that state again and again and come back to normal consciousness. We have ample proof of that.

However, we must reconcile to ourselves that the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, the total absorption, is the goal. We must not think that we do not believe in a heaven or hell, for we can only think in terms of sense enjoyments. One has to convince oneself that there is no sense-enjoyment which is lasting. Say only: *“I want to be what I am, I want to be absorbed in it!”* There is suffering in heaven, perhaps even quarrels and jealousies!

In the realm of phenomena there is always suffering. To make up one’s mind to attain that state of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* which is to reject any subject-object relationship. That state has been described in terms of matter because we cannot talk in any other language.

A poet says:

*'If ten-thousand suns could shed their light in at one moment,
It would appear weak before the glory of that Knowledge.
If twenty-million moons could shed their brilliance in one volume,
It would not compare with the radiance of that Knowledge!'*

(Question) *"In that ocean of infinite bliss there would be no forms. Individual enjoyment would not exist there. How could we enjoy it?"*

(Swami): *"The assurance has been given that nothing can be missed there. It is the sum-total of all the bliss you can think of. Suppose you like to swim in a pool of water and you enjoy drinking from another, float a boat in another—this gives you individual happiness. Now suppose one vast sheet of water includes all these pools which you enjoy in different ways, nothing is excluded from it, nothing will be missed in that Nirvikalpa Samadhi. The individual enjoyment that we derive from the senses is just a little particle, but in that state is contained the sum-total of everything. So there is no reason to get discouraged."*

However, no matter how it appears, this consciousness of ours is the Substance besides which ten-million suns and millions of moons look pale. We have to get rid of certain impurities that are clinging to it. So let us consciously start the hammering, rubbing, scrubbing and the fire-test processes with understanding and happiness; that in going through these stages we are purifying our 'gold.' It is not vain glorification of suffering. It is not self-torture, which is a complex, but it is, perhaps, self-analysis. Understand the possibility of deriving benefit from all sorts of conditions you may find yourself in.

As gold purified by thorough heating in the fire gives up its impurities and attains its own lustre, so the mind, through meditation gives up its impurities of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, and attains to the reality of Brahman. [*Vivekachudamani*, 361].

This mind, now, is *Brahman*, but it has been covered up by three layers of impurities. The innermost is *Sattvic*, the next *Rajasic* and the outermost is *Tamasic*. We get rid of Tamas by the hammering method, of Rajas by scrubbing, and of Sattva by applying the fire of discrimination and meditation.

‘Desires are like knots.’ Even the desire to see God is a knot which has to be cut. You remember when Sri Ramakrishna was going through the monistic practices with his Guru Totapuri. Sri Ramakrishna could eliminate all conceptions from his consciousness except the form of his beloved God, Kali. Totapuri picked up a piece of broken glass and pressed it between his eyebrows and said: “Concentrate the mind on this point.”

Again, “*When the seeds of Karma have been fried in the pan of Nirvikalpa you cannot sow them and get a harvest again*”, so said Ramakrishna. Even the worship of God is Karma, the result of Karma.

And then when ‘*all work is at an end*’ one gets absorbed in that Substance which is one’s own real nature. It cannot be described.

Now, hearing, reflection, assimilation and meditation are the processes of changing but they are little drops in the bucket compared with *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. A child plays housekeeping, but what is that compared with real housekeeping?

Reflection is *Manana*. It is superior to hearing, *Sravana*. When you engage yourself in *Manana* it is a hundred times superior to *Shravana*.

Meditation, *Nididhyasana*, is a hundred thousand times superior to *Manana*, but *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* is simply infinite in its results

We may well remember here the trumpet call of Swami Vivekananda: “*Awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached.*”

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, July 1965-66)

Leaves From an Ashrama

The Pragmatic Option
Swami Vidyatmananda

One day last spring, having nothing pressing to do, I amused myself by leafing through *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. I was struck by the number of entries setting forth arguments for the existence of God. I had never before realized that there could be so many, and arguments so ingenious. I smiled to note that most of the articles listed not only the so-called proofs, but equally the counter-evidences demolishing the proofs.

It seemed to me that there were at base three classic arguments concerned with establishing the existence of God — the cosmological, the ontological, and the teleological — each through the years subjected to adaptations, and each characterized by its own logical vindications and deficiencies.

According to the cosmological position, there has to be a First Cause, to set everything going, and who can that be other than God — who consequently must exist. But because this argument merely postpones an explanation — in that what we supposed to be God might have been created by some force prior to Him, the cosmological cannot be considered a valid proof. For my part, I rejected the concept of there having been a beginning, hence a Beginner.

In the ontological argument the logic is: since man can imagine a Perfect Being, He must exist, for He could not be perfect without the attribute of existence. This 'proof' has been frequently attacked as founded mostly on a play of words; and the Vedantist will reject it because it presupposes that man can visualize a Being who — if He be God — must be beyond human conception.

In the teleological argument the existence of God is assumed on the basis of what seems to be His works: the universe and its creatures. With this 'proof' I found myself in agreement, since it approaches the concept of *vijnana*, which views all this as a manifestation of Brahman. But I know that modern science generally rejects the teleological argument: evolution by natural selection makes God superfluous.

'Of course,' I mused, somewhat bored by these polemics, the really convincing argument for God's existence is the one which Sri Ramakrishna gave to Narendra, that he, Ramakrishna, had seen Him. But I know that this will be convincing only to those who fully accept Ramakrishna; thus as a general proof it is not sufficient.

I asked myself: 'What is my position? Surely I believe in God, but on what do I base that belief? Well, 'I decided,' partly on hope and partly on pragmatic considerations. Obviously I must go on with my spiritual practices in the hope that I myself will see God, thus furnishing an ironclad proof of His existence.'

'And in the meantime?' I asked myself.

'That's where pragmatism operates. Until I have seen Him I shall believe in God because of the general advantages which that belief affords me. Prayer brings me peace, so let me pray, whether or not I am sure that there is Anyone to hear. Relying on a Compassionate Being who understands and protects me helps me feel secure. Trying to feel that a Power is around me and indeed in me gives me courage. The pragmatic is an argument provisionally valid; if it tides me over until I obtain the supreme verification, it's proof enough for me, in having eased my passage through this life.'

And so, it being the hour of the evening service, I put away the big volume and went to the chapel to take advantage, as was my daily habit, of the pragmatic option.

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Programme for November - December 2017

Sunday discourses begin at the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 p.m.
Tel: 01628 526464 www.vedantauk.com

Nov 5	Jnana Yoga 23	Swami Dayatmananda
Nov 12	No Talk	
Nov 19	Jnana Yoga 24	Swami Dayatmananda
Nov 26	Day Retreat	
Dec 3	Jnana Yoga 25	Swami Dayatmananda
Dec 10	Holy Mother's Puja	
Dec 17	Jnana Yoga 26	Swami Dayatmananda
Dec 24	Christmas Eve	

Day Retreat

**With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 26th November
from 10:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.**

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

Holy Mother's Puja

10th December at Bourne End at 10:30 a.m.

Talk at 4:30 p.m.

Christmas Eve

24th December at Bourne End at 5 p.m.

continued from the front cover

To obtain that freedom is and ought to be the one aim of your having taken birth as a human being.

Swami Premananda

Let the mouth be closed, and actions speak. Is a person worthy to be called a human being if he cannot give up selfishness, if he cannot give up his pleasures of the senses? To take the name of Sri Ramakrishna, and at the same time to be selfish! Is there any progress for such a hypocrite? Think wisely and firmly; and act accordingly. Be completely desireless, but act.

Do not be swayed by words of praise or blame, or let your actions be influenced by the opinions of others. I see no evil in you. Who knows but that you may be a saint tomorrow? God plays with us by putting on various masks. We act under the control of our *samskaras* [tendencies]. We are all toys in the hands of the good Lord, and he is our refuge.

Trust in the Lord and act. Now all our efforts must be directed first to retrieve it; not by mere empty speech, but by sincere action, pledging all our heart and soul to it. Be active also. Free yourself from all sense of ego, and work selflessly. Whatever you do, do as the servant of the Lord. It is not a lazy man's job. Be up and doing!

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Empty Your Cup

A university professor went to visit a famous Zen master. While the master quietly served tea, the professor talked about Zen. The master poured the visitor's cup to the brim, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the overflowing cup until he could no longer restrain himself.

"It's overfull! No more will go in!" the professor blurted.

"You are like this cup," the master replied, "How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup."

Books

Once there was a well-known philosopher and scholar who devoted himself to the study of Zen for many years. On the day that he finally attained enlightenment, he took all of his books out into the yard, and burned them all.

(Zen Parables)

