

Vedanta

397 SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2017

Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj
New President of the Ramakrishna Order

Wanted: A Strength-giving Religion
Swami Ashokananda



Divine Wisdom

ABSORPTION

The subtle mind leads the aspirant nearer to God, but it cannot reach God, the supreme Atman. Having reached this stage, the world no longer holds any charm for the aspirant; he becomes absorbed in the consciousness of God. This absorption leads to Samadhi, an experience which cannot be described. It is beyond is and is not. There, there is neither happiness nor misery, neither light nor darkness. All is infinite Being - inexpressible.

Higher still is meditation. When a man practices this form of worship, he keeps up a constant flow of thought toward God and becomes absorbed in the living presence of his Chosen Ideal. He goes beyond prayer and japam, but the sense of duality remains.

Practice japam, whether you like it or not. As you persist, the mind is certain to become absorbed in contemplation.

Hold fast to the truth. Be pure-hearted. The purer you become the more will your mind be absorbed in God: You will be able to see the subtle deceptions of the mind, and you will be able to root them out.

When your mind becomes absorbed in meditation, a fountain of joy will spring up within you. Learn to be absorbed in him. Activity is not the goal. Work without attachment is only a means to absorption in God. At dead of night the mind becomes absorbed in God with very little effort.

The moment you become absorbed in the contemplation of God, you will experience unbounded joy. Days and nights will pass away in the blissful consciousness of God.

By steadfastness alone the mind becomes absorbed in God. Unless absorption is achieved, freedom from the temptations of the world is not possible. Lust, anger, delusion - these are strong foes. Be strong in the strength of God and escape from this net of Maya.

The mind is like a spoiled child always restless. Try repeatedly to steady it by fixing it on the Chosen Ideal, and at last you will become absorbed in him.

Vedanta

397 SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2017

Contents

194	NEW PRESIDENT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER
197	Editorial Worship of the Divine Mother -12
200	Wanted: A Strength-giving Religion <i>Swami Ashokananda</i>
217	The Path of the Devotee <i>Swami Saradananda</i>
222	Inter-connectedness <i>Swami Sunirmalananda</i>
227	Ramanuja and Vivekananda on Karma Yoga <i>Swami Bhaktananda</i>
233	The Quintessence of the Uddhava-Gita <i>Prof. K. Subrahmanian</i>
237	Leaves: On Provoking a State of Urgency <i>Swami Vidyatmananda</i>
239	Programme

ISSN 1355 - 6436



Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj
NEW PRESIDENT OF THE RAMAKRISHNA
ORDER

Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj was elected the President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at the meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Math and the Governing Body of the Mission held on 17 July 2017. He is the 16th President of the Order.

He was born at village Andami in the district of Tanjavur, Tamil Nadu, in 1929. Having lost his mother at a very young age, he was brought up by his aunt. In 1946 he completed his secondary school in Chennai with very good results. Since his father was working in Nasik, he went there and completed a diploma course in commerce.

Later, in 1949 he shifted to Mumbai where he accepted a job and also continued his studies.

He was a voracious reader and read many English literary works and books by Napoleon Hill on self-help. He was also influenced by Mahatma Gandhiji's thoughts.

He started practising, as advised by Gandhiji, the repetition of 'Sri Rama', and this became a turning point in his life to set the stage for future events. Sometimes he used to go for a solitary walk to the Worli beach in Mumbai and spend time quietly sitting on the huge rocks and watching the setting sun. One day while sitting there, a thought came to his mind, *'Well, these rocks are so big, the sea is so vast, the sky looks infinite, then what am I – a little speck on the surface of the earth. Why give so much importance to it?'*

Flash came the answer: It is true that you look like a speck on the surface of the earth, but within you there is a great presence which is greater than this universe. This thought came so forcefully that he felt someone was uttering those words into his ears. This idea lodged itself firmly in his mind. He was yet to read the Gita or the Upanishads at that time.

During this time he was staying in a hostel. One day while talking to a friend he came upon a report of the Mumbai branch of the Ramakrishna Order. He exclaimed: 'Is there such a place in Mumbai!' and asked his friend, 'Will you take me there?' His friend replied, 'Yes, I will take you. But don't tell anybody.'

Thus he started going to Mumbai Ashrama on the weekends. He read books of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, mainly *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Jnana Yoga* and *Thoughts of Power* and derived much insight and inspiration. The urge to find a satisfying answer to queries 'What is the meaning of this life?' and 'What should be my ideal in life?' which had been gnawing his mind became intense. Repetition of 'Sri Rama' was also going on all along. One day, while travelling in a bus, the answer bubbled from his heart, just as it had happened at the Worli beach – 'You will have to become a monk.' By this time he had become close to Swami Aparnanandaji of Mumbai Ashrama.

After much reflection on the next course of his life, he joined, at the age of 22, Mumbai Ashrama as a Brahmacharin, on the sacred birthday of Sri Ramakrishna in 1952. Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj, the seventh President of Ramakrishna Order, visited Mumbai Ashrama towards the end of the same year and gave him Mantra Diksha. He also received from Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj, Brahmacharya vows in 1956 and Sannyasa ordination in 1960.

As a novice at Mumbai Ashrama, he worked in different departments of the Ashrama. He also participated in drought relief camp in Aurangabad district where he conducted relief operations very efficiently along with other monks.

He first visited Belur Math in the year 1954 along with Swami Sambuddhanandaji, the then Head of Mumbai Ashrama. During this time he attended the concluding celebrations of Holy Mother's birth centenary and consecration of Holy Mother's temple at Jayrambati.

He was transferred to Kolkata branch of Advaita Ashrama in 1958. In 1961, he was sent to Mayavati to assist in the editing of *Prabuddha*

Bharata. Along with his assignment, he took keen interest in dairy, cultivation and other activities of the Mayavati Ashrama. He visited Mayavati and stayed there for a number of days on several occasions, although he, for the most part, stayed at Kolkata branch of the Advaita Ashrama. Advaita Ashrama, being chiefly a publishing house, he enthusiastically worked to improve the standard of publications, which received a lot of appreciation.

He was posted to Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, an educational complex near Belur Math, as its Secretary in 1976. During his long tenure of about 15 years there, the educational and rural welfare work of Saradapitha saw tremendous development. He, along with his monastic assistants, took up extensive relief operations during the devastating floods in West Bengal in 1978. From Saradapitha, he was posted to Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, as its Head in December 1991. The construction of the present magnificent Sri Ramakrishna Temple in Chennai Math was begun during his tenure.

He was appointed a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1983. In April 1995, he joined the Headquarters as an Assistant Secretary, and after about two years, he took charge as the General Secretary of the twin organizations. As the General Secretary, he steered the worldwide Ramakrishna Movement for ten long years until May 2007 when he was elected a Vice-President of the Order.

As General Secretary and Vice-President, he travelled extensively in India and different parts of the world and visited the branches of the Math and Mission and also unaffiliated centres in those places. Through those visits he endeavoured to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta among a vast number of people. He also gave Mantra Diksha to many spiritual seekers. He has contributed a number of articles to various journals of Ramakrishna Order.

After serving as a Vice-President for a decade he is now elected President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Editorial

Worship of the Divine Mother -12

In our last editorial we dwelt with mental worship. This is the third and most important part of worship. The speciality of mental worship is that it can be done by anyone, at any place, under any condition (For example in old age, sickness, while travelling etc.).

Let us remember that in mental worship one feels a sense of belonging entirely to God. The flowers one offers mentally should remind us that these are the spiritual qualities one need develop in order to realize God.

External worship (*Bahya Puja*)

Mental worship is followed by external worship where God is offered many items (called *upacharas*) such as water for washing one's feet, bathing, a welcome offering, food etc. Does God need all these items? Why offer peculiar items like water for washing feet, hands, and bathing etc.? The explanation is that in times of old, especially in tropical climates, men had to walk long distances. Naturally when they arrive they are dusty, tired, thirsty and hungry. And also apprehensive if they would be welcome or not. (Let us not forget that in earlier times hotels and motels were not there.) Hence injunctions are laid by the scriptures to treat a guest (*atithi*) as God in visible form. It is incumbent on all house-holders to receive all guests (even if they are not liked, it is a useful social custom) with joy and treat them with respect.

Worship of God in images

The worship of the images is a substitute for worship of God in Holy persons, which is the best form of worship. "*Realized persons are indeed gods*". There is a deep connection between the worship of the images and worship of guests; it is God, symbolized by these, that is worshipped and honoured. It is also another way of seeing God in everyone.

Items to be offered to the deity (*upacharas*)

After all these preliminaries are over the worshipper begins the actual offering of items known as *upacharas*. One can worship God with five, ten,

sixteen, or thirty-two items, though worship with ten items is the norm (called *Dasopachara puja*).

The items that are usually offered in the ten-item worship are:

Water for washing hands and feet, a special welcome in the form of a (cool) drink, and water for bathing. Then the guest is offered sandal paste, flowers, incense, light and food.

(Worship with sixteen items are usually offered on festival days. On these special occasions extra items such as beautiful garlands, dress, special dishes of food etc. are given to the Lord.)

If a person cannot afford to worship with all the innumerable items one can offer as many as one can afford. If that also is not possible one may perform worship with flowers alone as substitute for all the other items.

The ritual with ten items is followed by offering of handfuls of flowers called *pushpanjali*, symbolising surrendering the fruits of one's actions to the Chosen Deity. Worship, then, is concluded with Aratrikam.

Philosophy of Aratrikam

Aratrikam is the vesper service though it is performed in the day also, usually, at the end of special worship. It is marked with 5 items in sequence: light, water, cloth, flower and fanning with *chamar*. These five items represent the five elements fire, water, space, earth and air, out of which the whole universe is made. If the worship is done with sincerity and devotion it dawns on the worshipper that the whole universe, including himself belongs to God and that he has really nothing which he can call his own. What, then, can he give to the Lord? This ritual is symbolic of the complete surrender of the worshipper.

Distribution of Prasada (consecrated food)

When food is offered to God with devotion He accepts it with joy. It then, becomes sacred and spiritual. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi used to say that when she offered food to the Lord, she used to see a ray of light coming from the eyes of the Deity and touching the offered materials.

The food thus consecrated to God is called prasada. Puja is incomplete without sharing the offered food, to the devotees.

Worship without the distribution of prasada to devotees is ineffective. Devotees believe that prasada purifies the body and mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to regard prasada, especially the prasada of Lord Jagannath, as highly sacred and purifying.

Prasada also means God's Grace, and so partaking of prasada is an act of accepting divine blessings.

The Symbolism of Puja

Among the various articles required for Puja water represents faith (Shraddha), flowers devotion; light represents knowledge, food represents body, conch stands for the sacred syllable OM, bell for the *anahata*, the eternal sound heard by Yogis; incense for sensual pleasures, Pranam or salutation for humility and self-surrender, fruits for the results of one's actions, and circumambulation for seeing God everywhere.

According to another reading (*Advaitic* view) the human body represents the temple and the Soul within is God Himself. Realization consists in perceiving the identity or non-difference between the soul and God.

Puja is to be done with the feeling of identity of oneself with the object of worship. Meditation consists of freeing the mind of all sense-objects. Bathing consists in cleaning the mind of all dross and impurities. Purity consists in controlling of the senses.

Meditation consists of making the mind free from all worldly ideas and thoughts; the act of welcome consists in driving away all selfish activities. Ascertainment of Truth constitutes the seat of God; offering of bath water to the deity consists in being bathed in the immortal splendour of the Soul; to see the Atman in everything is sandal paste. Going around (*Pradakshina*) consists in becoming immortal and salutation in becoming conscious of oneness with God.

Rituals are not the only way of worshipping God. Vocal and work are also ways of worshipping Him. These will be discussed in our next editorial.

(To be continued)

Wanted: A Strength-giving Religion

Swami Ashokananda

I

In addition to the eternal universal religion, the Sanatana Dharma, which is fundamental to all minds in all times, every age requires a Yuga-dharma or religion of the epoch. The Yuga-dharma lays emphasis on those specific principles of religion that are especially suited to the needs and qualifications of the people of its particular time.

Many different qualities and powers of the mind have been considered basic to spiritual development and hence stressed by different religions. Among these qualities and powers of the mind are kindness, charity, compassion, knowledge, truthfulness, peacefulness, purity, self-discipline, self-abnegation, renunciation and strength. Even with individuals such virtues receive varying emphasis. One spiritual aspirant thinks the cultivation of purity most important; a second favours self-abnegation, a third compassion; and so on. Looking historically and in wider perspective at this tendency to preference, we see that different epochs in the religious life of humanity are also characterized by accentuation of different virtues.

I believe that the present age in every part of the world needs a religion that emphasizes strength above all other qualities. One cannot, of course, say that any religious practice is devoid of strength, because it is impossible to call a practice religious unless it is strength-giving. However, the strength usually derived from religious practices in general is not what I have in mind. In addition to such strength, our age requires special emphasis on the acquisition of strength as an ideal in itself.

Why do I propose for this age a religion with such emphasis on strength? Because we are in a very sorry plight. Humanity has sunk deep into an unprecedented materialism. I admit materialism has prevailed before among some people in certain times and countries, but mankind as a whole has never suffered from so gross, wide-spread and deep-rooted a materialism as now. If human nature is to be rescued from the ravaging effects of this, it will have to cultivate a strength of will proportionate to the strength of the evil it would conquer.

Is it not logical to think that our progress depends on our own power of will? In our present state we are bound by ignorance and its effects—attachment to things which are unreal or poisonous; lack of desire to think about the truth, even when it seems self-evident; and lack of self-control. We can free ourselves from this condition of confused understanding and paralysis of will only by somehow evoking a countervailing strength of will.

Considering the situation in this light, we must admit that whether we follow the path of devotion, reason, action or concentration to realize our spiritual ideal, strength of will is needed above everything. Without it, we make no real advance. We progress and then retrogress; we reach a certain point, but cannot go beyond it. Everyone has noticed that some spiritual aspirants remain in the same state of development for many years. Often they ascribe this to karma, to heredity, or even to some mysterious influence. But whatever the reason given for spiritual stagnation, its real cause is weakness of will.

However, do not waste time and energy asking how weakness of will originated. All that matters is to be rid of it—and to be rid of it means developing its opposite. To the degree the will is strengthened, realization of Truth is achieved. With only moderate

will-power we make moderate progress, but with a strong will our progress is rapid. Even if there are obstructive elements in our mind in the beginning, we can overcome and destroy them by sheer force of will and so go ahead.

II

The most fundamental doctrine of the non-dualistic Vedanta affirms that the soul or self contains all perfection within itself and that this perfection is not damaged in the slightest by its apparent bondage. Just as a king may dream of wearing rags and begging for food, so we imagine ourselves sinful and weak. In spite of his dream the king does not really lose his kingdom. And though we are under the influence of illusion, we do not really lose our pristine purity, but remain fully illumined, strong and perfect. If we are to be reminded of anything concerning ourselves, shall it be of our ignorance and illusion or of our true original nature, which is eternally existent within us? Shall we tell ourselves that we are poor beggars, or that we are really the king of the world, who lacks nothing? Is not our waking self truer than our dreaming self?

Swami Vivekananda called attention to the fact that dualistic religions have usually stressed man's weakness and dependence. This unfortunate attitude of the dualistic religions has made progress in spiritual life difficult. If a man's worship and meditation are accompanied by the feeling that he is weak and helpless, this feeling will persist in him and vitiate all his spiritual efforts. On the other hand, if strength is emphasized at the outset, great progress is possible and can be easily achieved.

Why do you think religion made the mistake of emphasizing weakness instead of strength? In the first place, since knowledge is progressive, even religion has taken time to find itself adequately.

Though in ancient days there were men who had seen God and knew ways by which He could be realized, many other better ways of knowing Him remained to be discovered, and at least some of them have been discovered with the passing of the centuries. I venture to say that in the course of future ages we shall know even more about God and about the ways of realizing Him than we do now. Undoubtedly men will always find surer, truer paths of attaining to the Highest. I am not saying that all the conclusions of religion are wrong, but that improvements can be made. Thus, by remembering that religion is progressive, we understand why some teachers in the past emphasized weakness rather than strength.

Secondly, even some of those who believed in the Divinity of man have said: "*Though the human soul is perfect and Divine, as long as we are ignorant of it, we should not speak about it*"; or, "*If you feel you are body and mind, why say you are Divine? Say so only when you actually perceive you are Divine*". Such an attitude represents a reversion to the tenet of weakness, which is explainable only as a part of the general tendency to maintain the so-called normal state of existence, the accustomed mode of consciousness.

People assume all kinds of attitudes to avoid changing their present state of existence. Many conceive an extreme hatred for religion. Others are supercilious and patronizing. They say, "*Let the superstitious have a few toys to play with, if they must. We, however, are enlightened; we have gone beyond religion*". Still others accord religion only a psychological value: they believe it has a quieting effect on the mind, but no reality.

Then there are those who accept the truth of religion, but do not want to realize it fully. Only a few, they say, are meant to become mystics—the vast majority are not intended to have God-vision; all God expects of most men is that they live a

moral life in the world and die with a prayer on their lips. Also, there are men and women who have a little taste, a little sentiment, for religion, but who cannot say from experience that they have perceived God or the Self or that they have attained immortality—they relegate such experiences to life after death. Others justify their present mode of life by declaring that God has pre-determined the rate of our progress in each life. They say: "*Since God has graduated our development, is it not wrong to force our way to Him? Concentration and meditation, which intensify spiritual progress, are surely harmful!*" Still others are afraid of religion. They find that if they become spiritual all fun goes from life. "*Oh, they complain, I was so happy before: religion has taken away my happiness.*"

Thus, the majority of us hate religion, desire a weak religion, fear the results of religion, or assume some evasive attitude toward religion, because we want to remain the miserable finite self that we feel ourselves to be. Clinging to the meanness and narrowness of our present state, we nevertheless hope somehow to reach a condition of perpetual blessedness!

The mind certainly has peculiar ways of trying to maintain its *status quo*. It does not want to change, and it resists with great might any effort to follow a new path. So we tread the same path over and over again. The mind is playing tricks upon us: seeming to indulge us, it really prevents our going forward. We have to recognize this tendency of the mind and combat it. If, while we try to combat it, our religion tends to increase our weakness and fear, it becomes a positive disadvantage. What we need is a religion which stresses our true, Divine nature, and of all religions Vedanta alone does so.

Other religions begin with the assumption that we are ignorant, impure, and imperfect; that we have been born, we shall die, and that we are dependent on God. We pray, beg for mercy, ask for kindness, and expect to make progress through God's grace. Not finding God, we seek a man and take the same attitude toward him. But by starting with the assumption that our present imperfect state is normal and that we are by nature worldly, we find it very difficult to make spiritual efforts in the right spirit.

Sri Ramakrishna used to tell the story of a lion that came upon a flock of sheep and was amazed to see another lion grazing with the flock and bleating. When the lion approached the sheep-lion, the latter fled in terror. The lion bided his time and one day succeeded in catching the sheep-lion and dragging him to a brook. The sheep-lion bleated and quaked in fear. "*Why are you so frightened?*" the lion asked: "*You and I are alike we are both lions. Look at yourself!*" The sheep-lion gazed at his reflection in the brook and saw he was the same as the other. "*Now,*" said the lion, "*roar like me*". But when the sheep-lion tried to roar, he could only bleat. So the lion got some meat and thrust it into his mouth. With the taste of blood, the sheep-lion began to roar and knew he was really a lion.

Just as a lion made to live among sheep behaves as a sheep, so a man made to feel weak and ignorant behaves accordingly. Far from being the weak, cringing, dependent creatures we think ourselves to be, we are the all-powerful Self.

III

Some say. "*Until we learn self-discipline, conquer the senses, forget the world, and become pure, it is impossible for us to feel our inner strength*". In speaking so, they put the cart before the horse. How are you ever going to conquer the senses unless you first go beyond

the senses? Whenever you succeed in dominating your senses, you feel yourself as above them. You may not observe it, but that is what happens psychologically. In any conquest of the senses, you invariably have a feeling of your higher being: and because of this feeling it becomes possible for you to see the limitation and worthlessness of the senses and hence to rule over them. Conquest always comes with the realization of our superiority over what we are trying to conquer.

Therefore, to those who ask if we can feel we are the Self before fully conquering the senses and body consciousness, I say that it is indeed possible. Seek the help of those who have already realized the Self! There is nothing like a burning lamp from which to light your own lamp. It is easy to warm yourself near a roaring fire. Be in the company of those who do not speak of the body and worldly things or try to drag your mind down to them, those who are not identified with the lower self but with the higher. The fire of such souls will communicate itself to your heart, and then the consciousness of the true Self will not be difficult to attain.

If you are unable to find such souls, you can still dwell on the truth of your Divinity. At first this truth will be only verbal to you. But since it is the truth, it will gradually create a reverberation in your being. Hitherto silent chords of your memory will resound in answer to the call. While repeating, "*I am not this body, not this mind.*" try by all means to conquer your senses. But never forget to say to yourself: "*Always, even in the deepest ignorance, I am still the shining Self, the Eternal One*".

In ancient books one of the names given the Self is Abhiih, the Fearless One. Swami Vivekananda used to delight in that word. We are the Fearless One! We can look the whole universe, infinite time and everything contained in infinite time and experience in

the face, and say: "*You have no power to dominate or conquer us*". Is it not true? Even though misfortunes come, even though destruction rains upon us, we outlast them all.

The human soul surmounts every conceivable circumstance: nothing can stand against it. Death has come to us many times: nevertheless we have outlived death. The only thing in the whole universe which survives all destruction and is truly abhiih, fearless, is the real Self of man. Therefore be fearless! Say: "*My name is the Fearless One. Abhiih! I conquer every difficulty!*" Fear is crippling our strength and fear is the result of our identification with the lower self. Our greatest need is to be jolted out of such identification.

The one doctrine that can jolt us out of it is the doctrine of the Divinity of the Self, which says: "*You are Divine: you are the free one. Never were you born: never will you die. All that happens in time—birth, death, everything—is just a dream. You, the dreamer, are really the free one, the witness. Infinite truth and power are within you*".

Though a man may have the faith that he is the perfect, infinite Self and constantly affirms himself to be such, faith and affirmation alone are insufficient; he must live up to them. We cannot say we are birthless, deathless, and the next moment seek the comforts and pleasures of the body and other self-indulgences. It is like planting a tree and immediately destroying it. Renunciation of our false identity must always accompany the affirmation of our true nature, and it should be a triumphant renunciation, the renunciation not of the weak, but of the strong. We renounce the lower vision in order to live up to our higher Self. When the beggar discovers he is really a prince, he throws off his rags, puts on royal raiment and mounts the throne. The lower gives way to the higher.

Achievements in the lower planes of existence are paltry compared to those resulting from renunciation. Men enjoy earning

their livelihood and having a pleasant home and family life, but they do not know of the inconceivably greater enjoyment which is theirs when they overcome the limitations of their little selves and find their unity with all, when they are able to enter into the hearts of all.

Remind yourself of the implications of affirming your own true nature, and then every smallness will fall off. Deliberately get rid of all that is holding you to the lower vision. That is renunciation. It is not a coercion of the self: it is not giving up what is essentially ours. It is renouncing what does not belong to our true Self.

If we want the renunciation which accompanies the affirmation of our higher nature to be real, it must be accompanied by asceticism, *tapasya*. Asceticism not only includes meditating on our true nature, but it means trying to break the bondage of the senses, the body, and the mind. It means that we starve the lower nature in order to throw it off easily.

Mortification of the body, when we still fully identify ourselves with the body, is harmful. Perhaps it is because self-mortification has often been practised with unfortunate results by those who are dominated too intensely by body consciousness that the word has gained certain disagreeable connotations. The Sanskrit word *tapasya* suggests only beauty and joy. It brings to mind the consciousness of Universal Being, of freedom from all entanglement, of a tremendous power by which to master the forces trying to dominate us. Without the feeling of triumph implied by the word *tapasya*, self-mortification certainly is harmful. But with this triumphant consciousness it becomes a wonderful instrument to help us attain our shining goal.

IV

The doctrine of the Divinity of the Self represents the quickest, straightest path to the goal, not only for individuals, but for mankind collectively. It should therefore receive wide dissemination. Swami Vivekananda said: "*Go from door to door and tell this truth to men and women, old and young, saint and sinner, learned and ignorant. Give everyone this life-giving, strength-giving doctrine of the Divinity of the Self. Teach it from village to village. Every other thing that human beings need, such as economic rehabilitation and so on, should be offered only after the human mind has been flooded with the idea of man's true being*".

The Swami, knowing your greatest need, drew your attention again and again in the course of his teaching in this country to your true, Divine nature; and although he knew that the most pressing need of the Hindus was to solve their economic and social problems, in India too he focused attention on the Divinity of the Self. It was his prescription for all humanity. It was the dominant note in all his teachings everywhere. And more and more, as I observe the trend of things, I see no other way for peace, prosperity and the growth of man along the right lines, no other way for the salvation of man, than remembering what man really is. To the extent religions fail to emphasize this, they can serve only partial needs.

Do churches have any legitimate place in the life of Western nations, or, for that matter, of Eastern nations? Throughout the last few centuries they have been only tolerated by the intelligentsia. You may protest, "*But we go to church*". Yes, perhaps you do, but nevertheless you are plunged in materialism. Your whole civilization is based on the exploitation of others. You are not

giving adequate place or time for individuals to enjoy life truly or to recognize and realize deeper values. Almost all institutions, even those that are religious, are geared directly or indirectly to material ends.

Why has this happened? Every church, every religion, has a supreme purpose to fulfill in the life of man, and that is not merely to inspire belief and faith in Divine Reality, but to bring about actual experience of It. *Religion means changing within*. It is constant change toward the end of being able to say, "*I have seen God; I have found the Eternal*". When you have found the Eternal, nothing in time will continue to be precious to you. Even infinite time is nothing, compared to eternity. Do you think a person who has touched eternity can attach value to things in time? He goes beyond temporal values. This is what religion must lead us to do; and I say this must be emphasized continually so that man's outlook may undergo a fundamental change. Otherwise, materialism will hold man its prisoner forever.

Only by sheer strength shall we be able to maintain the new vision of ourselves. The new vision is itself made of strength. The one who says, "*I am the resplendent Self*", cannot be a cringing person. He cannot whine, "*I am weak*". The accent should be ever and always on strength, and therefore religion should be based on strength. I have not the least hesitation in saying that religions which do not provide this element of strength in our existence, if not actually discarded, will be of scant help to us in the present age. They may serve the purposes of a handful of people, but will fail the majority. This applies not only to religions outside India, but also to certain religions in India.

Yet hope lies in the fact that all religions can, if they wish, embody strength in one form or another.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say again and again: "*He who says he is sinful, sinful he becomes.*" Religions, even as individuals, can learn to insist on only the highest consciousness. The Master could not tolerate anyone's thinking of himself as ignorant, sinful or bound. He would permit such talk from no one: whether devotee or jnani. He would say: "*What! You have taken the name of God today, and you say you are impure? You are a child of God, a devotee of God, and still you say you are ignorant, bound, and impure?*"

As a boy he had heard people declare that to take the Lord's name was purifying, and yet he had found them daily asking for purity! "*Yesterday he took the name of the Lord and was purified. Why, then should he ask to be made pure again today? Has he not already been purified?*"—thus the boy would wonder. But as he grew up he understood, and so emphasized the necessity of maintaining one's identity with the Self. He would invariably say: "*Never call yourself impure! We believe that God is our Father and that we are His children. Is this a make-believe relationship?*" We are indeed His children, and if we are children of God, we are God Himself. Children of God are bound to be Divine, even as children of men are human. Sri Ramakrishna taught this essential monism to all. He showed that this strength-giving, spiritualizing, transforming idea, by which we are awakened from our dream of imperfection and weakness, can be embodied even in devotional religions.

Religions certainly do not have to remain what they are. In fact, they cannot avoid changing. Show me a religion which has not undergone profound changes! Unfortunately, some of the changes have not been religious in nature or purpose. But let us forget the mistakes of the past. All religions can now, with the best of motives, with the best of effects, change from an emphasis on weakness to an overwhelming emphasis on strength. Men are verily

incarnations of Light. This doctrine is seen in Christianity in the Gospel of St. John. Not only is Christ the Divine Light, but all other men are living incarnations of Light. Why not emphasize this? Why hold to the doctrine that we are born sinners, doomed to fear and supplication? That is an unwholesome doctrine. How great an obstruction dualistic religions present to spiritual progress by teaching us to say, "*O Lord, I am a miserable creature; be kind to me!*" If you are convinced to begin with that you are miserable, it is psychologically impossible for you to learn to feel otherwise. Every time you say, "*Oh, miserable that I am!*" you are cultivating and perpetuating your misery. Under such negative conditions progress is at best slow.

V

Religion has not only its eternal aspect, as a means to God-realization, but also its secular and temporal aspect. Of millions of men everywhere who go to churches and temples, only a few earnestly practise religion in its higher aspect. The rest go through the forms of religion, honouring it as belief and doctrine. Even on them, to the extent that it regulates their lives, religion doubtless has a certain effect.

In addition to helping in the realization of purely spiritual ends, religion should so guide and inform secular activities as to make these lead directly to the realization of spiritual ends. The so-called worldly life can be lived in many ways, some of which are more in consonance with spirituality than others, and therefore preferable. Also, if secular life is lived richly and in a most dignified and self-respecting manner, it can be transcended soon and easily.

Though religions have often influenced secular life profoundly, this influence has not always been salutary. The great zeal developed by proselytizing religions has in some cases not been

used strictly for spiritual purposes or to uplift humanity, but has rather been used to disrupt the life of mankind. Some religions have inculcated aggressiveness, with the result that their followers have become fierce and self-aggrandizing on the material plane. Other religions have emphasized peace, gentleness and non-injury, with the result that their followers have become timid or almost cowardly, incapable of resistance even when these are imperative.

Since religions affect even those who are not seeking spiritual illumination, the responsibility of religions for producing unfortunate results in the worldly life of such people cannot be ignored. I am not forgetting for a moment that the essential function of religions is to lead men to spiritual illumination, not to worldly power and prosperity. But considering the history of the various religions and in view of the benefits and blessings of strength when it is truly conceived and is unaccompanied by subversive influences, we must admit that the masses of men will be best served in the affairs of their daily life by a religion emphasizing true strength. Yes, even in secular and temporal affairs the accentuation of strength will be most beneficial.

It is because there is a trend in America emphasizing strength that creeds such as Christian Science, New Thought and Unity flourish here. These religions tend to create an attitude of strength in business and domestic affairs and so benefit the temporal, secular life of the people. The followers of every one of them have borrowed directly or indirectly from the Indian Vedanta. For instance, Mrs. Eddy in her early editions of *Science and Health* quoted from two translations of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, though these quotations have been omitted from later editions. (I myself have read those earlier editions.)

Why is there this trend in America toward the Vedantic doctrine of strength? Because this doctrine is in accord with the genius of your people. Yours was a pioneer country. Men had to be strong and ready to fight in order to overcome difficulties and establish themselves. They required self-confidence. Had they thought that they were weak, miserable, helpless sinners, America would not have accomplished what she has.

Swami Vivekananda used to say that in the West people were taught by the gentle teaching of Christ but actually followed the strong teaching of Sri Krishna, while in India they were taught the strong teaching of Sri Krishna but actually followed the gentle teaching of Christ! The paradox amused him. There is no denying that you Westerners did not follow the Christ's teachings in becoming what you are. If you had turned the other cheek when the Red Indians had attacked, either you would have remained always on the Eastern coast or you would have gone back to Europe. If you had given your cloak when your coat was taken, you would not now be possessed of this rich country.

Everywhere the Western people have gone, they have seized all they could lay hands on. They have even sent missionaries to try to gain possession of people's souls! That has certainly been the exact opposite of following the Christian teaching. Moreover, Christ said you should take no thought for the morrow. Is this a civilization which is not thinking beyond today?

So it is that you, having ignored the religion you profess, have taken to the Eastern doctrine of strength, but have stopped far short of any true application of it. The application thus far made by Western borrowers must, indeed, be called rather crude and limited. But as time passes, I think the majority of you will learn to assimilate it in a better spirit, even in the temporal field you will

certainly find a higher application mandatory in relation to true spiritual achievements. When you do apply it properly, there will come a tremendous transformation. I am not saying the majority of people will plunge into deep meditation or go into the forest to devote themselves to tapasya, but they most assuredly will become alive to their spiritual nature to a degree heretofore undreamt of.

Perhaps you are unaware of how urgent it is that the American people become more conscious of their higher nature. They were formerly reputed to be very generous, but lately they have tended to become somewhat calculating. They are now generous mainly when their basic self-interest is not affected, and thus their heritage of generosity has been partially lost. They are reverting to the ways of the older civilization which they repudiated in order to establish this country, and in so doing are violating their fundamental nature.

However, the God of America will probably not allow this reversion to continue. When the American people truly understand and apply the religion of strength, which until now they have accepted only superficially and have applied chiefly in the interests of worldly gain, a veritable miracle will come to pass. They may not go to churches or kneel down to pray, but they will certainly be actuated on all planes to live up to the highest that is in them—they will manifest their best on the physical, mental, aesthetic, moral and spiritual levels.

I believe this is the religion that the world is waiting for.

In conclusion let me tell you something of the doctrine of *kundalini*, with which you are no doubt partially acquainted. Its essential idea concerns a power latent in man. When this awakes, he realizes God. As there is individual kundalini, so there is

collective kundalini, the kundalini of all humanity, called *Brahma-kundalini*.

Swami Vivekananda once said with great solemnity: "*Do not forget that in this age the Brahma-kundalini has been awakened!*" At no other time has this been possible, because in this age alone all humanity has become one. Parts of nations and civilizations have sometimes in the past been galvanized by spiritual power, but in this age the supreme miracle has taken place—the Brahma-kundalini, the sleeping Divinity of the whole of mankind, has been awakened!

Remember, then, that these are most auspicious days, and that many wonders shall be realized. Vast masses of men the world over will be actuated by the higher consciousness. In the cold season even the hardiest tree finds it difficult to develop one green shoot, but when spring comes, all nature puts forth leaf and blossom in abundance. How symbolic it is! In this age the awakening of a spiritual spring has indeed come. I fully believe it is just a question of time before tremendous spiritual fervour will be evidenced everywhere and the great majority of men and women will be transformed.

Do not, however, count on this miracle and sit idle in the meantime. Since we are truly the pure, perfect, eternal Divine Spirit, let us face our problems at once, whatever they are and begin to live up to the truth of our being. Let us manifest the Divine Self from this moment on, and at every moment!

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, May-June, 1962)

The Path of the Devotee

Swami Saradananda

Generally speaking, the struggle to know the transcendental Reality has long since taken two courses. First what is known in the *Shastras* as the process 'Not this', 'not this', is the path of knowledge which seeks to attain fulfilment by negation. And the other the process of 'this', 'this', is the path of *Bhakti* (Devotion). The *sadhaka* on the path of knowledge is from the very beginning fully aware of the consummation of his path and tries to approximate it by constant meditation upon the goal, while those who take to the path of *Bhakti* are in most cases ignorant of the highest end in the beginning, but at last realise the same transcendent being by advancing step by step from one ideal to another.

But in either case, the angle of vision is changed, and both have to renounce the feverish attachment for the world. But with the *Jnani* the renunciation of everything commences from the very start, while the *Bhakta* begins by giving up little by little for the sake of his Beloved but finally ends in realising the same, *Brahman*, by renouncing all, like the *Jnani*. The scriptures define dispassion as the renunciation of that outlook of the world which is defiled by selfishness and sense-enjoyment.

Very easily arises the knowledge of the transiency of the world, when we begin to ponder over this ever-changing human life that ultimately ends in death. It seems that in ancient ages man found out the Reality, *the First Cause*, first through the path of knowledge by renouncing the popular view of the world and life that makes one forget the Reality. And for the same reason we find in the *Upanishads* that the highest development of the philosophy of *Jnana* was already arrived at even before a full development of the

different aspects of Bhakti was attained; although it is true that from the very early time, these two paths were in vogue.

We have ample evidence in the Upanishads of the fact that man soon became introspective as he proceeded with the analytical process of negation, 'not this,' 'not this,' in his search after the Eternal First Cause. He soon realised that more than any other external object, his own body and mind are chiefly instrumental in getting himself tagged to the phenomenal world. So they, if properly directed, would help him more in finding out that First Cause, than all other external aids. "*By examining a single grain in a rice pot, one can tell if the whole rice is well-boiled or not.*" Similarly if one can find out the Eternal Being within one's own self, one can see Him in all. Thus to a pursuer of the path of knowledge, the only aim and ideal is to know '*who I am.*'

As has been already told, be he a Jnani or a Bhakta, he has to give up his attachment to the world. When the renunciation becomes complete and no other thought or idea of the world can arise in the mind, which is held in perfect stillness almost to the point of negation, it is the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* spoken of in the Shastras. How a seeker on the path of knowledge attains this state of Nirvikalpa and what are his realisations, we shall have occasion to deal with later on. Let us here describe the way in which a Bhakta reaches such a state.

The Bhakta, though he perceives the transiency of the world, believes in a personal God and so also believes in the reality of the phenomenal world, His creation. All persons and objects are dear to him, as he finds them all connected with God. He renounces all those objects that blur his vision of the Beloved. His only aim and ideal is to merge himself in the love and thought of some particular

aspect of God and then his whole life becomes an oblation on the altar of love for the Lord.

Now let us see how a Bhakta loses himself in the one thought of his Beloved and forgets the existence of all outside world and ultimately reaches the state of Nirvikalpa. As has been already hinted, the Bhakta accepts one particular form of God as his Chosen Ideal and begins to think and meditate on That alone. In the beginning he fails to bring before his mind's eye in meditation the complete picture of his Chosen Ideal. But as he proceeds on with his practice of meditation his mind gets more and more concentrated and his mental image of God also becomes more and more vivid and steady. And subsequently in a profounder state of meditation, the image appears to be living and it becomes possible even for the devotee to feel His Divine touch and hold talks with Him. At that state, whether with eyes opened or closed, the least concentration makes the devotees feel the living presence of his Beloved. Then again, from the belief that it is his Lord Who has assumed all the different forms, the devout sadhaka perceives the emanation of various other divine forms from his own chosen Beloved. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, *'To him who is blessed with the vision of one such living divine form, the visions of other forms of God come easily of themselves'*.

But there is one point which needs elucidation here. Though these visions have their inception in the subjective mind of the devotee, yet, in the matured state of meditation, when the vistas of the thought world are opened up to the mental gaze, they assume all the true colourings of objective reality as experienced, in the waking state.

And as those divine visions begin to come oftener and oftener and the consciousness of the reality of thought-world grows

deeper and deeper, the scales fall from his eyes and the devotee begins to perceive that the so called objective-world with all its apparent concreteness is but constructed of thought fabrics. And again the visions in the super-conscious state appear with such an all-absorbing reality, that for the time being, the objective world appears to be completely obliterated from his consciousness.

And this state has been described in the Scriptures as *Savikalpa Samadhi*. In that state of consciousness, though the material world disappears altogether, yet there still remains for him the other world, the world of thought. Then the Bhakta feels the joys and sorrows of life with his God exactly as we feel in our relations with the objects and persons of the outside world. Only there is this difference that the web of all his emotions and desires is woven round his Beloved. And as then in his mind various waves of thought still arise around the central theme, his Lord, the Shastras define the state as *Savikalpa*, i.e., the super-conscious state where mentation is not completely stopped, but is held fast to one idea only.

Thus, by meditating on one object of the thought-world, the perceptions of the gross external world disappear altogether, and when one idea gets hold of the mind strongly, all other ideas also fall off from there. The Bhakta who has advanced so far is not far-from reaching the state of *Nirvikalpa*. It is needless to point out that he who has been able so much to get rid of the idea of the reality of the world, has got his will sufficiently strengthened and mind keen.

And as soon as he comes to learn that if he can bring about a complete cessation of all mentations, his enjoyment of the divine bliss will be much more intense than otherwise, his mind eagerly runs towards the realisation of that state and through the grace of

God and the Guru, he soon crosses the thought-world too, and realises the absolute unity of the supreme Brahman of the Jnani. Or it may be that his intense love for God takes him ultimately to that state and then he feels like the Gopis of Vrindavan the union with the Beloved.

Thus has been described the gradual process of reaching the state of highest Samadhi in our Shastras. But as in the divine Incarnations both the human and divine elements are harmoniously combined from the very beginning, at times even during the period of sadhana, they appear as endowed with the powers and glories of perfection. It so happens because they have the inborn capacity to traverse equally both the realms, the human and the divine. Or it may be that divinity being their native nature it manifests itself at times through the cloak of their humanity. Whatever may be the causes, these facts of the lives of incarnations always appear as inscrutable mysteries to the human intellect. And it does not seem likely that the mysteries will ever be solved. But this much is certain that if we enter into the study of their lives reverentially, it will do us a great good.

In the ancient Puranic age, the human side of their lives was ignored and only the divine side was emphasised upon, whereas in this age of scepticism, the divine side is completely ignored and the human side only is discussed. But here we shall try to help our readers to see both the human and divine elements present side by side in the lives of incarnations. And this has become possible for us to understand only because we have seen that wonderful humanly divine life of Sri Ramakrishna

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, August 1946-47).

Inter-Connectedness

Swami Sunirmalananda

A century ago, there was concern when horse-carriage drivers heard that machines would be pulling carriages in the future. The introduction of motor-cars brought great worry. However, the world did not end.

Internet of Things is arriving soon. Until now, we had our mobile phones, pads and computers linked to the internet. Next, we had the inevitable GPS. Soon, countless devices will be connected to the internet. The real world will be connected to the virtual world. They say machines will invade human life. Devices around us shall begin to “talk” and to “participate” in our day-to-day life. Our lives will be easier, with machines doing everything for us.

First came virtual reality. That universe, however, was hidden in the computer. Then came Augmented Reality. Augmented Reality is the twin sister of *IoT* (Internet of Things). Augmented Reality is linking the real and the virtual. It is experiencing the world around more intensely.

And then comes Internet of Things. We shall soon live in a dream world. We need not “work”, our gadgets will work. We need not think, our gadgets will think for us. We need not cook, our gadgets will cook for us. This is, as technologists call it, intelligence of machines.

For one thing, connecting different things is a great idea. There was a time when your room would be full of machines. One for typing, one for playing music, one for seeing movies, one for taking pictures, a telephone to talk, and so on. Imagine the clutter.

Now, everything has entered your little mobile phone—talking, typing, watching movies—everything!

Yet, something is missing.

Technology feeds data, and devices provide information. Millions of gigabytes of data is processed quickly and efficient answers and solutions are brought forth. Machines mean lightning speed. Thus, machines mean speedy action, total perfection in work, capability of microscopic vision, better lifestyle and happiness. Numerous important fields like medicine are immensely benefited by machines becoming “intelligent”.

However, intelligence is something different. Though we may call them intelligent in the near future, machines are machines—and cannot of themselves become “intelligent”. Whatever the definition of intelligence, consciousness is fundamental. Despite all attempts, machines can’t be conscious beings. Response to stimulus and providing information using already stored data is just mechanical work. Countless living beings, including humans, do the same. Millions of us lead unconscious lives—like robots. Our actions are all reflex actions and are born of previous experience or “data” within. So, all the intelligence of devices till now, despite tremendous technological development, is superimposed and not original.

Then can we say that machines and nature around us actually and truly participate with our lives? It is the same with living beings. When we “*wake up*” and are conscious participants in life, we are intelligent beings. So, machines can be “intelligent” when they behave like conscious beings. But, can they be conscious? They are inert and are unconscious.

Perhaps this is not true. What we call inert matter too has consciousness within. This is the fundamental concept of Vedanta. Since thousands of years, Vedanta has been declaring again and again: “*There is One Supreme Consciousness behind all manifestation and multiplicity.*”

This is, however, a philosophy. Philosophy says many things and technology and science have no patience to listen to such imaginations. Is it imagination? But suppose science too says the same thing?

This brings us to the most remarkable scientist of the 20th century, Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose. In 1901, Dr. J. C. Bose demonstrated in London and in Paris that both inorganic and organic matter show the same feelings and emotions when subjected to various experiences. He took a living creature, a plant and a piece of tin. He connected them all to subtle instruments of his own creation. Even as hundreds saw, he demonstrated how all the three—the dead, the living and the metal—showed similar responses. All showed fear, danger signals, etc. Through this glorious experiment Dr. J. C Bose declared to the world that everything is basically one and interconnected.

Dr. J.C. Bose is thus the pioneer of modern technology. Accept it or not, his contributions to electromagnetism led to our enjoying phone, TV and so on. Thanks to his numerous other discoveries that the lifestyle of the 20th and 21st centuries is better. And, when we are ushering in the *Internet of Things age*, we must thank him once again. He shows how metals, and thereby devices and instruments, can truly be intelligent.

In Bose’s method, you don’t inject data. Data is already inherent; you need only know how to tap that information. Once

you do, you are truly making everything around you alive and vibrant.

Bose was a humble soul. He said that while he demonstrates that metals too have feelings, he is reminded of the ancient Vedic dictum that behind everything there is that one Reality. The *Katha Upanishad* declares, *“He who sees the Eternal amongst the changing things, Consciousness behind everything, One behind the multiplicity, is indeed a wise person. Such a person alone shall have lasting happiness. None other.”*

Behind everything there is the One. Whether it is inert matter or conscious living being—there is the same Reality manifesting in different forms. This has been the fundamental theme of Vedanta.

In a sense, science is progressing rapidly. The 21st century scientists have advanced a lot because they have begun to think along these Vedantic lines. Swami Vivekananda declared that the discoveries of modern scientists are faint echoes of the discoveries of ancient Vedic sages. Thus, modern scientists are progressing towards that unity. Though they are trying to connect everything using the internet—physically—eventually they will surely come to the conclusion that there is already a connection. If there was no connection already, you couldn’t connect anything. This is the first right step in the right direction — to connect everything, though they all may be completely different from one another.

Satyakama Jabala was a young aspirant, a seeker of Supreme knowledge. He went to his guru. The guru told him: *“I shall not teach you now. Do something. Take these 400 cows and some bulls to the forest. Return when the cows multiply and become a thousand.”*

Satyakama obeyed his guru and went to the forest with the cows. He lived there in contemplation. Soon, he had a thousand cows. When he was about to return to the guru, something extraordinary happened. A bull spoke to him and taught him some higher truths. Then fire spoke to him and taught him; so also a swan and finally a diver bird called Madgu. They all spoke to him and gave him knowledge. When he returned, the teacher saw that the boy was illumined. This, in fact, was the teacher's method of teaching. Satyakama had extracted knowledge from nature.

When people hear such stories, the natural reaction in the past would be, "funny, cock-and-bull stories." Now they don't say that anymore. Even Satyakama himself would have disbelieved all that happened to him. But he understood that through the symbolism of the bull, fire and so on, it was his inner consciousness that had revealed all knowledge. According to Vedanta, all knowledge is within. With the external stimulus or suggestion, the ignorance covering knowledge is removed and we become illumined.

In order to experience Augmented Reality (AR), people are told to use Google glasses, earphones and several other gadgets. Thus, the experience of the world around is enhanced. With the advent of the internet of Things, no gadgets will be needed. Connections become spontaneous. You are just living naturally and everything will appear in several dimensions, as vibrant reality.

So, let us understand that technology is slowly creeping towards that spiritual Oneness, which Vedanta has been speaking about all the time. They are trying to combine everything physically. The next step would be to eliminate the internet and connect everything using the mind.

Finally, the time comes for the spiritual discovery of unity in diversity. That will be supreme technology!

Ramanuja and Vivekananda on Karma Yoga

Swami Bhaktananda

*K*arma-yoga, the yoga of work, is one of the paths advocated by Hinduism for the manifestation of one's own potential divinity and the attainment of freedom. According to this yoga work done in a proper spirit, without any selfish motive and with detachment, leads to spiritual illumination. Hindu scriptures mention many instances of persons who attained spiritual illumination through the proper performance of work. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (IV. iv. 6), for example, relates how Satyakama Jabala got Self-realization by tending the cows of his guru, and the *Padma Purana* (*Sristi Khanda*, Ch. 47) speaks of how a woman, an untouchable, and a merchant reached the goal of spiritual perfection by the sheer performance of the duties pertaining to their station in life in an unselfish spirit. The *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita* cite the examples of Janaka and many others as having become perfect by following this yoga. Ramanuja, the well-known philosopher of medieval India, whose name is associated with the *Visistadvaita* school of Vedanta, gives an important place to karma-yoga as a means of spiritual unfoldment. Though he agrees with his teacher Yamunacharya that both *karma-yoga* and *jnana-yoga* are means to supreme devotion yet he regards karma-yoga as an independent means for attaining the Self. Karma-yoga according to him, removes all the miseries of the world and bestows the highest spiritual freedom. In his writings, especially in his commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, he very often upholds the path of work as a means for attaining spiritual illumination. In this connection, he specifies three conditions: (1) Work should be done as worship of the Lord; (2) It should be done in a detached spirit; and (3) There

should be no seeking after the fruits of the work. That is, actions done with an eye to fruits bind a man, while those done as worship of the Lord, without attachment to the results, lead one to spiritual freedom.

These three specifications in regard to karma-yoga follow directly as a corollary from Ramanuja's philosophy of devotion and his conception of God. The ultimate Reality, according to him, is an integral whole comprising of *chit* (sentient beings) and *achit* (insentient matter); and both together constitute the body of the supreme Lord and depend on Him for their existence. He is the inner ruler, and He pervades everything. He is the Self of all, rules over all, and has all beings, animate and inanimate, as His body.

The Lord being thus all-pervasive, every type of duty is His worship, and should be performed in that spirit. Worshipping Him in this spirit, man attains perfection. To a warrior, fighting his enemies is his duty; and if this is done as a worship of the Lord, without seeking the results, it becomes a means to the achievement of the highest human goal. Ramanuja says: (*Sri Bhashya* IV. iv. 22): *'The supreme Lord, when pleased by the faithful worship of His devotees — which worship consists in daily repeated meditation on Him, assisted by the performance of all the practices prescribed for each caste and Ashrama — frees them from the influence of nescience ... (and) allows them to attain to that supreme bliss which consists in the direct intuition of His own true nature.'*

Thus, Ramanuja's view of karma-yoga, viz. work as worship of the Lord, or as an offering to the Lord, has an intimate bearing on his conception of God as all-pervading.

Now all these actions that devolve upon one by the antecedents of birth and station in life should be performed in a detached way, with the feeling that it is the Lord, and not oneself, is the doer. This

is possible because the Lord is the inner ruler of all. The scriptures declare that the body, the organs, the vital force, and the individual soul are only instruments of the Supreme, and He is the only doer. So all actions should be performed without any attachment, dedicating its fruits to the Lord.

This dedication of the fruits to the Supreme is the logical consequence of the absence of the feeling of doership. For work without attachment automatically implies non-attachment to the results of action, since the performer of action in a spirit of detachment is free from the sense of agentship and, consequently, from the feeling of I-ness with regard to the work or its results. Therefore, he does not seek the results, but offers them all to the Lord, who is the real agent. The point to be noted here is that it is not the giving up of actions themselves that constitutes real renunciation, but the giving up of attachment to the fruits of actions and the idea of agentship. So declare the scriptures also.

Karma or action binds when done with attachment to results, and brings on endless misery in its train. But the same action done without attachment to results and as worship of the all-pervading Lord becomes a means of liberation and spiritual illumination. It is like using one thorn to remove another that entered the foot. And this performance of action without attachment to results becomes easier when we regard the supreme Lord, the inner ruler within controlling everything, as the doer of all actions, as in fact, He is. It is the Lord Himself who gets everything done by the individual soul, through the instruments of the body and the vital force, for the purposes of His own *Maya* or sport. This, in substance, is the concept of karma-yoga according to Ramanuja.

This view of karma-yoga finds its parallel in our times in the exposition of the same by Swami Vivekananda, who makes a

masterly analysis of it in his book *Karma Yoga*, examining it from every point of view. Like Ramanuja, Swami Vivekananda also bases his views on the Bhagavad Gita.

Swami Vivekananda gives a very wide definition of the word 'karma' so as to include the whole range of human activity, not merely those prescribed by the scriptural injunctions or determined by the accident of our birth and station in life. Everything we do, according to him, whether physical or mental, is karma. All of us, whether we will it or not, are always engaged in some activity or other, and so are performing karma every moment of our life. Except those very few who are perfect, who are satisfied with the Self, whose desires do not go beyond the Self, and to whom the Self is all in all, everyone else has to work.

As Sri Ramakrishna says: *'It is not possible for you to give up work altogether. Your very nature will lead you to it whether you like it or not'*. (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 378, 1st edition)

But much of our energy is wasted as we do not know how to work; consequently, we fail to reap the best results from the performance of the work. Karma-yoga teaches us the secret of work, by which we can work to the maximum advantage so as to bring out the best that is in us.

Now this secret of work, as stressed by Ramanuja and reiterated by Swami Vivekananda, is non-attachment to action and its results. No action is in itself either entirely good or bad. It is the way in which we do it, as also the motive that prompts us to do it, that makes it either good or bad. If it is the result of our selfishness and, in its effect, rivets one more chain on us, then it is bad; if it is the result of unselfishness and helps us to break our bondage, it is good. So karma-yoga calls upon us to be unselfish and non-attached to

actions; for it is selfishness and attachment that bind us. Now how to attain this nonattachment?

There are two ways of doing it. One is the way of the Jnana-yogis, those who do not believe in a personal God but depend on their own will to reach this supreme state of non-attachment. By the exercise of their will and with the power of their mind and determination, they dismiss all notion of '*I and mine*', and snap all bondage. But such men of strong determination are few and far-between. For the rest, there is a simpler and easier way. Those who believe in a personal God have not to tear themselves away forcibly from action. They give up the fruits of their actions to God; they consider all action as the worship of the Lord. They perform all the duties in the world that fall to their lot by virtue of their birth and position in life without caring for the results as a duty, always offering the fruits that accrue in the performance of such duty, whether good or bad, at the feet of the Lord. In other words, they work for work's sake, and do not worry about the nature of the duty that has come their way.

Duties are bound to vary from man to man, because all men are not endowed with the same ability and capacity—physically, mentally, and intellectually, and these duties are largely determined by our deserts. But, for the real karma-yogi, every duty is sacred, and is an instrument to break his bondage. So he performs it as the highest form of worship. For it is not the actual work that matters, but the manner and spirit in which it is performed that is important. When we thus perform our duties with detachment, in an unselfish spirit, and as worship of the Lord who resides in everybody, in course of time, we reach the same stage of perfection reached by the jnana-yogi through the path of knowledge, by the bhakti-yogi through the path of love, and by the Raja-yogi through the path of psychic control.

As Sister Nivedita beautifully puts it, in that stage, it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization; for the many and the One are the same Reality.

“No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid. This is the realization which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of karma, not as divorced from, but as expressing jnana and bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality.”
(Introduction to the *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*)

Thus, in the view of Swami Vivekananda, the service of the family, the country, and the world can all be conveniently turned to be fit instruments for raising ourselves to the highest stage of spiritual perfection, provided we do it as worship of the Lord Himself. Nay, that is real worship—the service of our fellow beings, seeing in them the very manifestation of God, as he proclaimed fervently:

‘May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls, and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, is the special object of my worship’.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, March 1965)

Illuminating Dialogues from Indian Lore
The Quintessence of the Uddhava-Gita

Prof. K. Subrahmanian

When Sri Krishna was about to leave the world, a great devotee named Uddhava went to Him and pleaded: “Lord, You should not leave us. The world will be empty without You. If You leave this world, take me also with You. I can't live without You.”

Sri Krishna replied: “My mission is over and I am going to leave the mortal world. Please live in this world for some more time, devoting your mind completely to Me without any attachment whatsoever. The world is a passing show. You will not be lost in this world if you see the universe in Me and Me in the universe.”

Uddhava: “Lord, I find it hard to give up desires. I am attached to my body and to my family. They were created by You but I consider them as my own. Because of attachment, my vision is not clear. Only You can give me a clear vision. Please instruct me and tell me how I can get rid of my attachments.”

Sri Krishna replied: “I am beyond words, mind, and the senses; yet those that are totally free from egoism and are wholly devoted to Me can find Me out. Listen to this story:

A great *Avadhuta* (A wandering monk) was once wandering about the world in a carefree fashion. King Yadu saw him and asked him:

‘Everyone in this world is agitated greatly by lust and greed; you seem to be indifferent to everything around you and are so happy. What is the secret of your bliss? How can you be so happy and carefree?’

The Avadhuta replied: ‘I have learned many things from many beings, both living and non-living. Here is the essence of what I learnt:

One must learn to live like a tree, one must always live for others. One must be detached like the air. One must be cool and pleasant like water. Like water, one must purify others when they come in contact. Like fire one must accept what others give, without discrimination, without likes or dislikes.

A real ascetic does not concentrate on the reflections of the sun in various vessels of water, but concentrates on the One that is responsible for the various reflections. Like a python one should take food that comes of itself.

One should be calm and quiet, like the ocean. The ocean does not overflow nor does it dry up; even so an ascetic should neither be overjoyed nor depressed. You should not fall a prey to lust and gold: here you must learn a lesson from the insects — they fall into the bright flame and perish.

Like a black bee which gathers honey from a variety of flowers a monk should gather knowledge from various sources, as also food from various houses. However, the alms collected should not be stored either for the evening or for the next day. He should not follow the bee in respect of storing food. If he stores anything, his intelligence will be destroyed like the honey stored by the bee.

You must learn to control your tongue; otherwise you will be hooked like a fish and die like a fish. All the other senses will come under your control if you have control over your tongue.”

Sri Krishna continued:

“Hearing these words of the Avadhuta, Yadu became wise and calm. Like him, you must also give up all desires. You must not hurt any being and must have complete control over your body. And You must worship your Guru.

Now I shall tell you the characteristics of a good disciple. He will be humble, energetic, and detached. He will be dedicated to the pursuit of truth, and will be free of envy and gossip.

He will be able to see the *Atman* in all beings. A fire that burns wood assumes the shape of the wood, but still it is free from all attributes. So also, the *Atman* remains unaffected by the bodies it dwells in. You, as a good disciple, must give up all attachments to this body. The *Atman* is beyond bondage and freedom. It is the reflections of the moon in the water that tremble and not the moon itself.

A wise man looks on his body with detachment, as does a man looks on his dream after waking from sleep. He should be content with his Self. You should at all times think of Me. If that is not possible, then dedicate all your actions to Me. Recite My name or listen to My deeds or be in the company of the good and holy.”

Uddhava asked: “Lord, now tell me who are the people that are dear to You?”

Sri Krishna replied: “My true devotee is: kind, forgiving, truthful, restrained, compassionate, considerate, calm, patient and learned. He adores Me only! Whoever worships Me whole-heartedly is My devotee. You get to know Me by serving holy people. Association with good people is very important. The *Gopis* (milkmaids of Vrindavan) were not learned; but they are very dear to Me because they loved Me. The *Gopis* wanted Me and nothing else. In My company they lost consciousness of their body. They did not know My real nature but they loved Me with all their heart.

I am the One, indivisible. The seed becomes the tree with a trunk, leaves, flowers, etc.; so have I become the many. The cloth is made up of threads, but you hardly are aware of them when you see the whole cloth.

The universe is like a tree. It is a tree of Action. Virtue and vice are its two seeds; The three gunas— sattva, rajas, tamas—are its trunk. The five elements are its stems.

With the help of a Guru you can know that the One has become the many. With the axe of true wisdom, you must cut down the tree of ignorance.

As fire burns the faggots and reduces them to ashes, so does devotion to Me destroy all sins. Devotion removes all impurities of mind. He is dear to Me who weeps for Me and sings My praises.

Cast away all unbecoming thoughts and consecrate your mind and actions to Me. Always meditate on Me. One must always remain absorbed in one's Self.

The mind becomes disturbed when it comes into contact with sense objects. One should keep away from them and meditate on the Self. When a person has become established in this state, like the sun he moves in the world, illuminating everything but remains unaffected. He looks upon all alike; he is free from malice, pride, and dishonesty. He goes beyond the three attributes of the mind and engages himself in meditation all the time. He sees Me in everything and everything in Me. He becomes a liberated soul.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, January 1976)



I tell you, my son: you will get the highest joy from the Master's name itself; you will get everything from his name - be it spiritual ecstasy or God-absorption. But everything takes its own time. It will not do to be restless. One has to get deeply absorbed in spiritual exercises; one must strengthen one's spiritual attitude in one's own mind. One may get a temporary enthusiasm by noticing somebody else's spiritual fervour; but then one must remember that all such men had to pass through hard struggle.

Swami Brahmananda

Leaves from an Ashrama: 59
On Provoking a State of Urgency
Swami Vidyatmananda

An ashrama friend said to me recently, 'For a long time I've been talking about religion. Now I want to experience something, to prove whether or not the claims of Vedanta are true.'

I replied, 'You will certainly experience at death and very possibly before.'

'Why do you say that?' he asked.

'Because,' I said, 'I believe that when we reach a point of extremity such as death, our consciousness must surely change. A knowledge that is always there manifests itself. It cannot be before, because usually the mind is distracted.'

That is what I replied, based on the following reasoning. I had been reading an article in the *Smithsonian* magazine describing the experiences of survivors who had fallen from great heights – in air mishaps or from mountains – and had survived. Time was enormously speeded up; a complete review of the entire life passes before the eyes, and a feeling of peace came as seemingly certain death approached. People on the point of drowning report the same, as do those who have died clinically and have been resuscitated.

Which led me to the theory that only in a state of urgency do we discover the real. Therefore a condition of extremity must be welcomed if we want to experience. Our tendency, of course, is to guard ourselves safe and comfortable, to never strain, to never die. But in that case, we shall never experience. Take your choice!

Sadhana (spiritual discipline) is a form of cultivated urgency. It is called austerity of life and mind. Sadhana is conscious deprivation of surface thought fostered to the point of extremity. This is what we seek in deep meditation.

Bhakti (Devotion), too, is a form of cultivated urgency. One's desire to see the Divine, to know the Divine, becomes so intense that one feels sure one will die if one doesn't. Sri Ramakrishna used the term '*howling like a wounded animal*'. Every saint one has heard about had a passion like that to experience.

If we can reach a state of urgency through one or another of these means, we may expect to experience. But it is rare that we push austerity or adoration so far. Hence nature is wise – a kindly disciplinarian which forces us to a condition of extremity in spite of ourselves. The Three Sorrows of sickness, old age, and death await us whether we like it or not. Nature does for us what we will not do for ourselves. When one knows at last that one is a 'goner', the surface consciousness draws away, and a moment comes when one sees in another fashion. Thus comes experience.

For those who can neither practice sufficient austerity nor love intensely enough, and who are not as yet beset by the Three Sorrows, there is one other route to achieving a state of urgency – extreme disillusionment with *maya*, a feeling that there is no sense at all in life. This utter disenchantment comes mercifully to the aging and sometimes even to the young: 'no one is my own; this world is not my home; nothing, nothing makes any sense; I can no longer fit into this scheme'. This feeling is good in that it brings us to the end of all our options. Swami Vivekananda put it well in his discourses *on Jnana Yoga*: "Be for one moment really 'hopeless' and the mist will clear."

These, then, are the routes to achieving a state of urgency: austerity, passionate longing, and the presence of one or more of the three Sorrows, extreme fatigue with life. Let one or several of these take control of us, and we shall have a chance of cracking the surface of distraction to – as my friend hoped – prove that the claims of Vedanta are true.

Programme for September - October 2017

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

Sep 3	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 16	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 10	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 17	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 17	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 18	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep 24	Jnana Yoga 19	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 1	Durga Puja	
Oct 8	Jnana Yoga 20	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 15	Jnana Yoga 21	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 22	Jnana Yoga 22	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct 29	Day Retreat	

Durga Puja

1st October at Bourne End at 10:30 p.m.

Day Retreat

**With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 29.10.2017**

from 10:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

continued from the front cover

Meditation means a continuous flow of thought toward God. when meditation ripens, there comes absorption, and Samadhi is experienced.

When the mind becomes absorbed, a shining light is first experienced in the mystic vision. With this vision, there comes a kind of higher and nobler joy, and the mind is reluctant to give up this joy and move onward. But if the aspirant goes further, the vision of the light will be concentrated into the form of the Chosen Ideal and the mind becomes merged in his consciousness.

The more the mind is absorbed within, the greater will be the joy of meditation; and when once you taste joy in your spiritual practices, the desire to continue them will grow. Then you will no longer have to ask how long you should meditate. Your own mind will tell you.

When you are able to free yourself from these deep-seated subtle desires, when the mind becomes tranquil, then only can you become deeply absorbed in real meditation. The practice of japam and meditation brings the aspirant to this stage.

Swami Brahmananda

Vedanta

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

Phone: (01628) 526464

www.vedantauk.com

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

Editor: Swami Dayatmananda

£1.50

They think that inaction in itself is the ideal. If it be so, why then, the wall also should be considered to have attained Samadhi. Should not one transcend all dualities? To maintain one's mental balance under all circumstances, to remain absolutely unmoved - that indeed is the goal!

The highest conception is to think that everything is He. Failing that, it is best to think that He is the real agent behind all actions and He is causing us to act.

Every action brings a corresponding result. A man will get social merit through his philanthropic activities, but if his ego is involved in those activities, he will not get any spiritual merit. Even the result of a good action turns into a bondage if it is done with ego. None can escape the wheel of karma through self-motivated action. On the other hand, unselfish action destroys the bondage of action and brings liberation to man.



A registered Charity