

Vedanta

402 JULY - AUGUST 2018

Meaning and Purpose of Religion

Swami Satprakashananda

Cosmic Religion

Albert Einstein



Divine Wisdom

Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 1



OF THE WORLD

Once, a man was going through a forest, when three robbers fell upon him and robbed him of all his possessions. One of the robbers said, "What's the use of keeping this man alive?" So saying, he was about to kill him with his sword, when the second robber interrupted him, saying: 'Oh, no! What is the use of killing him? Tie his hand and foot and leave him here.'" The robbers bound his hands and feet and went away. After a while the third robber returned and said to the man: "Ah, I am sorry. Are you hurt? I will

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Editorial

Will Vedanta be a popular religion of the future?

At the beginning of the 19th Century, it appeared that the tremendous impact which religions of the world had on society for ages was at an end under the sledge-hammer blows of science and technology. But this feeling was predominant only in those people who identified religion with crude and exclusive dogmas and meaningless rituals. They felt that science was a sort of menace and agnosticism and materialism would pose a serious challenge to their very existence. The claim of religion to have access to a superior knowledge has often made some religions look down upon scientific and secular knowledge and to assume an attitude of confrontation with it. In medieval times when religious hierarchies had great political influence, religions had even persecuted scientists in the West for their heterodox ways of thought. But in modern times sciences are better equipped, and they have produced many results that have revolutionised the life of man. Therefore people have begun to show great interest in the methods of science like observation and experiment, and are thus less prone to believe things because they are written in some books or because some organised body of priests insists on their acceptance. So the reconciliation between science and religion can be effected only if it could be shown that religion can justify itself by reason through which every science justifies itself. This is possible only if religion accepts the same methods of investigation, study and experimentation, which are applied to sciences and study of nature. A reconciliation on these lines will benefit religion very much, for it will eliminate all the dross from religion and its essential parts will be strengthened.

Again we see that it was the study of comparative religion, which also came into vogue with the extension of the scope of man's study

of his own past, that came to the rescue of true religion in a great way. This study of comparative religion gave rise to a quest to discover some universal principles of religion which could form the basis of true spirituality which is the essence of diverse but great religious traditions.

Vedanta is one such religion which is the most ancient but having some of the grandest universal principles and eternal values which can stand the test of time. It never felt threatened by this onslaught of science whose proponents were determined to take their quest to discover truths of the material world or the observable universe to its logical conclusion. However, Vedanta has never been practiced on a large scale by men in the past, and therefore it is hard to say how far it is going to be a popular religion in the future with the majority of people. The reason for this can be found if we analyse and arrive at what constitutes the sources of strength of other religions generally, and how this Universal Religion of Vedanta is unlike them in these aspects.

Firstly, every religion has a book to which it fanatically clings and that forms the basis of their religious doctrines. Vedanta, however, accepts all scriptures but insists on men going beyond all such books, however ancient or sacred they may be. Secondly, every religion venerates some particular person, called a prophet, incarnation or messiah etc. However, no personality has ever become the object of such exclusive worship among the Vedantins. According to Vedanta we are all brothers and the difference is only in the degree of divinity which is manifesting itself. Thirdly, it is often seen that a religion, to be strong and sure of itself, must affirm that it alone is true. Otherwise it fails to influence people and have their unalloyed allegiance. Vedanta does not preach such exclusive doctrines of the prophets who promise all kinds of rewards to those who will follow them and eternal doom to those who refuse to do so.

The Vedantic idea of God poses another difficulty for a vast majority of people who wish to follow it. Men generally want a monarch God, sitting on a throne, entirely apart and who rules their destinies. They firmly believe that he is to be feared and propitiated and one should bow down before Him and surrender to His will. Vedanta on the other hand teaches that God is in everyone and has become everyone and everything. Swami Vivekananda once jocularly remarked, "His Majesty the King has gone from this country (India); the Kingdom of Heaven went from Vedanta years ago".

Vedanta asserts that God is Spirit and He should be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth. In Spirit we are all one. All the difference we see is in the bodies and minds alone. Vedanta accepts no sin but says there are mistakes and man travels from lower truth to higher truth but never from error to truth. The God that Vedanta proposes is not one to be feared but in fact He is the one being of whom we should never be afraid for He is the man's very Self. Vedanta says that when you want to worship personal gods you are only seeking to worship one of his different manifestations, among which you are also one.

The goal of Vedanta is thus the discovery of the innate spiritual divinity of man and the unity of all existence in that Divinity. It is this compulsion of every being to go back to unity that constitutes true religion according to Vedanta. If this Vedanta, in other words the conscious knowledge that all is one Spirit, spreads all over the world, then the whole of humanity can become spiritual. But is it practically possible? That is the vital question.

Perhaps it will take a long time for humanity to understand that herein lies the path to universal peace and harmony. For man wants to perpetuate his old superstitions in the form of either national or communal religions. True religion has been a transformative force for the better for very few. Unfortunately, most of those who have worked in the field of religions have been politically motivated. They

have been mostly interested in upholding what the majority of the masses believe in – their superstitions and weaknesses passing in the name of religions. Religion is always a quest to conquer nature and never to compromise and fit into nature. A true scientific quest aims to conquer external nature similarly Vedanta teaches us how to conquer internal nature.

Thus the quest for the ultimate Truth took two directions – the one directed outward and the other inward. Through the outward quest great scientific truths about the physical universe and the forces that run it were discovered. These were applied to develop scientific methodology and technology which attempted to help mankind in their quest to conquer physical nature and natural forces which dominated humankind for centuries together making them mere puppets in the drama of our physical existence. It helped us to solve to some extent at least the problem of our total dependence and helplessness against the merciless natural forces which guided our destinies.

However, through the inward quest Vedanta sought to find out that unity which formed the basis of all diversities. Just as by understanding one lump of clay we know the properties of all the clay in the universe. The question was asked in the Vedanta, “What is that by knowing which we know everything else?” With this quest, the idea arose that true perfection is found in the fundamental unity of all existence. In practical life it takes the form of expanding love – expanding gradually from self-centredness to the family, the community, the country and the whole world. When this expansion of heart is complete, man feels that in hurting or helping another he hurts or helps himself, and that he has no death when there is life anywhere. It is only when a vast majority of mankind accepts these wonderful spiritual truths will Vedanta become a truly popular religion.

Meaning and Purpose of Religion

Swami Satprakashananda

It is very often argued: “Can we not be pure and virtuous without struggling for God-vision, without seeking after that formless, nameless Being that passes human understanding? Is it not enough to live honestly and do our duties faithfully and efficiently? Is not this life sufficiently rich, varied, and meaningful to engage our thoughts? Why worry about the beyond? We want more of life. Religion makes us lose interest in this life. Religion negates life.” Such are the views expressed even by many leaders of thought in modern times. Strange as it may seem, most young men and young women of the world entertain these views. It is true that religion takes into account the Great Beyond, but this does not mean that religion negates life or makes us otherworldly. Can we understand this life without referring it to what is beyond? Is this life complete in itself? Is it self-explanatory? Has it not a beginning and an end far beyond what we perceive? Our life here is but one small link of the infinite chain of our existence. It has a past. It has a future. We cannot know the present without knowing the past and the future. This universe, a series of causes and effects, has an Ultimate Cause. The manifest is only a speck of the Great Unmanifest. We can understand the seen only in relation to the Unseen, the finite only in relation to the Infinite, the changeful only in relation to the Changeless. This is exactly what religion proposes to mediate. It tells us to regulate life’s journey in view of the ultimate goal, to utilize the relative values of life as instrumental to the attainment of the Supreme Good, to conduct this transitory bodily existence so as to restore us to the eternal life of the Spirit. Certainly this is not the negation of life. This earthly

life is not an end in itself. One has to go beyond it in order to reach the goal. To neglect the affairs of life and to be drowned in them are equally wrong. Religion teaches us how to transcend them. The best use one can make of this life is to utilize it as a means to the highest end.

There is inherent in man a longing for the Real. He cannot rest satisfied with the impermanence of things. However immersed he may be in the affairs of the world, however hard he may try to be contented with the fleeting joys of life, his heart yearns for something which can bring him enduring peace and fulfil all his desires. No temptation, no sophistry, can smother this craving for the Eternal in man, though for the time being it may lie buried under the weight of adverse conditions, internal as well as external. It is this innate necessity that installs religion in the heart of man. It is the special function of religion to lead man from untruth to Truth, from darkness to Eternal Light, from death to Immortal Bliss. To release the spirit from the bondage of matter in order to establish man in the pristine glory and blissfulness of the Self, is the aim of religion. It is wrong to say that religion is otherworldly. It is equally wrong to suppose that religion is for this world. The main purpose of religion is to reinstate man in his lost spiritual kingdom, which is beyond all worlds, that is to say, in his Infinite Self, beyond the domain of matter, beyond time and space, beyond relative existence. For this it is not necessary to go to any other world; one can realize it even here while living in this body. Religion confers on us material benefits as well by evoking our best virtues and faculties. But these are incidental, the by-products of religious living. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Religion should be judged by its special function and not by the subsidiary results.

There are, however, not a few in this age who miss the true meaning and purpose of religion and measure its usefulness by its social value. Religion is the way of Truth. Why should it conform to social life? Is social life an ideal in itself? Is it ultimate that everything should be modelled after its pattern? Truth is above all. Truth will not pay homage to society. Society has to pay homage to Truth or die. Society must conform to the religious ideal. The more it does so, the higher it is. That is the ideal society where the conditions are most favourable to the realization of the Supreme Ideal by its individual members. It is child-mentality to think of religion only as an instrument of material welfare. "What is it good for if it cannot make me toys?" remarked a baby while looking at a very valuable scientific instrument.

But such is the hold of this sense-bound world on our imagination that even men of great importance cannot conceive of any higher purpose of religion than to sub-serve the interests of the earthly life. Their religion is "world and life affirmation." Some of them have gone so far as to assert the superiority of the Western religious ideals over the Oriental religious ideals by this life-affirmation test. According to them, Christianity is world and life affirming; Indian religions are world and life negating. Whereas no religion holds this life to be the be-all and end-all of existence. No religion cherishes the illusion of perfection in this world of duality. Every religion directs you to a goal beyond. In this sense every religion is otherworldly. The kingdom of God is within you. It is not of this world. But at the same time no religion tells you to neglect or ignore this life. In every religion there is a place for worldly duties, there is a place for social service, there is a place for the joys of life; yet no religion wants to keep you earth bound but leads you beyond. This life has a meaning only when it is directed to a transcendent goal. It is worth living only when

it is inspired by the supreme spiritual Ideal. Of course, in judging religions we should consider the genuine form of each religion and not its aberrations. To say that Christianity stresses this earthly life and its values and not the life beyond is to miss the true spirit of Christianity. If it be so, it is not Christianity as taught by Jesus Christ, who said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25). It seems to be neo-paganism masquerading as the religion of Jesus. Indeed, no religion is characterized by this "world affirmation" spirit. It may be the true character of realism or humanism but not of religion. It is in no mean degree responsible for the growing secularization of religious thought and life in these days.

It should not be supposed, however, that if we hold this life just as a means to the realization of the supreme spiritual Ideal, which is far above the sense plane, we shall not get sufficiently interested in this life and that secular interest being of secondary importance, our material welfare will suffer. For the truth is just the reverse. This life can be most fruitful of peace and prosperity, order and efficiency, only when it is vitalized by spiritual idealism. Unsupported by moral and spiritual life, the sense life cannot take care of itself. As an end in itself it is bound to be a failure. It can flourish only as a means to something higher, if not the highest. The love of the ideal inspires love in the method of its attainment. So there can be no reason for our losing interest in this life. There are many who acknowledge the need of moral and spiritual virtues for material well-being, but few regard them for their own sake. Consequently it is a common tendency to make religion sub-serve the interests of the sense life; and this is considered to be the practical application of religion. It defeats its own purpose. It is the sense life which is to be subordinated to the spiritual life and

not *vice versa*. Matter is for the spirit, not the spirit for matter; the world for God, and not God for the world: this should be the guiding principle in life. If we subject the spiritual life to the sense life, we lose both. On the contrary, if the sense life be governed by the spiritual life, we save both. This is applied spirituality, if there is any such thing. He who lives to eat fails to eat and consequently to live: his uncontrolled eating reacts on itself and costs his life. He who eats to live succeeds in eating as well as in living. He is not at all indifferent to eating, rather he is particular about it.

Such as think that Hinduism is life negating will do well to study the Hindu scheme of religious life, which consists of a two-fold way, the way of world-experience and the way of renunciation, intended for the realization of the four-fold values or objects of life, namely, ethical value, economic value, aesthetic value, and the Ultimate Value, or Freedom, or the Supreme Good. The Hindus have not denied any aspect of life or any of its values but have adjusted all into a complete scheme of life with the Supreme Good as its goal.

It is to be noted that in the Hindu scheme of life values, the ethical values are the basic and not the economic value. Man should secure even the essential needs of life by the right performance of duties, or dharma. Dharma in a wide sense implies the Law which upholds the universe and all beings and things, and which leads to the welfare of all here and hereafter.

So we see social service has a distinct place in the Hindu scheme of life. But it is not the finale. Social work does not solve life's problems. Man must be awakened to higher consciousness, must learn to conquer animality by divinity, to free the soul from the bondage of the flesh, to overcome the body idea by spirit consciousness. Otherwise you will open clinics but not solve the problem of disease; extend relief measures but not solve the

problem of misery; develop machinery but not solve the problem of want; make laws but not solve the problem of crime; conclude peace treaties but not solve the problem of war. Moral observance, too, is not adequate to cope with the situation. Man must be aware of his spiritual self. As long as the body idea dominates the mind one cannot but have the sensuous outlook on life. Only when spirit consciousness prevails in man do his thoughts and actions become naturally pure. He becomes moral by inner urge. Moral conduct is of real value when it is the self-expression of inner consciousness.

Morality cannot be the ultimate end of life. There is no perfection on the moral level. Morality works on the plane of duality, where justice and wrong, mercy and misery, forgiveness and fault, coexist. Perfection is in the spirit, which is beyond all dualities. Besides, however advanced a person may be in the moral life, he cannot get rid of the evil in himself. The vices overpowered by the virtues lie dormant in him but do not die out. The dark forces exist in the unconscious in subtle forms but never become extinct. This is also true of the spiritual aspirant. It is only when the seeker has the direct vision of Truth that all the subtle forces of evil in him, with their root cause, primal ignorance, become extirpated never to appear again. "The knots of the heart are cut, all doubts disappear, and the impressions of Karma die out when the One is realized who is transcendental and immanent," says the Mundaka Upanishad (2.2.8). It is said in the Bhagavad-Gita, "Sense objects fall away from the abstinent man, leaving the subtle attachment behind. On seeing the Supreme, his subtle attachment, too, vanishes" (2.59).

He who realizes the Supreme goes beyond law. "What directions, either positive or negative, can there be for him who is beyond duality?" says the great Hindu sage Shukadeva, with regard to him who attains the transcendental experience of the

One without a second beyond all multiplicity. Yet what he does is according to law. Morality becomes the spontaneous expression of his Self-realization. "An expert dancer never takes a wrong step," says Sri Ramakrishna. There is no law for the free. Law implies bondage. It is for the bound. An immoral man transgresses law, a moral man observes law, a man of realization transcends law. Morality finds its culmination in spiritual perfection.

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, July-August, 1942)

The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and is good and great, and, at the same time, have infinite scope for future development. All that was good in the past must be preserved; and the doors must be kept open for future additions to the already existing store. Religions must also be inclusive and not look down with contempt upon one another because their particular ideals of God are different. In my life I have seen a great many spiritual men, a great many sensible persons, who did not believe in God at all that is to say, not in our sense of the word. Perhaps they understood God better than we can ever do. The Personal idea of God or the Impersonal, the Infinite, Moral Law, or the Ideal Man — these all have to come under the definition of religion. And when religions have become thus broadened, their power for good will have increased a hundredfold. Religions, having tremendous power in them, have often done more injury to the world than good, simply on account of their narrowness and limitations.

Swami Vivekananda

Cosmic Religion

Albert Einstein

Everything that men do or think concerns the satisfaction of the needs they feel or the escape from pain. This must be kept in mind when we seek to understand spiritual or intellectual movements and the way in which they develop. For feeling and longing are the motive forces of all human striving and productivity—however nobly these latter may display themselves to us.

What, then, are the feelings and the needs which have brought mankind to religious thought and to faith in the widest sense? A moment's consideration shows that the most varied emotions stand at the cradle of religious thought and experience.

In primitive peoples it is, first of all, fear that awakens religious ideas—fear of hunger, of wild animals, of illness, and of death. Since the understanding of causal connections is usually limited on this level of existence, the human soul forges a being, more or less like itself, on whose will and activities depend the experiences which it fears. One hopes to win the favour of this being by deeds and sacrifices, which, according to the tradition of the race, are supposed to appease the being or to make him well disposed to man. I call this the religion of fear.

This religion is considerably stabilised—though not caused—by the formation of a priestly caste which claims to mediate between the people and the being they fear, and so attains a position of power. Often a leader or despot, or a privileged class whose power is maintained in other ways, will combine the

function of the priesthood with its own temporal rule for the sake of great security; or an alliance may exist between the interests of the political power and the priestly caste.

A second source of religious development is found in the social feelings. Fathers and mothers, as well as leaders of great human communities, are fallible and mortal. The longing for guidance, for love and succour, provides the stimulus for the growth of a social or moral conception of God. This is the God of Providence, who protects, decides, rewards and punishes. This is the God who, according to man's widening horizon, loves and provides for the life of the race, or of mankind, or who even loves life itself. He is the comforter in unhappiness and in unsatisfied longing, the protector of the souls of the dead. This is the social or moral idea of God.

It is easy to follow in the sacred writings of the Jewish people the development of the religion of fear into the moral religion, which is carried further in the New Testament. The religions of all the civilised peoples, especially those of the Orient, are principally moral religions. An important advance in the life of a people is the transformation of the religion of fear into the moral religion. But one must avoid the prejudice that regards the religions of primitive peoples as pure fear religions and those of the civilized races as pure moral religions. All are mixed forms, though the moral element predominates in the higher levels of social life. Common to all these types is the anthropomorphic character of the idea of God.

Only exceptionally gifted individuals or especially noble communities rise *essentially* above this level; in these there is found a third level of religious experience, even if it is seldom

found in a pure form. I will call it the cosmic religious sense. This is hard to make clear to those who do not experience it, since it does not involve an anthropomorphic idea of God; the individual feels the vanity of human desires and aims, and the nobility and marvellous order which are revealed in nature and in the world of thought. He feels the individual destiny as an imprisonment and seeks to experience the totality of existence as a unity full of significance. Indications of this cosmic religious sense can be found even on earlier levels of development—for example, in the Psalms of David and in the Prophets. The cosmic element is much stronger in Buddhism, as, in particular, Schopenhauer's magnificent essays have shown us.

The religious geniuses of all times have been distinguished by this cosmic religious sense, which recognizes neither dogmas nor God made in man's image. Consequently there cannot be a church whose chief doctrines are based on the cosmic religious experience. It comes about, therefore, that precisely among the heretics of all ages we find men who were inspired by this highest religious experience; often they appeared to their contemporaries as atheists, but sometimes also as saints. Viewed from this angle, men like Democritus, Francis of Assisi, and Spinoza are near to one another.

How can this cosmic religious experience be communicated from man to man, if it cannot lead to a definite conception of God or to a theology? It seems to me that the most important function of art and of science is to arouse and keep alive this feeling in those who are receptive.

Thus we reach an interpretation of the relation of science to religion which is very different from the customary view. From

the study of history, one is inclined to regard religion and science as irreconcilable antagonists, and this for a reason that is very easily seen. For anyone who is pervaded with the sense of causal law in all that happens, who accepts in real earnest the assumption of causality, the idea of a Being who interferes with the sequence of events in the world is absolutely impossible. Neither the religion of fear nor the social-moral religion can have any hold on him. A God who rewards and punishes is for him unthinkable, because man acts in accordance with an inner and outer necessity, and would, in the eyes of God, be as little responsible as an inanimate object is for the movements which it makes.

Science, in consequence, has been accused of undermining morals—but wrongly. The ethical behaviour of man is better based on sympathy, education, and social relationships, and requires no support from religion. Man's plight would, indeed, be sad if he had to be kept in order through fear of punishment and hope of rewards after death.

It is, therefore, quite natural that the churches have always fought against science and have persecuted its supporters. But, on the other hand, I assert that the cosmic religious experience is the strongest and the noblest driving force behind scientific research. No one who does not appreciate the terrific exertions, and, above all, the devotion without which pioneer creations in scientific thought cannot come into being, can judge the strength of the feeling out of which alone such work, turned away as it is from immediate practical life, can grow. What a deep faith in the rationality of the structure of the world and what a longing to understand even a small glimpse of the

reason revealed in the world there must have been in Kepler and Newton to enable them to unravel the mechanism of the heavens, in long years of lonely work!

Anyone who only knows scientific research in its practical applications may easily come to a wrong interpretation of the state of mind of the men who, surrounded by sceptical contemporaries, have shown the way to kindred spirits scattered over all countries in all centuries. Only those who have dedicated their lives to similar ends can have a living conception of the inspiration which gave these men the power to remain loyal to their purpose in spite of countless failures. It is the cosmic religious sense which grants this power.

A contemporary has rightly said that the only deeply religious people of our largely materialistic age are the earnest men of research.

(Reprinted from 'Cosmic Religion,' published by Covici-Friede, New York.)

The most beautiful and deepest experience a man can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as all serious endeavour in art and science. He who never had this experience seems to me, if not dead, then at least blind. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious. To me it suffices to wonder at these secrets and to attempt humbly to grasp with my mind a mere image of the lofty structure of all that there is.

- Albert Einstein, The World As I See It(1949)

Self-effort

Swami Virajananda

Prayer does not consist in reciting a set formula. That bears no fruit whatever. You must feel a real want within for what you pray for, suffer intense pain and agony, so long as your prayer is unfulfilled. You have to be restless to find out the ways and means of gaining the object of your prayer, in spite of insuperable difficulties in your path, and to strive heart and soul to achieve it, as if life itself depended upon it. Only then will your prayer be answered and your heart's desire be fulfilled. Only such prayers reach the throne of the Most High.

Highest knowledge, devotion, spirituality — these can only be acquired through great self-effort. One has to struggle hard to win them. Then only do they become one's own, and enduring, filling the mind with joy unspeakable. None can make a gift of these to another. Spiritual practice has to be diligently performed. Then only can realisation be attained. The degree varies with the intensity of spiritual effort. What is gained without discipline or hard labour loses its gravity, is not highly valued, and does not bring the happiness earned by hard struggle. Moreover it goes away as easily as it comes, and it is of little use when we are buffeted by the angry billows of life. In dangers and difficulties, in trials and tribulations, it is swept away altogether. To make spirituality one's very own means saturating oneself thoroughly in the idea of the realisation of the Self, so that one's nature is wholly changed and an entirely new personality is developed. It is like being reborn again in this very body. Is it child's play? Such a thing is possible only if one is wide awake and strives for it to the utmost, as if one's whole life is at stake. Thus one must

continue spiritual practices without interruption and with single-minded devotion as long as the goal is not achieved.

If you give up your small self for the sake of others, you will not only find your real Self, but will also make others your own. The more you seek to save your little self, the more you lose your true Self and estrange others.

Go on struggling ceaselessly. Fight like a hero! Never look back, but ever go forward. Onward to the goal! Pay not the slightest heed whether you be exhausted, mangled or mutilated on the way. *Abhih.*

Abhih! Be fearless! Courage! Courage! Do not allow even the thought of defeat to enter your mind. Realisation of the goal, or let the body fall! — let this be your Mantra. Victory or death! — let this be the stake. If you have to die, die like a hero. Only thus can the fort be stormed.

Whining or self-pity is of no use at all. "I am too wretched, worthless, vile and weak; I cannot do anything by myself." These are the words of the namby-pamby, the do-nothing imbeciles. Can anything be done by such people? Strive hard, be wide awake and push on. Only then will success come. Will the road come to an end if you merely sit and think, "Oh! The road is long and difficult"? Get up, start walking and as you proceed the road will grow shorter. Courage, hope, unexpected help will come. The path will gradually become easy and straight, and in no time you will reach the goal. Oh! the joy of reaching the fulfilment!

Many are under the impression that if they are initiated by an enlightened (Siddha) Guru, all their miseries will be dispelled in some mysterious way through his grace, if he only wills it! Thus, incurable diseases will be healed; employment after the heart will be secured; they will have worldly happiness and prosperity; they will prosper in business; they will be able to escape the evil

influences of an unlucky star, and so on and so forth! There is no end of their supplications to the Guru! They ought to know that there is no connection whatever between initiation or entering upon the spiritual path, and these trivial mundane matters. It is also childish to solicit such favours from the Guru; it is not at all a sign of spirituality. He is no omnipotent Providence, no Dispenser of earthly gifts, no Ruler over the destinies of the people of the world. It is wrong to embarrass or trouble him by such importunate requests. They rather tend to make the disciple an object of the Guru's displeasure than a recipient of his favours and blessings. The relationship between Guru and disciple is of a purely spiritual nature — pertaining to spiritual matters only.

Service or worship with a desire for the fruit thereof is mere shop-keeping. True spirituality is not won with this outlook, and whatever result is obtained is extremely meagre and evanescent. Worship with desire for fruit does not purify the mind. It gives neither supreme devotion to God nor salvation, nor abiding peace and joy. Sri Ramakrishna could not accept or even touch things when offered to him with some underlying desire or motive.

To realise God in this life one has to do *Sadhana* (spiritual practices) with all one's strength and ability, to offer one's all to Him, and if possible, a little more. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, have faith and devotion, in even more than full measure. The meaning is, that one should become like a vessel overflowing with faith and devotion. How many have this abundant measure? There is, however, no cause for despair. Go on with your *Sadhana* to the best of your ability. But always have this firm conviction that however hard you may strive, it is as nothing — it can never be enough — when the goal is the realisation of the Self; for ultimately this goal can only be attained by His grace.

But the grace of God descends only upon him who has striven his utmost, who has not spared himself, who has not let go the helm, and who has finally come to know, after many a hard struggle, that it is impossible to realize Him through self-effort alone, without His grace. When the aspirant feels that he is lost in impenetrable gloom, that he is about to drown in a boundless sea, his strength utterly exhausted by his efforts to keep afloat — then and only then does the Lord lift him up with His lotus hand and take him beyond the realm of life and death, where there is endless bliss and infinite peace! The possession of even a particle of that bliss makes the *Jiva*, or individual soul, happy beyond measure.

Why should you fear the world so much, as if it were going to devour you? Be brave and fearless! Be a hero and make light of the world, and the world will lose its hold upon you. “I am very weak, I am low and sinful, I am worthless. Nothing can be accomplished by me, I am incapable of doing anything” — unless you give up such baneful ideas you will never succeed in achieving anything in life. Sweep those ideas away from the mind, stand up and say like a hero, “What is there that I cannot do? I am the child of Immortality: Immortality is my birth-right, nothing can dispossess me of that!” Whenever weakness or listlessness assails the mind, recite the following verse:

“I am divine and nothing else.

I am Brahman the Absolute;

Misery and grief cannot touch me.

I am Existence-Knowledge-Bliss.

I am ever-free by nature.

O, my mind, say — Om! Tat Sat Om!”

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Sister Devamata

Thoroughness in all his thought-processes was characteristic of Swami Ramakrishnananda. He never left a problem half-solved. He carried it into his conversation, into his reading, into his meditation, he lived with it, until he found a solution for it, I remember when he was striving to discover a demonstrable point of contact between physical space and spiritual space, how insistent was his effort. He read the latest books on astronomy, he talked with those who were versed in the science of physics, he spent long hours searching the spaces of his own inner consciousness. Death alone was able to check the ardour of his seeking.

The solutions he reached were always definite. There was no vagueness in his mode of thinking. His thought was bold and convincing. Those who came to pay him homage often returned day after day, drawn by his power and the unfailing courtesy of his welcome. It was not his custom to rise when visitors entered, but from his seat on the rug at the far end of the monastery hall he would greet them with a gracious smile and a friendly wave of the hand, as he requested them to take their places in the group already gathered round him. There were certain devotees who came daily on their way home from their offices, and this led to a continuity of thought in the conversations of succeeding days. One simple question would provide the theme for many gatherings. So it was when a devotee asked: "What constitutes morality?" The Swami's answer was: "All that takes man to God is morality; whatever takes man away from God is immorality."

"There is a social law and a religions law," the Swami continued. "God commands us to punish those who disobey Him. Why should

we punish them? To make them obedient servants. It is true that Christ says, ' When a man strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other but this is meant for those who have given up the world, not for the householder. He must punish the wrongdoer in order to protect society; otherwise there will be general depredation, the good will be destroyed and the wicked will prevail. For instance, a man desires nothing but God. He may have a house and another man may ask for it. The man who cares only for God can say: "Yes, take it. I do not want it." But that would not be possible for a man who still wishes to live in the world.

"Punishment is not a bad thing. If by punishment you help to rectify a man, really you have done good to him. You should not allow the wicked to thrive. In a field there are weeds, but if you want to reap a good harvest, you must pluck them out. A revengeful spirit, however, is bad. Satan always tries to revenge himself, but God never felt the least anger toward Satan. They say God sent him down below, but that is not true. Satan went of his own accord because he could not have what he wanted in heaven. The attitude of God toward Satan was that of pity. The attitude of Satan toward God was that of revenge, jealousy, hatred. These feelings are always Satanic. Vengeance is based on egotism and malice."

The following evening the conversation turned on the origin of evil and one of the habitual group asked the question: "How has evil come?" Swami Ramakrishnananda replied : "The dualists say that all the good in man belongs to God and all the bad belongs to the man himself. The monists say that all belongs to God, both good and bad. In reality all is God. It is He who actuates the evil-doer as well as the saint.

A man has sugar candy to sell in the shape of a mango or a bird or a dog. A little boy says to his father, 'Please buy me that bird'.

He thinks it will taste sweeter than the mango or the dog, whereas in reality they are all alike. In the same way man looks at the world and calls this good and this bad, but as a matter of fact it is all made out of the same substance. God has created both good and evil, but He is beyond both. He has created the two parties and set them warring against each other, while He looks on as the Witness. All this warring of good and bad, pleasure and pain, is merely the play of God; this creation is His laugh. Someone said to Sri Ramakrishna, 'When God could make all people good, why did He create evil ? Why did He not make every one good?' Sri Ramakrishna's answer was, ' Then with whom would He play ? '

"It is because we are mistaking the real for the unreal, the unreal for the real, that all this seems so serious to us. We are taking the play to be the real thing and the Player to be unreal: whereas the Player or God is the one reality and the play of creation is absolutely unreal. If you will analyse your own life, you will find out how vague and uncertain it is—a birth, a death and a little space between. Out of darkness you have come, into darkness you will go, and you call the space between life. There was no dream, then you dreamed, and again there was no dream. A dream you look upon as unreal, but this little span of life is just as much a dream, just as unreal as the dream that comes to you in sleep. At any moment death may call you away." Swami Ramakrishnananda spoke with great earnestness. The unreality of this outer life with all its perplexities and distresses was a subject on which he felt deeply. The outer world never grew real to him. He was never trapped into looking upon the play as the serious thing and giving a lesser place to the Player. At all times the Player stood in clear outline before him. He never forgot his Divine origin. "Man is made in the image of God; that is, man possesses all the powers of God, but in miniature form," he declared. Evolution is

a process of 'rolling out.' As we evolve spiritually, the inner powers become more and more manifest.

"Evolution means wanting something more. It implies a craving. A craving for more of God makes us evolve spiritually, a craving for outer things or earthly powers brings material evolution. The same craving is in the ant, in the angel, in man and in the *Siddhas* (Seers). Man worships the gods to satisfy this craving. But Bhagavan Sri Krishna cautions every one against worshipping the gods. 'Those who worship the gods go to the gods,' he says, 'but my devotees come to me.' What is desirable ? Is it desirable to go to the gods or to the Supreme Being ? Sri Krishna answers this explicitly, "Those who depend on Me, I provide for them, I take care of them, I become their servant."

The question was asked, "Can a man ever do as he likes ?" The Swami's answer was: " Sometimes he thinks he is doing as he likes, but in reality God is guiding all his movements. God is the only Doer, nothing is done by man. The devotee asked again: "Then what is the use of man's making any effort to be good or to realize God?" Swami Ramakrishnananda replied: "You cannot help acting. Your very nature is to act. Can you remain perfectly quiet even for a moment? This body is born to act. Your hands, your feet, your eyes and ears have a natural tendency to action. As long as you must act, you will want to do that which will bring the most desirable results ; so, as long as you act you will have to try to be good, to be virtuous, to be unselfish, in order to get the desirable results you are seeking ; and since God is the most desirable result to be attained, you will have to strive to realize Him."

An Outline of Hindu Psychology – 1

(The Psychology of Suggestion)

Swami Gnaneswarananda

Suggestion is the manifestation of something phenomenal and material with the help of a stimulus which is not material. It usually involves a subject who receives the stimulus and an agent who works it.

Suppose I tell a man that he is sick, and a few others tell him the same thing. If we constantly go on infusing such an idea into his mind, his *buddhi* will transform his consciousness into the form of a disease which will, in course of evolution, project itself on his physical body in the form of an illness. The general notion about the development of the phenomenon of sickness is that its cause comes from outside in the form of some material disorder. For instance, let us take the case of contracting a cold. We contact something from the outside world in the form of some matter, some germ or uneven atmospheric condition, and that causes some change in the physical system and eventually it develops into a cold. We do not call this suggestion because the stimulus in such a case is not a thought. A suggestion is distinguished from such a phenomenon in regard to the exciting cause only. In the case of a suggestion, the physical result is just the same, but the stimulus is of an entirely different nature. It belongs to the plane of thought: whereas in the case of a phenomenal event the stimulus is tangibly material.

We may classify suggestion under two general heads: perceptible suggestion, which is carried from the agent to the subject through the medium of something visible and tangible. Imperceptible suggestion is where such visible media of transference are entirely absent. For instance, if I were to convey some stimulus by means of speech or gesture, and transfer my thought to the subject by a perceptible method of communication, and that idea materialized in the subject

in the form of some phenomenon, say a disease, that would be a case of suggestion through a perceptible medium.

But in some cases it happens that the stimulus is not transferred through the perceptible mediation of word, script, or gesture: it is transferred directly from consciousness to consciousness. Hindu psychology observes authentic cases of such a nature, and on the premises of these, and other cases, draws its conclusion. By studying facts very closely we come across phenomena in which a stimulus is caught or contacted by a subject without the help of a perceptible medium. In phenomena like thought-reading or thought-transference, one can transfer one's own thoughts or receive another's without the help of any visible medium. It is dogmatism to deny that it never happens. Do we not find evidence, even in our ordinary daily experience, of a thought being set in motion by one person and contacted by others without any visible medium? For instance, it happens often that I am thinking of something very deeply without in any way giving expression to it. One of my companions, prompted by some invisible force, as it were, takes up that thought and starts to talk about the very same thing. Hindu psychology explains such cases of thought-transference, thought-reading, clairvoyance, clairaudience, and other such psychic phenomena, with the help of a discovery of its own, which we shall discuss later.

Let me now give you another instance of suggestion through imperceptible mediation. I think many of you must have noticed that you can draw the attention of a friend, who is sitting in a big crowd, if you simply concentrate your thought on that person. Suppose that in a theatre or a concert you suddenly see a good friend of yours sitting in a distant corner. You are eager to talk to him. You keep your mind fixed on him. He becomes restless and starts to look around. Then your eyes meet with a smile of joy. Such slight cases of thought-transference have been verified by many. In almost nine cases out of ten you will be successful, provided your mind is in a state of concentration. How can this phenomenon be explained? There

is no visible medium of contact in such cases. It must have taken place through the medium of something very subtle. Hindu psychology explains such phenomena with its doctrine of *chitta*, or cosmic mind-stuff.

The doctrine is that there is a common background of thought on which every individual thought raises its vibration. An individual plane of consciousness is only walled-in space within that one cosmic background of thought. If these walls, or *upadhis*, could be removed by some means or other, a direct method could easily be established to catch any thought vibration.

We have already discussed the nature of the *chitta*. Let us now relate it to this special topic of suggestion. If we accept as a working hypothesis the theory that there is a cosmic background of thought, upon which all waves of thought vibrations are raised, then it would not be difficult for us to explain any of the phenomena mentioned above. Even the materialization of strong curses, or powerful blessings, could be explained with the help of this hypothesis.

Let us consider this teaching in regard to its bearing on the psychology of suggestion. The cosmic mind-stuff is one and universal. Any vibration that is raised in any consciousness is recorded there first, and then translated into expression and conveyed to the subject. Suppose I want you to look at this picture. At first I create a thought-wave on the cosmic background of my thought, which is the background of your thought as well. But owing to some obstructing wall my thought does not create a corresponding wave in your consciousness. For that reason I use a sound stimulus and say, 'Please look at this picture.' Individual consciousness is nothing but that universal consciousness limited by certain conditions. In our technical language we call these conditions *upadhis*. *Upadhi* ordinarily means a limiting condition. This term may be explained with the help of the following illustration :-

Infinite space is one and indivisible; when that space is enclosed by four walls we treat this walled-in space as something different

from the universal space. But, in fact, universal space has never been divided or limited by anything. Considering the *upadhi* of these four walls we say that the space here is small or big and so on. The universal appears limited to our consciousness by the existence of these four walls. Anything that apparently encloses universal consciousness, as these four walls enclose space, is called *upadhi*. which limits, not the substance, but the subjective consciousness, by its existence.

Fundamentally and essentially there is one universal consciousness and there are several walls, so to say, that make it appear limited. In the first place, there is our ego, our sense of 'I', which puts a wall around that universal consciousness. Then there is our *buddhi* which, again, puts another enclosure. Our mind puts a third enclosure around it. Then, our senses limit the universal consciousness still more. These different enclosures are the *upadhis* that appear to divide and limit the universal consciousness. For that reason, under ordinary circumstances, we respond only according to our *upadhis*, viz: the ego, *buddhi*, mind, and the senses. If these *upadhis* could be done away with, if these limiting conditions could be transcended, one could raise strong thought waves, not only in another individual consciousness, but in the cosmic consciousness. And such thought waves could be directed towards any particular object without any hindrance.

The problem is, how to transcend these *upadhis*. In ordinary cases this transcendence of the *upadhis* happens naturally. For instance, in the case of ordinary thought transference, where one spontaneously picks up the thread of another's unexpressed thought, there is no conscious effort on the part of either one of the persons to transcend the *upadhis*. But it happens nevertheless. If we want to find out a law and explain such a phenomenon in the light of psychology, we have to maintain that what happened in such a case is this: first of all, one person by a natural method transcended some of the *upadhis*, so that the vibration was raised on the cosmic background. Then it also

happened that by some spontaneous response to his higher nature the other person also rose above those *upadhis*. So it became easy for that projected thought to enter his consciousness. Other phenomena like clairvoyance, clairaudience, and so on, could also be explained by this same psychological theory of the *chitta*.

There is one more very important thing to be considered in connection with this theory of the cosmic mind-stuff. We find there are certain traits, certain tendencies, certain instincts common to all people, and those instincts or habits of thoughts are not necessarily for the best. Some faulty habits of thought are found in all living beings. According to Hindu psychology, the most deep-seated illusion common to all is the confusion between the subject and the object, the I and the 'not I'. The body and the mind, being the object of one's perception, can never be the subject, or the 'I'. But we all accept the combination of the body and the mind as our self. Now, how is it that all living beings have got entangled in the same fundamental illusion? This question is explained very conveniently with the help of the cosmic-mind doctrine. There are certain fundamental and essential qualities that belong to that cosmic mind-stuff. Individuals, being part and parcel of it, naturally possess them. Many of the common instincts, like clinging to life, the urge for the propagation of the species, hunger and sleep, have been explained from the viewpoint of heredity, that these are inherited from the parents. But the question is, where did the ancestors get them? If we push the question further and further back, we have to stop somewhere and admit that such qualities were inherent in the very nature of the stuff all are made of.

For that reason, Hindu psychology, analysing the question deeper, ascribes it to the cosmic mind-stuff, and holds that the influence of *maya* or illusion, is fundamentally implanted there. *Maya* first of all exercises its influence on the cosmic background. It influences the very material out of which everything is made. For that reason it expresses itself through every individual manifestation. Here is an

illustration of our common illusion: Where is the I? My body is not the 'I'. I call it *my* body. The very expression shows that I put myself in the position of the possessor, and the body is an object which my real 'I' possesses. Otherwise, I could not use the expression, '*my* body'. The idea of possessor and possessed is distinctly present in our consciousness regarding the relation of the 'I' and '*my* body'. Still, all of us always confuse it and take the possessed for the possessor.

Let us try to understand the theory with the help of a very suggestive illustration: Suppose we immerse several vessels of different colour and shape in the water of a lake. According to the colour and shape of the vessels the water contained within will certainly appear differently. The size, colour, shape, and every other quality of the vessel, illustrates the *upadhi*. According to the *upadhis* of these vessels, the same water which is contained in all of them is different in appearance. Next, suppose that there is some special quality, characteristic, or property, like saltiness, present in the water which is contained by all these vessels. That saltiness would be common to each individual vessel, irrespective of its colour, size or shape. Likewise, Hindu psychology maintains that all individuals are like so many 'bottles' that are immersed within one 'ocean' of consciousness. The common influence of *maya* is nothing but the response of all these 'bottles' to the common property of 'saltiness' in the water'.

However, let us return to our main topic, the psychology of suggestion. We classified suggestion, generally, under two different headings, perceptible and imperceptible suggestion. Let us analyse further the real nature and procedure of these two kinds of suggestion. What actually happens when a suggestion is transferred through words? Suppose I suggest to another person some idea through words or any other means of perceptible communication, and after a while I find that there has been a materialization of that thought in the form of some phenomenon. To make it more definite, suppose I give you a glass of pure water to drink. After you have taken it I tell you that

I made a mistake. Instead of water I gave you a glass of some poisonous medicine, which might cause a stomach-ache. Gradually you actually develop a stomach-ache, although you drank only a glass of pure water. The stimulus or exciting cause for your stomach pain is not the water, but the notion suggested to you by my words. The stimulus in this case was a verbal suggestion, yet it developed in the form of a physical phenomenon, a disease. Now, what are the intermediate stages and steps that were involved in the case of this materialization of a verbal suggestion? The verbal stimulus was accepted by you and then it created a change in your *buddhi*, raising the thought wave, 'I have taken poison! It will give me a stomach-ache'. The form of discomfort was at once manufactured there. It next came to the mind and the mind gave it to the body. According to the Hindu psychology of projection, there is no difficulty in understanding such a phenomenon of materialization.

I remember the case of a boy I used to know. In India, in our theatres the roles of women were usually played by boys. The boy I am speaking of used to take female parts and by playing these parts, dressing, acting and speaking like a woman, he got into a special state of consciousness. The suggestion of womanhood constantly worked on him and changed his manners and expressions even in his ordinary life. His voice, his gestures, his mannerisms, and his general expressions became just like those of a woman.

I should like to cite another instance, of a mystical type, from the life of Shri Ramakrishna, the Master of my Master. There are many wonderful records of amazing phenomena in his life. At one time he was undergoing a process of meditation and practices, putting himself in the position of Shri Radha, the divine consort of Krishna. He dressed like a woman, spoke like one, sang the songs appropriate to the relationship between Radha and Krishna, and filled his mind with the thought of the girl, deeply in love with Krishna. Even those who knew him well could not recognize him when he stood in a group of women, so much like a woman had he become. It so happened that

his physical body underwent an amazing transformation. He actually become a woman in all physical manifestations, even so far as to have the periodical expression of potential motherhood. It sounds like a fairy tale, but when I make such a statement I am absolutely sure about the truth of it. I place this case before the public because I think that this experience of Ramakrishna is even more important to a student of psychology than the classical instance of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi, and it has been testified to by many who knew him closely at that time. There are many other wonderful instances in the life of Ramakrishna which are of immense importance to the study of psychology.

If we find that things happen, yet dogmatically deny them, it is not rational or scientific. One outstanding fact about Hindu psychology is that it never denies any happening, no matter how extraordinary it is, so long as it is authentic. It takes into consideration psychic experiences, as well as ordinary perceptions, and thus finds out the law. For that reason, one is not surprised to find that the laws of Hindu psychology explain many more facts than modern psychology. A generalization based on diverse, authentic facts is bound to be more scientific than one based on only a few limited ones.

This theory of suggestion has been accepted to a very large extent by the Hindu mystics in their study and explanation of the fact of transference of spiritual energy from the teacher to a disciple. It has been demonstrated in many cases that spiritual power can be transferred from an illumined teacher to a fit student without the help of any tangible method of communication. In the life of Ramakrishna it has been demonstrated several times that by means of a mere wish, a magnetic glance, a simple touch, or even a potent thought, he would bring about amazing changes in the minds of some of his disciples. Swami Vivekananda was once asked what was the greatest power he saw in his teacher, Shri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda replied, somewhat in these words: I have found people who could exercise a wonderful influence over matter, but the most remarkable power I

found in Ramakrishna was that he had an amazing control over mind. If he wanted to change, transform, or illuminate the mind of any person, he could do it just by a glance, or a wish, as easily as a potter gives form or shape to a lump of soft clay'.

Vivekananda had come to this conclusion after studying the life of Ramakrishna carefully. In the early days, when he first came to Ramakrishna, his teacher had simply touched him, and transformed his consciousness completely. This is a well-known incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda. At first, Vivekananda thought it might be some power of hypnotism; but later he learned that it was much greater than that. It was the power of implanting spiritual consciousness in another person. Such phenomena have been demonstrated through the ages by Hindu mystics of the highest calibre.

Such arts of spiritual husbandry can be explained very well with the help of this doctrine of *chitta*, or cosmic mind-stuff, which we discussed before. Even in Western thought we find the existence of such ideas in an undeveloped form. Many Western poets recognize the fact that thoughts can be transferred from heart to heart, even without the mediation of words, gestures, writing, or anything of the kind. Tennyson, in his 'Aylmer's Field', states how the hero and the heroine felt the pang of separation so intensely that both simultaneously thought of putting an end to their lives. They were far apart from each other and knew there was no chance of a reunion. It so happened that they both committed suicide at the same moment, without the one knowing anything of the other. This shows that this idea was present in the mind of the poet. But it requires the labour of a scientist to gather relevant facts and find out a law. Hindu psychologists did this to a very satisfactory degree.

In view of the evidence of imperceptible suggestion it is logical to believe that whatever thought waves we raise agitate the cosmic background. If we could evolve a spiritual broadcasting system as well as a receiving set, there would be no need for us to go through

this indirect and slow' process of talking, writing, and gesticulating, for the purpose of communication.

There is another practical point we may discuss. How can a healthy, strong and pure suggestion be conveyed by one person to another without any hindrance? To reach any logical conclusion regarding an experiment of this kind one has to understand clearly the nature, function, and possibilities of both the persons. It is the agent who transfers the thought to the subject, and the subject receives the force thus transmitted. There are certain favourable conditions required for this. The necessary requisite for the agent is absolute control over his thoughts and a very strong power of concentration so that he can apply the maximum intensity and force to the thought to be transmitted. We all raise thoughts very often and wish things to happen, but they do not materialize. The reason is that we do not have the power behind our thought, and so it is not intense enough to go forth. The thought should not be disturbed by any cross-current, nor should it be limited by the traits of the *upadhis* of the mind, ego, or *buddhi*. Only when the agent is able to transcend the limitations of his *upadhis* and can hold the thought, which he wants to send out, in a very intense form in one particular focus, can he direct it towards the subject. Even if these conditions are all there, the thought may yet meet with some other obstructions belonging to the consciousness of the subject.

Although an agent may be directing the strong light of his thought-current towards the subject, if the subject maintains an impregnable and opaque wall around him, how can the light penetrate there? Therefore, the subject must be capable of receiving the suggestion. In ordinary speech, people say that faith is necessary for the subject to receive a thought vibration of such a type. I would rather put it in psychological language and say that the absence of cross-currents of any kind in the consciousness of the subject is the primary condition which enables him to receive the thought vibration of the agent. Even

in cases of the transference of spiritual power from master to student it has been found that a highly illumined teacher can implant spiritual power only in a certain type of disciple. There are other types that cannot receive it even if it is sent to them. They do not have the capacity to receive or retain it. It is only a dry piece of fuel that will catch fire when a kindled piece of wood is applied to it; a piece of ice would not burn even if it were kept in a fiery furnace.

Of course, when the current from the agent is exceedingly strong it can, by means of its own power, remove certain obstacles from the consciousness of the subject. The same holds good in cases of extraordinary subjects. A person of strong faith often gets wonderful results by working it all out by means of his own receptivity, rather than through the conscious transmission from the agent. But the general law is that the proper condition of both the agent and the subject makes such a phenomenon much more likely to happen.

So we see that all suggestion involves a subject who receives the stimulus, and an agent who works it. There are three types of suggestions: passive, active, and mutual. A suggestion is passive when the subject, by his special susceptibility, attracts the thought stimulus and demonstrates it. I might give you, as an example, one of my own experiences.

Once, in India, an old man came to me carrying his little daughter in his arms. The man, a complete stranger and a very poor man, told me the child was sick and asked me to cure it. I offered to call a good doctor to attend the child, but the old man would not hear of it. He kept saying, '*Babaji* (father—a term applied to monks in India), please say the word, and I know she will be cured. I have faith in you, not in doctors.' The child also looked at me with intense, pleading eyes. I told the man to pray to God, but he simply shook his head and repeated, '*You say the word.*' It seemed absurd to me, but I asked the man to wait. I went inside the place where I was living and sat down to meditate. The thought kept coming to me, 'Why should I be against the man, against the man's burning faith?' And the feverish eyes of

the little girl haunted me. I got up and went to the door, where the man was still standing. 'What was it that you wanted me to say?' I asked: 'That your child will be cured? All right, if you have so much faith it must be so'.

In a couple of days I found that the child was cured! This may have been a case of passive suggestion. A stimulus can even be drawn by a subject without any agent. We say that a passive suggestion is one that is effected more from the side of the subject than from that of the agent, as in the above case, where the man's intense faith was the primary factor.

A suggestion is active when the agent, by his own power, imparts the stimulus to the subject, as in hypnotism, done without the approval of the subject. There are many cases of active suggestion in the lives of great religious leaders, and the spiritual transformations done by spiritual giants are accomplished in this way. Some of them, whose cup is overflowing, are compared to a child, standing on a street corner with a bag of jewels, giving them away, indiscriminately, it seems. I mentioned earlier the experience of Swami Vivekananda with Ramakrishna. That, and other such incidents in the life of that 'God-man of the nineteenth century', may be classified, from the viewpoint of psychology, as active suggestion.

A suggestion is mutual when both the agent and the subject cooperate in bringing the suggestion into effect. Because it is a fifty-fifty proposition it works without a great deal of power.

There is another point I should like to mention. That is the fact of the affinity of consciousness'. Each consciousness has an affinity which determines the subtle thought-forces that it draws. As iron has a special affinity for oxygen and will draw oxygen, so everyone has his own affinity. Like draws like. A subject can pick up a subtle disembodied thought-stimulus from the cosmic background of *chitta*, according to its own affinity, just as the string of a musical instrument vibrates sympathetically to a corresponding tone sounded in the air near it. Hence the importance of creating a constructive affinity in

order to receive positive and not negative thoughts. We must tune the 'instrument' of our being to receive constructive thoughts. Likewise, we should always release good and constructive thought, so that it may materialize in the life of someone else, now or in the future. For instance, you should send out thoughts of goodwill to all people, wishing that all become selfless and holy, say, as Buddha. Such thoughts accumulate and then do their work. And such thought-forces, when they grow in volume, bring forth a God-man, an Avatar. So it is believed in India. Remember, thought-stimuli released in the cosmic *chitta* remain there as a potent force, to be picked up and manifested by a subject having affinity for such stimuli. Hence the need and efficacy of broadcasting positive and constructive thoughts.

I should like to conclude by reminding you that the study of Hindu psychology convinces us of the fact that it is consciousness, always consciousness, that manifests in the form of phenomena. Phenomena, or the material world, are nothing but the expression and manifestation of *thought*. If we are once convinced of the truth of this it is not difficult for us to understand ideas like that of the power of suggestion, deduced from that one fundamental doctrine of *chitta*. Had not that basic teaching been true there could not have been any expression of the power of suggestion in any time whatever. How else could there be the manifestation of such phenomena of thought as we find almost daily in the course of experience? No scientific mind can deny these facts. Thus, the more we understand the subjective nature of things, the more we comprehend the nature and extent of the working of such spiritual forces as suggestion, thought-transference, spiritual husbandry, and the like.

Sometimes, by calling such phenomena 'psychic' we simply mystify ourselves and think that these do not happen as the result or expression of any law, but are something beyond the comprehension of our logic or general level of understanding. But it is not correct to think that anything could happen without law or order. There is no chance or miracle in nature. Those phenomena, the laws of which we

do not know, we call 'miracles'. If we take into consideration phenomena of every kind, without going either to the extreme of scepticism or to that of superstition, it becomes much easier for us to find out the laws that govern every phenomenon. Then we do not put a high wall of distinction between the occult and the ordinary. It is the openness, receptivity, and freedom of the mind from rank superstition or unreasonable scepticism, that prepares it for scientific investigation. People who are superstitious by nature will accept anything without the scrutiny of reason. Therefore, they are incapable of reaching any logical conclusion about anything. The same is true of the mind which rejects everything without first giving it the privilege of an experiment. This is superstition of a different kind. It is negative superstition.

A scientific mind is one that gives due consideration to all ideas, thoughts, and phenomena, and then organizes and analyses them. It is a mind that puts them to many tests to examine their validity, and finally generalizes by inductive reasoning from them, in order to establish a general fundamental principle. That is how all the sciences have been developed, by the process of inductive generalization. The same is true in the case of developing a comprehensive science of psychology. It will be only by adopting such a process of scientific investigation that we shall be able to establish correct theories about the working of the inner spiritual forces. And by doing so, we shall be able to free humanity from its stupidity and superstition regarding spiritual matters, and establish a branch of psychology that will not only explain and help us to improve our ordinary daily life—business, social, and family life—, but will explain logically and clearly the principles which govern every phenomenon that one experiences along the way of spiritual development.

(Reprinted from Vedanta for the East and the West, July-August 1966)

Harnessing the power of Vedanta

Srinivas Venkatram

Carry the light and life of Vedanta to every door, and rouse up the divinity hidden within every soul.

- Swami Vivekananda

Vedanta as the potential divinity of every human being

Vedanta can be simply defined as the affirmation of the potential divinity of every person. According to Swami Vivekananda, our goal is to recognize this great truth about ourselves, and also help others recognize this potential divinity in themselves & manifest it in their lives.

Let us begin by appreciating the implications of the term 'potential divinity of every human being'.

If we are 'potentially divine', it follows that

(i) Each one of us carries within, infinite possibilities as a human being.

This means that each of us need not feel limited by a few talents (or lack of them) or allow ourselves to be judged in terms of what we are capable of or not. Rather, each one of us can be whoever we want to be, as long as we do what is necessary to manifest any specific possibility in ourselves

(ii) Every one of us carries an inner repository of 'strength' which manifests itself as strong character values, resilience and endurance, deep self-esteem, and the capacity to face and find solutions to any challenge we face.

When people recognize that they have within themselves an intrinsic/ inner source of strength – they become capable of dealing with the strong gusts of change, of ups and downs, of constant buffeting of challenges that is the nature of life. They develop courage,

heroism, endurance, and the necessary mindsets to transcend circumstances and create their own destiny.

(iii) It also follows that if I am divine, so are you; and if every individual is similarly divine – at least potentially – then ideas of race, caste, colour, and other divisions between one human being and another become meaningless. In short, we have no choice but to have the highest respect for every other human being.

Put another way, this recognition of divinity in the other leads to the creation of a common bond or shared identity among people that is deeper than the membership of a nation or city or tribe, deeper than the physical colour or form of the human being, and deeper even, than the religious belief systems that shape their thinking.

(iv) The recognition of the potential divinity in each person also means that any activity that helps us awaken and manifest this divinity within, will result in an intrinsic joy and happiness.

In the words of Sister Nivedita

“If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then 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. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular.”

(Introduction: ‘Our Master and His Message’, CW. 1, p.xv)

This opens the door to a new “secular spirituality” wherein every one of us has the possibility of finding a life full of meaning and purpose – one where our work becomes a means for awakening something higher – of the potential divinity within ourselves.

Thus, Vedanta – and its call to recognize and manifest the divinity of every human being – offers powerful new levers for the redesign and regeneration of society.

Necessity for ‘Assimilating’ these ideas

How is the power of Vedanta to be harnessed by educators, by human resource professionals, by coaches and counselors, and other change-agents in society?

The challenge we face is that it is not enough for people to theoretically know or even dogmatically believe that they carry an 'inner repository' of strength, or that they have infinite possibilities within.

Such a theoretical knowledge or belief will not result in their experiencing the effects of inner strength – such as character, resilience, self-esteem, and capacity to respond to life.

Therefore, simply providing such knowledge in the form of books or films or talks may convince people theoretically but will not truly impact their lives.

In order for Vedanta and its principles to have a lasting and visible impact on the lives of say, young people, they must be given an opportunity to discover, engage with, and assimilate the ideas of Vedanta into their thinking and into their lives.

What does the process of discovery, engagement, and assimilation do? It helps transform the “knowledge”

- that we have strength within,
 - that we have infinite possibilities, and
 - that others are potentially divine,
- into an enabled human being,
- whose identity has transformed or expanded
 - whose mental models and 'ways of thinking' are radically changed
 - whose models of response to the environment have evolved in relation to the world around them
 - whose life strategies and architectures of choice have similarly undergone radical change.

To elaborate, assimilating Vedantic Ideas can lead to

(i) a transformation of one's identity from a “victim” of life (where one views oneself as someone caged and caught up by the circumstances), to a “creator” of one's destiny (where one sees

circumstances as opportunity spaces, and oneself as someone capable of creating a new reality by leveraging these opportunity spaces).

(ii) Similarly, assimilating Vedantic Ideas can lead to radical changes in one's mental models and vision of life and work – Why do we work? Do we see work only as a means for making a living and building a professional career or do we seek work as a medium for contribution and self-actualization.

It is by answering questions such as these, that we can find new meaning and fulfillment in the workplace – not just from external professional rewards alone but also from intrinsic rewards that become visible to us once we widen our mental window.

(iii) Capacity to respond to challenges is another area where assimilation of Vedantic Ideas leads to visible results. By translating Vedantic principles into new models of thinking and new models of response, and helping people discover, engage and assimilate these new models of thinking, we are helping them adopt new “positive engagements” with the challenges they face in their daily life.

“*Cognitive Empowerment*” is the word I have coined to describe this process of assimilating Vedantic Ideas into

enabling identities and self-assessments,
an expanded vision of life and one's role and place in the universe
inclusive ways of thinking
affirmative ‘models of sensemaking’ the world around us, and
positive ‘models of engagement’ with the challenges we face in personal and professional lives

In this sense, Cognitive Empowerment is a far deeper, far more comprehensive perspective of human evolution and change than either communicating ideas or bringing about behavioral shifts in people.

Cognitive Empowerment in Action

Applying Cognitive Empowerment in various educational, community, and workplace contexts requires the development/construction of specific and targeted 'assimilation experiences'. These assimilation experiences enable participants to systematically discover, engage with, and assimilate ideas into definable and measurable shifts in identity, modes of thinking and engagement, mental models, etc.

Thus, Cognitive Empowerment is associated with rigorous, methodology driven, and measurable mechanisms for strengthening people from within.

Cognitive Empowerment can be applied in several areas. But in our experience, there are some critical areas where empowerment can have powerful and visible impact.

(i) Enabling children to discover their infinite possibilities within and freeing them from the shackles of a 'socialized and limited' vision of themselves and their own potential (ii) Empowering youth to discover their own emotional and inner-knowledge resources so that they are able to build their lives and careers as creators of their own destiny

(iii) Enabling people in workplaces to find new sources of meaning and purpose within work itself – so that they go beyond narrow notions of duty and efficiency and seek to become instead, transformative contributors in their own workplaces and in their own communities.

(iv) Providing communities with the self-confidence and collective capacities to find answers to their own challenges – without necessarily being dependent or psychologically enslaved by outside 'aid'.

Similarly, techniques of Cognitive Empowerment can be used by educators, by HR professionals, by coaches, school and community counselors, and by community change agents to help people assimilate ideas of Vedanta – inner strength, interhuman respect, meaning and purpose, and the awakening of one's possibilities that these ideas bring.

Cognitive Empowerment – empowering people ‘inside-out’

For long, we have seen empowerment in terms of financial and resource empowerment, social and political empowerment, and empowerment through capabilities and education.

All these forms of empowerment create the necessary external “spaces” for people to develop, grow, and express their potentialities as human beings.

But Vedanta and Cognitive Empowerment focuses on helping people ‘recognize’ their own inner power, ‘awaken’ their own aspirations for improvement, and become conscious that they carry within themselves the power to not just respond to challenges, but also design their own solutions and thereby take charge of their destinies.

Thus, Cognitive Empowerment gives people the capacity and intention to fill the spaces, provided by other forms of empowerment, with their own potentiality as human beings. Furthermore, it enables them to create their own spaces through the energy & knowledge resources which they intrinsically possess.

Srinivas Venkatram is the Founder-CEO of Illumine Knowledge Resources – an “ideas to actualization” lab based in Mumbai, India. Illumine has developed several assimilation products that help people build self-esteem, new models of learning, adopt positive engagement with life, citizenship thinking, agility, resilience, etc.

Illumine has designed & developed several large-scale interventions based on the principles of Cognitive Empowerment including the Awakened Citizen Program now being conducted in 4000 schools across India; the Contributor Program being conducted in more than 500 engineering colleges including IIT-Delhi & IIT-Jammu; interventions related to building meaning, purpose, citizenship, innovation and agility in some of India’s largest companies; besides working on innovative community change programs.

Illumine has also set up a dedicated lab to support young people in the career space.

Leaves from an Ashrama 63

Being Receptive to New Light

Swami Vidyatmananda

Ever so often I hear someone say, What a time we're living in! Everything turned upside down! I never thought I'd live to see the day when the old, established standards were being swept away as now, with no respect for anything on the part of so many.

Whether values are really being modified faster than usual, I do not know. Perhaps they are. Perhaps we are in one of those transitional moments when history takes a new turning. But it seems to me that a Vedantist will not be upset by this. He can easily chant with Tennyson¹ :

The old order changeth, yielding place to the new.
And God fulfills himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

In one short sentence Sri Ramakrishna furnished a maxim useful to all men made uneasy by the times: As long as I live, so long do I learn.

We are urged, then, to keep a young outlook--not to become set in our ways, not to become conservative and rigid and incapable of accepting anything new; instructed to live so that each day permits fresh surprises, each personal encounter new perceptions; every experience a chance to enlarge our comprehension. And how better--in this day when established truths seem to be overthrown so easily by the astonishing young--to take so many uncertainties in our stride?

Ramakrishna said also: There are three terms that prick me to the core: guru, doer of action, and father. God is the only guru. My Divine Mother is the only doer of actions; I'm nothing but an instrument in her hands. And I feel myself always the child of Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna knew everything, yet he always preserved the attitude of student, of learner. This is very significant and should remind us that when we think we know, at that moment we have ceased to learn or to be able to learn. Light! More light! Is there any end to it? cried a great sage, Swami Brahmananda, as he saw the abysses of Knowledge opening out infinitely before him. And one of the wisest and humblest men of our time, Albert Einstein, observed: Anyone who can no longer feel either astonishment or surprise is to all intents dead. His eyes are, as it were, switched off.

The best example of the ever-ready learner was that wandering monk of the Srimad Bhagavatam , called the *avadhuta*. He read lessons in everything, so much so that he spoke of himself as having twenty-four gurus. We understand, of course, that the avadhuta had only one Guru. He became a sage through the practice of seeing the Divine Preceptor in everybody and everything.

Things change and will change. How dynamic He is! How full of admiration we should be, regarding His fabulous versatility! Rather than decrying change, let us learn to make it make us appreciative of its Author.

¹ Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892). English poet.

Programme for July - August 2018

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

Jul	1	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 11	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jul	8	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 12	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jul	15	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 13	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jul	22	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 14	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jul	29	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 22	Swami Shivarupananda
Jul	30 & 31	Annual Retreat	
Aug	5	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 15	Swami Sarvasthananda
Aug	12	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 16	Swami Sarvasthananda
Aug	19	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 17	Swami Sarvasthananda
Aug	26	Day Retreat	

Annual Retreat (2 days)

**With Swami Veetamohananda, Swami Bodhasarananda, Swami
Atmapriyananda, Swami Sarvasthananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on July 30th & 31st
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm**

Day Retreat

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

continued from the front cover

release you from your bonds." After setting the man free, the thief said: "Come with me. I will take you to the public high way." After a long time they reached the road. At this the man said: "Sir, you have been very good to me. Come with me to my house." "Oh, no!" the robber replied. "I can't go there. The police will know it." This world itself is the forest. The three robbers prowling here are Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. It is they that rob a man of the Knowledge of Truth. Tamas wants to destroy him. 'Rajas' binds him to the world. But Sattva rescues him from the clutches of rajas and tamas. Under the protection of Sattva, man is rescued from anger, passion and other evil effects of Tamas. Further, Sattva loosens the bonds of the world. But Sattva also is a robber. It cannot give man the ultimate Knowledge of Truth, though it shows him the road leading to the Supreme Abode of God. Setting him on the path, Sattva tells him: "Look yonder. There is your home." Even Sattva is far away from the knowledge of Brahman.

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Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them that they are all glorious children of immortality, even those who are the weakest in manifestation. Let positive, strong, helpful thought enter into their brains from very childhood. Lay yourselves open to these thoughts, and not to weakening and paralysing ones. Say to your own minds, "I am He, I am He." Let it ring day and night in your minds like a song, and at the point of death declare "I am He." That is the Truth; the infinite strength of the world is yours. Drive out the superstition that has covered your minds. Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practice the Truth. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached.

Swami Vivekananda



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