

Vedanta

400 MARCH - APRIL 2018

After Sri Ramakrishna's Passing Away
M (Mahendra Nath Gupta)

Saint Tukaram
Swami Ritajananda



Divine Wisdom

Teachings of Swami Turiananda

Swami: "Man is trying hard to make himself happy. But nothing succeeds unless He wills it. Freedom can be realized in two ways—by identifying oneself with Him and by living in eternal self-surrender to Him. There can be no freedom of will away from Him.

"Reliance on one's apparent self leads to ruin. To presume to be all-knowing is extremely harmful. Self-reliance or self-confidence means faith in the Higher Self. To persist in remaining what one already is or in holding on to one's preconceived opinions at any cost such self-importance is bad."

Swami: "One must have the capacity to love. Oh, how madly we used to love in our boyhood! I loved my brothers so much that the thought of renouncing them to become a Sannyasin, used to make me cry. But afterwards the Master snapped these ties one by one.

Sri Ramakrishna asked S., "Whom do you love?"

S. said: 'I do not love anyone.'

'Oh, you dry fellow!', the Master remarked."

Swami: "You can never be emancipated by adoring a man as man. You must look upon him as God. However great he may be in spiritual wisdom and dispassionateness, however highly endowed he may be with spiritual powers, the worship of man will not lead to your liberation, if you do not look upon him as God Himself. Without such a consciousness, his worship may serve to communicate to you his spiritual qualities and powers, but nothing more.

If you worship a divine Incarnation, knowing him as such or not, he will surely grant you God-realization. Sishupala attained God-realization even by hating Sri Krishna. The Gopis realized God even though they considered Sri Krishna as only their lover.

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Editorial

Realization through Devotion

Q: "Is Bhakti (Devotion) alone sufficient for the attainment of God, for His vision?"

Sri Ramakrishna: Yes, one can see God through bhakti alone. But it must be 'ripe' bhakti, prema-bhakti and raga-bhakti. For the Kaliyuga (the iron age) the path of bhakti is especially good. One can realize God through bhakti too. One can attain everything through bhakti yoga. I wept before the Mother and prayed: 'O Mother, please tell me, please reveal to me, what the yogis have realized through yoga and the jnanis through discrimination.' And the Mother has revealed everything to me. She reveals everything if the devotee cries to Her with a yearning heart. She has shown me everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Puranas, and the Tantra.'

In other words, you realize God with form through Bhakti yoga, and the formless Absolute through Jnana yoga".

The aim of all religions, of all Yogas, is the realisation of God, the Ultimate Reality. Different religions or paths are only various paths leading to this realisation. Swami Vivekananda says:

"You must bear in mind that religion does not consist in talk, or doctrines, or books, but in realisation; it is not learning but being. Man must realise God, feel God, see God, talk of God. That is religion."

The realisation of God needs *sadhana* or spiritual practice. *Sadhana* in the devotional path seems easier compared with other paths. It is easy because it follows the objective path. Every path or method is easy or difficult depending on the person's bent of mind. It is easy for a person having a natural bent and difficult for one who does not have it. Though nothing is easy or difficult, still generally it is possible to mark out one method as easier than another. The *object* rouses the attention of a child and attracts him long before he has any idea of the *subject*.

Man's attention is naturally directed towards external objects; it is only late in life that he learns to direct his attention within and notice the *subject*. It is for this reason that the path of devotion places before the devotee an object that attracts him. This attraction seems to be spontaneous and guides the devotee further along the path. As he goes on practising the devotional disciplines his mind becomes focussed on the object of his devotion more

and more until his whole mind gets occupied with it without much difficulty.

In the path of devotion there is no great strain because there is no attempt to go against the grain. The instruction is to follow one's natural bent of mind until its source is reached which is God, the Absolute Reality; for all objects, what we call "the world", are in reality the manifestations of that One Reality only. This is why the different schools of devotion are unanimous in agreeing that the path of devotion is the most effective means to the realisation of God.

Sri Ramakrishna says: "*For this Kali Yuga, Naradiya-Bhakti, or communion with God by love, devotion and self-surrender as practised and preached by the Rishi Narada, is enjoined.*"

The devotional path lays special stress on the personality of God and regards the personal God as the Highest Reality. A devotee is expected to love God intensely to the exclusion of everything else. Devotion or *Bhakti* is attraction to the Absolute. Sandilya defines devotion as *intense attachment* to God. This attachment to God is the genuine characteristic of devotion. Narada also defines devotion as '*Parama Prema Rupa*' i.e., of the nature of supreme love towards the Supreme Lord. And the nature of this supreme love is '*Anirvachaniyam*', indescribable. It is like the dumb tasting nectar.

In order to gain this one-pointed devotion one must cultivate certain virtues. Narada advocates that a devotee must cultivate harmlessness, truthfulness, purity, compassion, faith, and other such qualities. Without the cultivation of these qualities it is impossible to attain devotion to God. When a devotee consciously starts cultivating these virtues love for God starts manifesting spontaneously. It is like the sunlight streaming in as soon as the curtains are drawn.

Spiritual practice in the path of devotion lays emphasis on establishing special ways of adoring Him and cultivating special types of relationship with Him. Different religions stress different types of relationships. God can be worshipped in any number of ways; He can be worshipped through all human relationships. Narada, one of the greatest teachers of devotion tells us that God can be worshipped in eleven ways.

These are the eleven ways:

A devotee:-

(1) *Loves to chant the praises and glories of the blessed Lord.* Thus Narada and Vyasa are always found delighting themselves in singing the glories of the Lord, helping to convert others to a life of spirituality and love.

(2) *Loves His enchanting beauty.* The Gopis of Vrindavan were naturally attracted by Krishna's enchanting personal beauty, and they revelled in it.

(3) *Loves to offer Him the worship of his heart.* Ambarisha spent his whole life in worship, Prahlada in remembrance.

(4) *Loves to meditate on His presence constantly.* Brother Lawrence puts great emphasis on practising the presence of God.

(5) *Loves to think of himself as His servant.* Hanuman is the supreme example of service to God.

(6) *Loves Him as his friend.* Uddhava and Arjuna had the attitude of friendship. It is said of St Teresa of Avila that she looked upon God both as a friend and as her Beloved. Certainly God considered her as a friend. Once when she was passing through great hardship she complained of it to the Lord. He seems to have replied, 'Thus I treat my friends'. Like a flash came the retort from St Teresa, 'No wonder, you have so few friends!'

(7) *Loves Him as his child.* Kausalya, Devaki and Yashoda adored Him as their darling child. Many Christian women saints too had this attitude adoring baby Christ.

(8) *Loves Him as his beloved.* Radha, Meerabai, and Andal are supreme examples of adoring God as their Beloved.

(9) *He likes to surrender himself to Him completely.* Bali and Vibhishana are supreme examples of complete self-surrender to the Lord.

(10) *Loves to be completely absorbed in Him.* The great Rishis like Sanatkumara and Yajnavalkya immersed themselves in His bliss.

(11) *He likes to feel the pangs of separation from Him.* This attitude is a common characteristic of all devotees, because it is in the very nature of intense love that it cannot bear separation; and Narada has made this one of the supreme tests of devotion. (*Narada Bhakti Sutras, Sutra 82.*)

Sri Ramakrishna is the supreme example of the practice of all these ways and relationships. He practised all these moods and relationships in his life and proved their validity.

Whatever may be the mood or relationship it is the intensity of one's yearning, *Vyakulata*, that matters. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, one realises God through intense yearning alone.

"Bhakti is supreme devotion to God. One has to do spiritual practices in order to get devotion to His lotus feet; one has to weep for Him with the intense longing of the heart. The mind should be gathered up from the different objects and concentrated exclusively on Him. He is not in the Vedas or Vedanta or in any scripture. Nothing will be achieved unless one's heart yearns for Him. One has to pray to Him with intense devotion, and practise Sadhanas. God cannot be realised so easily."

After Sri Ramakrishna's Passing Away ¹

M (Mahendra Nath Gupta);

Translated by Swami Chetanananda

(The five volumes of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, recorded by M (Mahendra Nath Gupta) in Bengali, were not written in chronological order. At the end of the first four volumes, M added some information about the disciples of the Master and the Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore that was established after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away. A few years ago, some researchers discovered that four of M's diary entries (25 August 1886, 2 September 1886, 12 October 1886, and 17 February 1887) had been published in 1904 in the Navya Bharat, a monthly magazine. Perhaps M intended to add these entries at the end of the fifth volume of the Kathamrita, but unfortunately that volume was only published posthumously. I have translated this newly found material from Bengali into English. I must acknowledge that I have used some songs from Swami Nikhilananda's translation, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, which I have referred to in the end-notes. In this precious historical record, we learn that the Ramakrishna Math at Baranagore was inaugurated sometime before 12 October 1886.)

—Translator

Chapter 1

Wednesday, 25 August 1886

It has been ten days since Sri *Ramakrishna* (the Master) went to his town abode, leaving his devotees behind. Imbued with renunciation, *Narendra* (later Swami Vivekananda) and his brother disciples have been practicing sadhana.

Narendra and the Master's devotees have assembled in the parlour of *Balaram Basu's* house in Calcutta. They are like motherless orphans. By merely looking at them, one can feel their intense grief, the result of the Master's passing away. One thought fills their minds: The Master has gone to his own abode; what should we do now? The devotees have no place where these young disciples can stay together. They are forced to return home for food and shelter every day. The thread holding the pearls together as a necklace, has broken and the group is about to fall apart. The disciples continually think: Where shall we go? What shall we do? Sitting in seclusion, they think of the Master and cry for him.

Narendra, Rakhali, Kali, Sharat, Shashi, Tarak, Gopal, Bhavanath, and M arrived first, and later Niranjana came.

Everyone looks to Narendra. He is planning to send some of his brother disciples to Vrindaban, so he has been collecting some money from the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna's Advice:

Renounce Woman (Lust) and Gold (Greed)'

Narendra leaves for *Girish's* house nearby, accompanied by some of his brother disciples. He and M talk on the way.

Narendra (to M): "Sir, please pay for a one-way fare for Baburam."

M: "*Certainly. I will pay.*"

Narendra: "*Right now, if you would, please.*"

M: "Right now?"

Baburam is one of those who has been chosen to go to Vrindaban. The group of devotees arrives at Girish's parlour. Narendra asks Girish for money.

Girish: "*I don't have much money with me at present, but if you want I can contribute ten or eleven rupees right now. Why are they going to Vrindaban?*"

Narendra (gravely): "*The Master has told us to renounce 'lust and greed'.*"

A Devotee: "Are you also going away?"

Narendra: "*Let us all move out. I have some business at home. The litigation has not yet been settled. (After some thought) Let the litigation take its own course. I haven't understood the truth. Getting involved in this family affair is useless.*"

Rakhali: "If I stay here, I shall feel pulled by my family."

Narendra's father has passed away, and he has two younger brothers and sisters. They have no guardian and no means with which to purchase

food and clothing. Narendra has passed his BA examination, and if he so wishes, he can get a job to maintain his family. Rakhal has his father, wife and child at home.

The topic of the *Kankurgachi* garden house (currently known as Yogodyan Math) arises and they discuss how the trustees should be appointed.

Rakhal: "We will be pleased if they make Narendra a trustee."

Narendra: "*No, no. What good is there in being a trustee?*"

When everyone asks Narendra to be a trustee, he tells Girish: "*All right. Let it be so.*"

But Narendra is not appointed.

Devotees Are Grief-stricken because of the Master's Passing Away
In Girish's room Mani [2] and a devotee begin to talk.

The devotee heaves a sigh and says: "*I shall not pray to the Master for anything.*"

Mani: "*Not for anything?*"

Devotee: "*No, I will not pray for anything - neither for devotion nor for my family.*"

Having thus spoken, the devotee again sighs deeply.

Devotee: "The Master said: 'Why so much milk? Devotees have their families; how can they afford to pay for it?' How painful! I will never forget it."

While the Master was suffering from cancer at the Cossipore garden house, the householder devotees had borne all the expenses for the Master's service. The Master was always watchful, so that they might not spend too much money.

Devotee: "*I wanted to engage a full-time doctor to treat the Master, but I couldn't do it.*"

The devotee remains silent for a while and then says: "*Well, do you think that I would try to improve the condition of my family by chanting*

the Master's name? What do I care whether people call me good or virtuous?"

Chapter 2

Thursday, 2 September 1886

Shashi has come to M's house on Guruprasad Chaudhury Lane in Calcutta. He and M are seated on a wooden cot in the study. Shashi and Sharat live in their family home at Pataldanga. Today Shashi wears clean clothes and carries a new umbrella. Shashi and M begin to talk about the Master.

M: *"The Master told me that Narendra was the main disciple among the group."*

Shashi: *"I vividly remember that the Master said that Narendra would be our leader."*

M: *"Do you remember what the Master said about further study?"*

Shashi (with a smile): *"Yes, I distinctly remember that the Master told Narendra one day, 'Don't allow them [the young disciples] to study in school anymore.'"*

M: *"What about Kali?"*

Shashi: *"Yes, the Master scolded Kali and said to him, 'You have introduced studies here.' I had begun to study the Persian language, and as a result I got a scolding from him."*

Then Sharat and Narendra arrived, and they all began discussing when Sri Ramakrishna's message would be preached. Who would preach it first?

M: *"Who has understood the Master? Do you remember what the Master said about Vaishnavcharan's writing?"*

Sharat: *"Yes, I remember. The Master said: 'Vaishnavcharan understood every one of my spiritual experiences.' I thought that he would be the first to make them public."*

Narendra: *“The Master told me, ‘The knowledge of Brahman is the goal. Vaishnavcharan was supposed to spread the message first.’ But it didn't work out. Keshab Sen was first to make the message public.”*

Chapter 3

Sri Ramakrishna's First Monastery at Baranagore

12 October 1886

Nearly two months had passed since the Master left this world, after binding his devotees with a cord of love. Where would they go now? They could no longer enjoy staying at their homes. They wanted to be together always and to spend their days and nights thinking of him and talking about him. Two or three of the disciples had no home. At this juncture Surendra came forward and told them: *“Brothers, you have no place to live, and we have no place to give rest to our hearts. Let us rent a house in Baranagore, where you will live, and we shall visit from time to time.”*

Surendra used to pay fifty rupees every month for the Master's service at the Cossipore garden house. He now said: *“Brothers, I used to contribute a little money for the Master's service. I shall provide that amount to pay the expenses of this house in Baranagore.”*

Gradually, Narendra and the Master's other unmarried disciples moved to the Baranagore monastery and they did not return to their homes. The number of monastic brothers increased over time, and eventually Surendra was donating one hundred rupees per month.

Blessed Surendra! It is you who have laid the foundation of this first monastery. This ashrama owes its existence to your good wishes! Through you, the Master has made it possible for his disciples to live in the world as the embodiment of his central teaching - the renunciation of 'lust and greed'. Through Narendra and other young renunciants he has demonstrated the Eternal Hindu Dharma among people. Who can forget the debt owed to you? The brothers lived at the monastery like orphan boys. Sometimes they would not have the money to pay their rent; sometimes they would have no food. They would wait for you to come

and settle all these difficulties. Who would not shed tears on remembering your selfless work!

Narendra and Jnana Yoga

Baranagore Math. On this moonlit night Narendra and Mani are walking on the eastern veranda of the Master's shrine. It is the night of the full moon, when the goddess Lakshmi is worshipped. Narendra and Mani converse about the Master and also about jnana yoga and bhakti yoga.

Mani: *“The Master described two paths - knowledge and devotion - and said that both lead to the same goal. The followers of jnana and the followers of bhakti reach the same place.”*

Narendra: *“But the Master told me: “The Knowledge of Brahman is the goal. Devotion is meant to maintain the external aspect of life. The elephant has outer tusks and inner grinders as well. The tusks are mere ornaments; but the elephant chews its food with the grinders.”*

Mani: *“The Master also said that one can attain the Knowledge of Brahman through the path of devotion. The Knowledge of Brahman can be attained from the path of knowledge as well as from the path of devotion. Perhaps you remember that the Master also said: ‘After attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, some embrace devotion and live in this world. One can then ascend from the lila (relative plane) to the nitya (Absolute plane) and descend from the nitya to the lila.’”*

Narendra: *“Were you present that day when the Master talked about the Knowledge of Brahman at the Cossipore garden house?”*

Mani: *“I was not present at that time; but I heard that he talked about it for a long time. Do you remember what he said about Shukadeva?”*

Narendra: *“No, I don't remember.”*

Mani: *“I have heard that the Master said on that day: ‘Shukadeva and sages like him may have been big ants; but even they could carry at the utmost a few grains of sugar. Shiva touched the water of the Ocean of Brahman-Consciousness, or at the most drank a handful of that water.’ Did you hear such things?”*

Narendra: *“Yes, the Master said many such things on that day.”*

Narendra's Vision and Abnegation of Ego

Mani and Narendra begin a discussion about the brothers of the monastery.

Mani: *“Now everything depends on you. You will have to look after them.”*

Narendra: *“The ego is very troublesome. The other day I scornfully scolded **** a little. Immediately I had a vision of the Master. Do you know what he told me? He said: ‘What are you thinking? Know for certain that I can make any one amongst you who is the smallest, the greatest; and again, I can make any one amongst you who is the greatest, the smallest.’”*[3] *I have been extremely careful since I had that vision. ‘The least shall be greatest and the greatest, least.’”*

Mani: *“You are right. One attains God by His grace only. He can make a person great, and also small. Can anyone attain Him by one's own efforts? One needs His grace.”*

Narendra's Longing for God-vision

Narendra enters the room. It seems that his hope for God-realization has weakened a little. He begins to sing:

Can everyone have the vision of Shyama?

Is Kali's treasure for everyone?

Oh, what a pity my foolish mind

will not see what is true!

Even with all His penances,

rarely does Shiva Himself behold

The mind-bewitching sight

of Mother Shyama's crimson feet.

To him who meditates on Her

the riches of heaven are poor indeed;

If Shyama casts Her glance on him,

he swims in Eternal Bliss.

The Prince of yogis, the King of the gods,

meditate on Her feet in vain;

Yet worthless Kamalakanta yearns

for the Mother's blessed feet! [4]

Narendra goes to another room in the monastery. What is he thinking? Has Sri Ramakrishna's loving form suddenly come alive in his heart? He again begins to sing:

Dear friend, my religion and piety have come to an end:

No more can I worship Mother Shyama; my mind defies control.

Oh, shame upon me! Bitter shame!

I try to meditate on the Mother with sword in hand,

Wearing Her garland of human heads;

But it is always the Dark One, [5] wearing His garland of wild wood-flowers

And holding the flute to His tempting lips,

That shines before my eyes.

I think of the Mother with Her three eyes,

But alas! I see Him alone with the arching eyes, and I forget all else!

Oh, shame upon me! Bitter shame!

I try to offer fragrant flowers at the Mother's feet,

But the ravishing thought of His graceful form unsettles my helpless mind,

And all my meditations meant for the Naked One [6] are drawn away

By the sight of His yellow scarf. [7]

After singing this song, Narendra remains silent for a while and then suddenly announces, "Let us go to the cremation ground." He then

remarks: *“My goodness! It seems to be a parlour and not a cremation ground.”* (All laugh.)

Paramanik Ghat is just near the monastery, and the cremation ground is near that ghat. The cremation ground is surrounded by walls, and there is one brick building with three rooms at the east end. Sometimes at night Narendra and others go there alone to practise sadhana.

The Holy Mother now lives in Vrindaban. Narendra and M are talking about her. One day at the *Cossipore* garden house, the young devotees told Sri Ramakrishna about the Holy Mother's affection for them. At that time, she was living at the garden house to serve the Master. The disciples told the Master that they had never met another woman as large-hearted as she was.

M: *“What did the Master say?”*

Narendra: *“The Master began to laugh and then said: ‘She is my Shakti [Power]. So, she loves all.’”*

Chapter 4

Friday, 17 February 1887

It is 12:30 p.m. at the Baranagore monastery. Narendra and the other monastic brothers are living at the monastery. *Haramohan* and M have arrived. Shashi is busy with the Master's worship service. Narendra is about to go to the Ganges for his bath.

Narendra: *“Krishna mainly discussed japa and austerity in the Gita.”*

M: *“How is that? Then why did he give so much advice to Arjuna?”*

Narendra: *“Krishna did not ask Arjuna to perform family duties.”*

M: *“When Krishna asked Arjuna to fight, Arjuna was a householder. He, therefore, was advising Arjuna to perform his family duties in a detached way.”*

(Narendra later changed his opinion about this. While in America he lectured on karma yoga, and there he advised his students to perform action without attachment. When Narendra first took the vows of sannyasa, he was extremely disgusted with the duties of the world, so he said that japa and austerity were the main focus of the Gita.)

A householder devotee is talking with a monastic brother; his intention is to stay at the monastery. The devotee is impressed with the spiritual atmosphere of the monastery, and family life has become distasteful to him. They are talking on the southern veranda of the kitchen, where Niranjan is working.

The Devotee: *“If I stay in the monastery, will I be blamed for neglecting my family?”*

The Monk: *“No one will blame you for living here, but you have a responsibility to look after your family.”*

Niranjan (from the kitchen): *“Hello brother, what are you doing? What kind of advice are you giving to him?”* (All laugh.)

Narendra and Kali have returned from their bath in the Ganges. Kali is always engaged in studying Vedanta. He does not care for the attitude: *“You are my Lord and I am Your devotee.”* He reflects continually: *“I am that Brahman. I have no name and form.”* So, after returning from his bath, he goes to his room and starts repeating: *“I am beyond name and form. I am that Absolute Being. I salute You, I salute You, I salute You and Myself.”*

The devotees sit down to have lunch. There is only one cook at the monastery. After lunch everyone clears away their own leaf-plates; but Narendra removes M's leaf-plate. When M objects, Narendra replies, *“Here all are equal.”*

After lunch everyone assembles in the parlour. Some are chewing betel-rolls; some are smoking hubble-bubbles.

Rakhal (to M): *“I want to visit you someday. I am eager to hear what you are writing about the Master.”*

M: *“I have decided that until my life is transformed I will not share those teachings with anybody. Each of the Master's words is like a mantra. Is it not good to translate those teachings into one's life?”*

Rakhal: *“Yes, indeed. Well, how do you like your family life?”*

Shashi: *“Look, brothers, Rakhal is lecturing.”*

Rakhal (smiling, to M): *“Previously I was not inclined to come here. Now I see that the company of the brothers is beneficial.”*

Narendra: *“Where is the real substance in human beings? I care for no one, except one. [Perhaps he meant Sri Ramakrishna.] Who has his own power? Every one is subject to circumstance - a slave to maya (Illusion). Every one is a slave like me - a sport of circumstances.”*

Rakhal smiles and whispers to Haramohan. Prompted by Rakhal, Haramohan asks: *“What about Brother X?”*

Narendra: *“Brother X is a wretched fellow. If he wants to be a monk, why is he saving money? A sadhu should be penniless.”*

A Monk: *“Everyone is wretched and you consider yourself great.”*

Narendra: *“I am also wretched because I am a slave of circumstances. Do I have any power?”*

M (to himself): *“Is it circumstance or God? The Master used to say, ‘Everything happens by the will of Rama.’”*

Narendra: *“How can a man who has money be a monk? Moreover, he gives lectures to people. Is he not ashamed to preach?”*

Narendra and Buddha

Haramohan: *“Well, if a man experiences ecstasy or samadhi, he must be great.”*

Narendra: *“Go and study Buddha. According to Shankara the ultimate spiritual experience is nirvikalpa samadhi, which is the first stage that Buddha attained.”*

A Devotee: *“If nirvikalpa samadhi is the first stage, then there must be higher stages than that. Why don't you describe a few to us? Buddha must have said something about it.”*

Narendra: *“I don't know.”*

A Devotee: *“If nirvikalpa samadhi is the first stage of Buddha's experience, then why did he later preach this doctrine: ‘Non-violence is the supreme dharma?’”*

Narendra: *“It is hard to understand this view, but the Vaishnavas learned their non-violence from Buddha.”*

A Devotee: *“Is it necessary for one to learn non-violence from Buddha? It often happens that one gives up eating fish without having any instruction from anybody. It may not be true that the Vaishnavas learned non-violence from Buddha.”*

Narendra: *“If someone renounces the killing of animals without being asked to, then it is to be understood as hereditary transmission.”*

A Devotee: *“Then what about the people in Europe who have given up killing animals? They were beef-eaters. They have not learned from Buddha.”*

Narendra: *“However, Buddha discovered this path.”*

M (to himself): *“Wonderful! Each disciple of the Master is a hero. Everyone is an independent thinker, not just Narendra. And why not? They are disciples of the Master and he trained them himself.”*

Narendra is reading the Gita and explaining it to the brother disciples. He has been elucidating the following verses from the Gita (5.7-9): “He who is devoted to yoga and is pure in mind, who has conquered his body and subdued his senses, who has realized his Self as the Self of all beings—he is undefiled though he acts. ‘I do nothing at all’, thinks the yogi, the knower of Truth; for in seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting; in walking, breathing, and sleeping; in speaking, emitting, and seizing; in opening and closing the eyes, he is assured that it is only the senses busied with their objects.”

After reading the Gita for a while, Narendra says: *“I am leaving; now you have the joyful company of M.”* But Narendra cannot go.

Baburam: *“I don’t understand the Gita and other scriptures. The Master said the right thing, “Renounce, renounce.””*

Shashi: *“Do you know what the real import of the word ‘renounce’ is? It means to remain in this world as an instrument in the hands of God.”*

Prasanna begins to study the Gita in Kali's solitary room. Sharat is also there reading Lewis' *History of Philosophy*. Another monk is meditating in the Master's shrine.

Narendra and the Vision of God

The discussion turns to the vision of God.

Narendra: "*The vision of God is a kind of false perception.*"

Rakhal: "*What do you mean? You have experienced it.*"

Narendra (with a smile): "*One gets such a vision because of a derangement of the brain, like a hallucination.*"

Mani: "Brother, whatever you may say, the Master had visions of divine forms; so how can you say that it is a derangement of the brain? Do you remember when Shivanath remarked that the Master's samadhi was a kind of nervous disorder or mental illness, the Master replied, 'Does anyone become unconscious thinking of Consciousness?'"

Narendra and the other brothers have assembled in the parlour. Some are chewing betel-rolls, some are smoking hubble-bubbles. It is spring, and the nature as if is pulsating with joy. The monastic brothers are also joyful. They practise celibacy and renunciation and think of God day and night. Always before them is their great ideal, their guru, Sri Ramakrishna. Sometimes out of exuberant joy, they shout the great saying of the Sikhs: "*Wah guruji ki Fateh*" - Victory to the guru! Narendra taught them this mantra, prefacing it with 'Om'.

M asks Sharat to join him in repeating 'Victory to the guru!' one hundred times, which makes him happy.

Narendra: "*It does not work to just give an order. One should first start repeating the mantra, then others will join in.*"

Balaram has sent some sweets and other things from his Calcutta residence. The *kachoris* (fried bread with a spicy filling) are delicious. All of the brothers enjoy the refreshment. One brother tries to eat more than his share.

Narendra (to the brother): "*You greedy rascal! It is not good to eat too much.*"

Vesper Service in the Monastery

It is evening. Shashi burns incense in the shrine and bows down to the Master, glorifying his sweet name. Then he visits the pictures of gods and goddesses in each of the rooms, addressing them one after another and waving incense in front of each of them. He chants in his melodious voice: “Salutations to the guru”; “Salutations to Mother Kali”; “Salutations to Chaitanya taking the form of Rama and Krishna”; “Salutations to Radha and Krishna”; “Salutations to the beloved of Radha”; “Salutations to Advaita Acharya and other devotees”; “Salutations to Gopala and Mother Yashoda”; “Salutations to Rama and Lakshmana”; “Salutations to Vishwamitra”.

The senior Gopal performs vespers by waving the light and the devotees watch him. Narendra and M are in the main hall. M had asked Narendra to join the vesper service, but due to some work he could not do so.

After the vespers, the devotees sing a hymn to Shiva in chorus: “Jaya Shiva Omkara, Bhaja Shiva Omkara; Brahma Vishnu Sadashiva, Hara Hara Hara Mahadeva.”

As night falls, everyone sits for a light supper, which Baburam serves. Each person is served a few chapatis, some vegetable curry, and a little bit of molasses. M is eating with them, sitting next to Narendra. When Narendra sees a couple of burnt chapatis on M's plate, he immediately replaces them with good ones. Narendra keeps a vigilant eye on everything.

After supper everyone sits together in the parlour. A monastic brother tells M: “Nowadays we hardly get to hear any songs on the Divine Mother. Why don't you sing that favourite song of the Master's?”

M sings:

O Mother Shyama, full of the waves of drunkenness divine!

Who knows how Thou dost sport in the world?

Thy fun and frolic and Thy glances put to shame the god of love.

O Wielder of the sword!

O Thou of terrifying face!

The earth itself is shaken under Thy leaps and strides!

O Thou Abode of the three gunas!

O Redeemer! Fearsome One!

Thou who art the Consort of Shiva!

Many the forms Thou dost assume,

fulfilling Thy bhaktas' prayers.

Thou dancest in the Lotus of the Heart,

O Mother, Eternal Consort of Brahman!

While talking with M, Rakhal says: *"I want to visit Varanasi. I feel I should go there alone."*

Rakhal has his father, wife, and son at home, but he has renounced everyone and everything for God-realization. He is endowed with intense renunciation. His mind is longing for God all the time, so he wants to wander alone.

Notes and References :

[1]. Translated from *Udbodhan*, vol. 102, no. 10 and vol. 103, nos. 2 and 3.

[2]. 'M' and 'Mani' are pseudonyms for Mahendra Nath Gupta, the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

[3]. Compare: *'I teach the Knowledge of Brahman to the gods and human beings. I am endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman. I make a person great if I want to. I can make a person Brahma, a rishi, or a knower of Brahman.'* — 'Devi Sukta', 5.

[4]. *Gospel*, 679.

[5]. *Krishna*.

[6]. *Shyama*.

[7]. *Gospel*, 873.

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To Drink Milk or to Do Spiritual Practice

By Swami Bhaskarananda

[Adapted from the authors book 'Life in Indian Monasteries' -ed.]

I was near Swami Videhananda (1906-1984), popularly known as Gangacharan Maharaj, when he said, *"I was fortunate to have lived with a God-realized soul for a number of years."* I was then in my late thirties, and Gangacharan Maharaj must have been in his sixties. I asked him, "Who was that God-realized soul?" Gangacharan Maharaj replied, "I'm speaking of revered Swami Vishuddhananda. He was that God-realized soul. I stayed with him in our Ranchi Morabadi ashrama for a few years when I was a junior monk.

He was then the head of the ashrama."

"How did you know that he was a God-realized soul?" I asked.

Gangacharan Maharaj replied, *"We knew about his exemplary spiritual life, and had heard that he had experienced God. But we wanted to know if the information was correct. One evening, during our evening monastic class in the monastery, we asked him, 'Maharaj, have you experienced ¹ God?'"*

"At first he was extremely reluctant to answer our question. But we wouldn't let him go. We insistently went on requesting him to tell us the truth. Eventually, he yielded to our request. He said that in 1917 he and Swami Madhavananda were performing tapasya (spiritual austerities) in Varanasi for a while. At that time, he developed an intense yearning to experience God. He had heard that the saint Tulsidas had had the vision of God on the holy Chitrakut Hill not too far from Varanasi. This thought triggered in his mind a great desire to go and visit Chitrakut.

"Arriving there, he found some accommodation in a local priest's home. The very first day, while lying awake in his room, he got the vision of God. The experience overwhelmed him with intense spiritual bliss. This condition lasted for three days."

Swami Vishuddhananda was one of the early disciples of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Even as a young monk, Swami Brahmananda, one of the

foremost saintly disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, acknowledged the exalted spiritual state of his mind. Once, Swami Brahmananda, then President of the Ramakrishna Order, sent young Swami Vishuddhananda to assist Swami Ramakrishnananda in our Madras ashrama. In introducing Swami Vishuddhananda, Swami Brahmananda wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda, *“I am sending a monk whose mind is always absorbed in God.”*

In addition to the above, Gangacharan Maharaj told us another very interesting anecdote about Swami Vishuddhananda. One day a Marwari merchant came to him in the Ranchi Morabadi ashrama. The merchant wanted to give a gift of a milk cow to the monks in the ashrama. The financial condition of the ashrama was not good. Swami Vishuddhananda had been suffering from an ulcer in his stomach. His doctor had prescribed milk in his diet. But with the meagre income of the ashrama, it was not possible to buy enough milk for him, what to speak of milk for the junior monks. So the proposed gift of a milk cow appeared to be a godsend.

Swami Vishuddhananda called the monks together and said to them, *“This kind gentleman wants to give us a milk cow. If we accept the gift it will be an added responsibility for you. You will have to take care of the cow. As a result, there will be less time for your meditation and other spiritual practices. So ask you to choose between these two things: Do you want to drink milk, or do you want to do your spiritual practice?”*

The monks replied, *“Maharaj, rather than drinking milk, we would prefer to do our spiritual practices.”*

Their answer pleased Swami Vishuddhananda. He then told the merchant, *“We are sorry. We cannot accept the cow. Instead, may I suggest that you give us some money every month to buy milk for the monks?”*

According to Hindu tradition, making a gift of a milk cow to holy people brings abundant merits. The merchant was not sure if the alternative suggested by Swami Vishuddhananda would produce similar results. Therefore he did not agree, and left the ashrama.

Swami Vishuddhananda eventually became the eighth President of the Ramakrishna Order.

Saint Tukaram

Swami Ritajananda

“A preacher who has a commission from God need not invite people to hear him. He possesses such irresistible attraction that people come to him of their own accord. People of all classes, even kings and autocrats gather round him. Does the magnet say to the iron: ‘Come near me?’ That is not necessary. Because of the magnet, the iron rushes to it. He the preacher, with divine commission may not be a scholarly person. But do not conclude from that, he has any lack of wisdom. Does book-learning make one wise? He, who has a commission from God never runs short of wisdom. That wisdom comes from God. It is inexhaustible.”

(Sri Ramakrishna)

To the earnest seeker of God, the lives of saints always stand as the milestones guiding his way. These saints coming from different modes of life, struggle to attain the Supreme Reality and after their attainment - some of them give expression to their experiences in beautiful poems.

Although the final realisation of all the mystics is nearly the same, they come to that by different routes. Thus, the study of the lives of mystics form a very interesting subject, very beneficial in shaping our lives in proper setting.

The town of *Pandaripur* is an important place of pilgrimage, attracting large crowds every year. One main reason for this is that it is associated with the lives of many great saints of Maharashtra. Of these Tukaram is one, whose life sketch and ‘*Abhangas*’ are widely read.

His life is a beautiful illustration, where birth, education and wealth do not have anything to do with God-realisation. Born and bred up in a very poor, low-class family, he was not conversant with many scriptures. But still by his absorbing love for God, he could enter the high realms of spirituality.

Not far from Poona is a village, *Dehu*, where Tukaram was born. His ancestors were Kshatriyas of a lower order, considered as Sudras.

Agriculture and trade were their chief occupations in life. Their devotion for *Vithoba* of Pandaripur was very great.

Finding it very difficult to go there often, one of his ancestors built a small shrine in their own village and introduced the Lord's worship there; visiting Pandaripur only when it was convenient. Tukaram followed this trend of life of his ancestors and got this traditional religion as a patrimony.

He says:

"I have inherited this practice of going on a pilgrimage to Pandaripur from my ancestors. I recognize no other pilgrimage and no other vow. My only vow is to make a fast on the Ekadasi day and to sing the name of God. I shall utter the name of God, which is verily what will last the end of time".

Tukaram's father Bolhoji was a petty trader and had three sons - Savji, Tukaram and Kanya. When Tukaram was of thirteen years, his father died. Savji had no taste for worldly life and so the management of the shop fell on his younger brother. Being a very simple child and inexperienced in worldly affairs he could never manage his business well.

Two years later he was married first to Rukhmabai and since she was sickly, he married again. The name of the second wife was

Jijabai. So, even at a tender age he had to maintain a family. Once when he was on the verge of bankruptcy, his second wife, Jijabai, secured a loan for him and set him up again. For some time, everything moved on smoothly, and Tukaram went out to different places and made good profits.

One day while he was returning home after selling his wares, he met a party of people dragging a person, who was crying piteously. When he saw Tukaram, he began his tale of woe, *“Sir, look at my pitiable condition. I was a prosperous merchant. By a sudden mischance I have lost all and these people to whom I am indebted are dragging me to the prison. I beseech you to save me from their clutches.”* Tukaram, who had always a loving heart, was moved by the condition of the man and immediately gave away all the money in his hand, without any security. He returned home empty-handed.

Shortly after this a famine broke out and Tukaram who was always on the verge of a collapse was badly hit. He did not get even one proper meal a day and his first wife died of starvation and a few days later his son also passed away.

It is interesting to note here, that in spite of all these calamities and a series of sufferings, Tukaram was able to maintain an even attitude. He had read the lives of some Maharashtra saints and books on religious subjects. The noble words he had read came to his rescue in these days of woe.

Added to this, one night he had a dream, in which he got initiation. He narrates his dream as follows:

“I imagined I met him (the Master) on the way to the river for the holy bath. He placed his hand on my head and asked me to give him some ghee for his meals. Unfortunately, being in a dream I could not give it to him. An obstacle having thus apparently risen, my spiritual teacher hastened away. He told me of his spiritual lineage as that of Raghava Chaitanya

and Kesava Chaitanya. He told me his name as Babaji and gave me the Mantra, 'Rama, Krishna, Hari', for meditation.

Since it was the 10th day of the bright half of Magha and the day of Guru (Thursday) I immediately accepted it with all my heart. Verily, my teacher cognisant of the aspirations of my heart bestowed on me a Mantra (Sacred words imparted by a Guru to his disciple) I loved so well and a Mantra so easy to utter.

Verily, there can be no difficulty in uttering that Mantra. By that Mantra have many, who have gone from amongst us crossed the ocean of life. To those, who know, and to those who do not know, the Mantra has served as a raft to enable them to cross the ocean of life. Verily I was put in the possession of this raft. There is no limit to the grace of God Panduranga."

This dream had a profound effect on Tukaram and he at last found a support which made him strong enough to face all troubles of life.

As we have already noticed, he had only hardships coming one after another and we do not find a single instance where the world smiled benignly on him. His wife, to whom he was no better than a worthless fool often used to tease him.

Gradually he lost all taste for business and wanted to free himself from it. Accordingly, he gave away everything to his younger brother Kanya. Now he was free from the bondages of life.

One, who thinks that the world is everything and the source of all joy, will take Tukaram as a total failure and cannot but imagine him to be steeped in misery.

But Tukaram himself sings differently,

"Well done! O Lord, Tukaram dances at Thy feet. Had I been a learned man I would have brought calamities on my head, would have scorned the

service of the saints, would have been subjected to pride and arrogance, would have gone by the way leading to hell as others have done. Greatness and arrogance would have surely taken me to Hell."

Further, he does not seem to be in the least sorry for his life's hardships:

"Life seems to me like vomit. Happy am I that my wife is a termagant. Happy am I that I have lost all reputation. Happy am I that I am disrespected by all men. Happy am I that I have lost all my cattle. Well it is that I have ceased to be ashamed among men. Well it is that I have come as a supplicant to Thee, O God! Well it is that I built a temple for Thee and neglected my wife and children."

When, one by one, his parents, wife and son died he felt that they all got salvation and that the hand of God was working behind these in order to free him from all unreal affection.

He began to sing:

"O my God, now there is none between me and Thee, creating a barrier."

The Lord out of His infinite grace wants His devotees to be drawn to Him. He will seldom allow them to get on very easily in this world. He strikes His devotee with poverty. If the devotee is granted a good wife, he will be lost in the love for her. Hence the Lord gets him a shrew. *"Verily have I experienced all these"*, says Tuka, *"why should I talk of others."*

Tukaram's wife could never understand him. His love for singing kirtans, and entertaining saintly guests used to enrage her. Tukaram says that his wife, who did not like these, would run like a mad dog towards the guests.

Gradually his fame spread on all sides. Some brahmins, feeling jealous of his popularity, began to persecute him.

One day they threw away his compositions in the river Indrayani. Tukaram was sorely shocked that his only great possession in this world, should have been destroyed like this. He composed all the Abhangas as directed by another saint Namadeva, who had appeared to him in a dream along with the Lord and asked him to compose the Abhangas. This dream had impressed him very deeply since the Lord Himself appeared with Namadeva and he was entrusted with that important work. So, he could not bear the destruction of this sacred work.

He thought that he should importune the Lord to restore his poems. He could not get any peace of mind and death appeared to be more covetable than that life. But somehow, he felt he must try and see how far the Lord would come to his rescue and so began a fast. After thirteen days the Lord appeared before him and gave him consolation and assurance.

After this vision Tuka felt repentant for having forced God to please him. He says,

“O my Lord, You followed us poor men as the shadow of the body, came near me like a youth and gave comfort to me. You showed me Your beautiful form, embraced me and comforted me.

Verily have I troubled You for nothing. Forgive me, my Lord! I shall never cause You trouble any more. I committed a great mistake because I taxed Your patience. Mean creature that I am, I shut my eyes and went on fasting for thirteen days. You saved my books from the river and protected me from the calumny of the people. Verily, have You come to save Your devotee.

Let people put a scythe against my neck, or give trouble to me as they please, but I shall never do anything to trouble You. Forgive me for what I have done before. I shall guard myself against the future.

What will You not do, O my Lord! for the sake of Your devotees, if only they are patient? I grew impatient, but nevertheless I received favour at Your hands. Nobody put the scythe on my neck or cudgelled me on my back, but still I cried for help. Compassionate as You are, You brought back my books You are more affectionate than a mother, more delightful than the moon. Your grace flows like a river. What comparison shall I find for Your qualities? You have made nectar and You are sweeter than that. I place my head at Your feet, forgive me...

Adieu to all worldly life, which only makes one go away from God. The ripples of intellect change from moment to moment and attachment ends in dislodging us from fixity of any kind. Put an end to all my anxieties.

O God! come to live in my heart?"

It is a well-known fact that the realisation of God does not come to anyone very easily. Even great devotees, in spite of their pure and sincere prayers, pass through many agonies. Despondency, and doubt often torture them and we get some idea of this dark period of their lives from their own words. Tukaram says,

"My heart tells me that I have not known You. How can I sing of You, without Your vision? You have deceived me and made me serve, without bestowing the knowledge of You on me... But, You forget I am a Bania (business man) after all, and cannot be cheated. How can I dance and sing of God without seeing Him? I have become mad for the sight of You."

He elaborately expresses all his sufferings and talks about his warfare with the world and his mind. He felt that God was near but still far off. The mind began to run hither and thither before it settled down and it was torn to pieces by thousand and one things of the world. As days rolled on, the stage of purification came as it generally does with all saints and Tukaram could see his mind as separate from himself. He saw the numerous defects, and somehow, they barricaded the vision of the Lord.

He earnestly appealed to the Lord for forgiveness. This section of his Abhangas form an interesting reading and gives us valuable instruction.

The transformation of the personality is the keynote of all religions and it is what the mystics also pass through. Except in the cases of those, whose souls are ever-pure, who are born without any tinge of worldliness, all others have to pass through this purificatory process.

When freed from all dross, the mind becomes a perfect and clean mirror and reflects divinity in all its glory.

Tukaram passed through all the purificatory stages before he got his realisations. He sought the company of great saints, and now and then, spent days in solitude in earnest prayer. He used to say,

“O Lord, if You do not like to show yourself before me at least You can give me the company of Your devotees, who have incessant love for You. The remembrance of the greatness of the saints burn my heart. I shall offer my life as a sacrifice, if You do not grant me the company of saint.”

But still neither the company of saints nor his prayers brought him sufficient peace. He often felt like committing suicide and would cry, *“My hopes are shattered. I shall commit self-slaughter.”*

At last the happy day dawned and we shall hear of the experience from the poet's own words:

“I see God's face, and the vision gives me infinite bliss. My mind is riveted on it and my hands cling to His feet. As I look at Him all my mental agony vanishes. Bliss is ever leading me to a higher bliss. Blessed am I that my effort has been crowned with success. I have attained the desired end. My heart is set on God's feet and my mind is composed. The blessed omen has wiped off death and old age. My body is changed. On it the light

of God has fallen. I have now obtained the limitless wealth and I have seen the feet of the formless Person. I have obtained the treasure, which has existed at all times. All quarters have become auspicious. Evil itself has transformed into the greatest good. The lamp in my hand dispels all darkness."

From that day onwards, the world appeared a paradise for him and he lived in that state of blessedness radiating a joyful atmosphere. He felt the Divine joy seething through his body and his tongue ceaselessly began to chant the name of God.

The news of the greatness of this illumined saint spread far and near and reached the ears of the prince Shivaji, who was to become the famous king of the Maharatas. He felt a strong desire to hear Tukaram's kirtan and invited him to his presence through messengers. But Tukaram refused to go and sent a reply,

"My delusion and desires are at an end. They are verily the bait which death sets for us. Gold and clay are to me of equal consequence. The whole heaven has entered into my house."

This made Shivaji revere the saint all the more and he managed to go there himself and in incognito sat with other people and listened to the soul-stirring kirtans of Tukaram.

We are told of a number of Abhangas addressed to Shivaji. They are full of advice to the young prince infusing courage and strength.

"Without heroism, misery cannot disappear. Soldiers most become reckless of their lives and God takes up their burden."

These words are expressive of Tukaram's ideas regarding a Kshatriya's duty.

As years rolled on Tukaram began to have large number of disciples, who admired him immensely and to one of these disciples we are indebted for the Abhangas which number more than 4,000.

Now Tukaram's occupation was to preach devotion to God, encouraging people to chant His name.

One day, we are informed that he went to the river Indrayani, with all his disciples, singing the praise of God and when every one was absorbed in the kirtan, Tukaram suddenly disappeared.

No other information was further heard, about his passing away from this world. This famous saint was only 42, when he died in the year 1649 A.D.

Within such a short span of life, Tukaram had the intense spiritual life of a mystic and left a monumental work; the Abhangas. These form a good source-book to study the life of the saint, his experiences and his teachings. They are very simple in language, but very deep in meaning.

We have already known the story of his realisation and now we shall try to have an idea of the message of Tuka.

Tukaram never felt the need of vast learning of the scriptures. To him sincere devotion to God was much more important.

Like all true devotees he never felt any difference between the God and His name.

The chanting of Lord's name was an end in itself.

"Sit silent, compose thy mind and make it pure, and then happiness will know no bounds, for God will certainly come and dwell in Thy heart. This will be the effect of thy long effort. Meditate time after time on God's name—Rama, Krishna, Hari. I declare that this will surely come to pass, if thou hast one-pointed devotion."

The uttering of the name of God is indeed an easy way to reach Him, says he again and again. For, he himself felt that by the repetition of the name of God, his mind became composed. The

tongue felt the taste of ambrosia, good omens appeared all around. Slowly the mind got coloured by the vision of God and he felt satisfied like one who had taken a hearty meal. Desires came to an end and words came out of the mouth as if of full satisfaction. Happiness met happiness and blessedness reigned everywhere.

A person who constantly repeats the name of the Lord, with unflinching devotion acquires immense merit, gets liberation in this very life, and enjoys untold benefits.

All our senses forget their movements, the body becomes cool and lustrous and the devotee is filled with energy.

All evils fall off and passions flee.

The repetition of the Lord's name is so sweet, that God Himself cannot know it!

“Does lotus flower understand its fragrance? Only the bee tastes its fragrance. The cow eats grass, but it is the calf which enjoys the sweetness of its milk. The oysters cannot enjoy its pearl. The devotee alone enjoys the sweetness of God's name but not He.”

Besides this repetition of God's name, one is advised to join the kirtan parties.

Thereby the devotee not only saves himself but also helps others who join the kirtan.

The body should be kept sound to sing the Lord's name.

The kirtan is compared by him to a river of nectar flowing before God.

Now it will be clear to the readers what is the essential teaching of Tukaram.

He felt that devotion and devotion alone can take one to God.

"God has no form, nor any particular name, nor any place, where He can be seen, but wherever you go you see Him.

He is neither impersonal nor personal, but is beyond all knowledge.

God, cannot be attained except through love. In fact, He does not care for anything except love.

"God cares not for the sweet voice nor any attainment, but He looks at the heart within."

The love for the Lord must be so intense that the devotee cuts himself from all other attachments.

All the external forms of castes and creeds, rituals and a variety of dogmas Tukaram never liked.

Though he started his early life as a great devotee of Pandarinath his mystic experience made him see clearly the unimaginable greatness of the Lord of the Universe, and he brought out the ideas of the Upanishads, which point out the one source from which all have come and by whose lustre the sun, moon and others shine.

But still as a true devotee he liked to enjoy sugar and did not want to become sugar itself. The Lord may be formless to those who like that aspect. But for Tuka, the Lord should take a form. It is the devotion that makes God to take a form.

To sing and glorify the Lord is an end in itself and absolution is not desired by a devotee, for it cannot bring the same joy as the happiness of repeating the Lord's name.

Besides the greatness of Lord's name and kirtan, Tukaram used to speak very highly of the association with the saints.

He looked upon them as the Lord Himself in flesh and blood.

God and the devotee are like seed and tree.

Though the saint attains his identification with God, he maintains a difference for the sake of devotion.

“The Personal and Impersonal forms of God are not the two contraries but one and the same. It is the Impersonal which shines forth as the Personal by the power of devotion”, says Tuka.

The various forms of images are only helpful in the beginning but the devotee has to go beyond all these and reach the all-pervading, immanent and transcendent God.

Like all great mystics, Tukaram belongs, to the entire world and his light is available to all who require and seek it, a mission not for his country alone but for the whole world.

In such a short account of a great topic it is impossible to bring out the beauty of this great mystic, who has left behind a wealth of spiritual gems. To pick and choose from them and give a clear picture of the saint is an extremely difficult task. But an attempt has been made to give at least an outline.

In these days, when the world seems to be steeped in darkness, as in any day in eternity, it is only the light of the lives of saints like Tukaram that can show us the right path, which leads to the goal of human life.

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Become an Imitator of Christ'

(Teachings of Saint Basil)

(St. Basil, the Great was the archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia (329-379). He had founded a monastery on his own ancestral estates, and c. 356 drew up a Rule for the members of the community basing it upon the Rules he had studied on his visit to Egypt and other countries. This became the basis of most of the subsequent Rules of various monastic reformers of the Eastern churches.)

You who aspire to become a fellow soldier of Christ's holy disciples, brace yourself for the endurance of tribulations and manfully betake yourself to the company of the monks. Even in the beginning of your renunciation of the world, show yourself a man ; and that you may not be dragged down by attachments to your relatives, strengthen yourself by exchanging mortal for immortal aspirations.

Do not be careless of yourself as if you were a useless vessel— for by the renouncement of earthly goods you have won honour

with Christ but with much care and forethought set about finding a man skilled in guiding those who are making their way toward God and who will be an unerring director of your life. He should be adorned with virtues, bearing witness by his own works to his love for God, conversant with the Holy Scriptures, recollected, free from avarice, tranquil, pleasing to God, labouring for the spiritual advancement of his clients, without vainglory or arrogance, impervious to flattery, not given to vacillation, and preferring God to all else. If you should find such a one, surrender yourself to him, completely renouncing and casting aside your own will, that you may be found a clean vessel, preserving unto your praise and glory the good qualities deposited in you.

Do not think that all who live in a cell are saved, the bad as well as the good, for this is not true. Many indeed take up the life of virtue, but few bear its yoke. Be eager to imitate men of disciplined habits. Judge not the sins of others, but be master of what is your own. With your ears opened to give heed and your hands ready to execute the command you have heard, let your tongue be silent and keep your heart under custody. Be slow and dull for idle talk, but knowing and wise in hearkening to the saving words of the Holy Scriptures. Let the hearing of worldly tales be to you as a bitter taste, but the discourse of holy men as a honeycomb.

Be not inquisitive nor desirous of seeing everything. Use your eyes to the purpose, use your ears to the purpose, speak to the purpose, answer to the purpose.

Do not accumulate a heavy burden of sins for yourself by having too soft a bed or by the style of your garments, by variety in food, or a table too richly appointed for your stage of self-renunciation, by the way you stand or sit, or by being too negligent or too fastidious with regard to manual labour. All these things bring harmful results, even if they are objects of your desire. Unless you quickly recognize them as a snare and root them out of your heart, they will lead you to defection from the life in Christ.

Do not make excuses, saying, '*Alas, my head!*', alleging non-existent pain and relaxing the rigor of the vigil for the sake of taking rest. Rather, be constant in secret prayer, which God beholds in secret and will repay you for openly. Hoard the accruing gains of the most perfect way of life, that in the day of need you may discover hidden wealth. Let your countenance be bright and cheerful, that you may give joy to him who speaks with you. Rejoice in every success achieved by your neighbour and glorify God, for his triumphs are yours as yours also are his. Perform the duties of your ministry with care as if you were serving Christ, for 'Cursed,' says the Prophet, be every man that doeth the work of the Lord negligently.'

The nearer you approach the higher ranks of sacred orders, the more you should abase yourself. Humility is the imitation of Christ; haughtiness and arrogance, the imitation of the devil. Become an imitator of Christ. Examine the actions of each day, compare them with those of the previous day and press on toward improvement. Spend your time in retirement, not for days nor months, but throughout many years, praising your Lord in song, night and day, in imitation of the Cherubim. If thus you begin and thus make an end, travelling the straight road for the short time of your probation, you will, by the grace of God, enter into paradise with the lamp of your soul brilliantly alight, to rejoice with Christ for ever and ever.

The Visishtadwaita of Ramanuja

S. S. Raghavachar

(Visishtadwaita is the phase school of Vedanta that teaches that the individual soul is an eternally distinct part of God. As a spark is related to fire, so is the soul related to God.)

Ramanuja, a philosopher and saint, flourished in South India in the eleventh century and propounded a school of Vedanta that has come to be known as *Visishtadwaita*. As a *Vedantin*, he founded his thought on the teachings of the Upanishads, the *Vedanta-Sutras* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The central concept of Vedanta is that of *Brahman* and Ramanuja's entire system of philosophy is devoted to its exposition. His special mode of interpreting that principle is conveyed by the term *Visishtadwaita* (qualified non-dualism).

Like the other teachers of Vedanta, Ramanuja also develops a doctrine of sadhana complete scheme of practical philosophy designed to work out the human perfection. As is natural, this scheme is governed by his conception of ultimate Reality, the designated Brahman.

Ramanuja's metaphysics of Brahman starts with a critique of materialism. For him, nature is not a self-maintaining and self-explanatory order. Materialism cannot also furnish any account of the centres of consciousness whose reality is testified by experience and thought on all their levels or of the selves.

If the metaphysical picture is widened and a dualistic naturalism is formulated affirming the material realm of being and the realm of non-material selves, though the outlook is somewhat more tenable, being more comprehensive, we have still fundamental difficulties according to Ramanuja. A dualism of finites is no final satisfaction for the metaphysical impulse.

The dynamism, order and coherence of nature, and the laws governing the kingdom of finite spirits, remain unexplained. No knowledge is complete which rests in the finite manifold. To account for the completeness, thought

must ascend to something infinite, one and transcendent. The ground and explanation of the many finites many, material and spiritual; must lie in a supreme Reality which is their sustaining foundation as well as at once above them. and is their sustaining foundation. It must transcend them for it is not itself a finite principle and must be immanent in them for they must be grounded in it. That Reality is Brahman.

This ascent to the category of Brahman is based on no absolute denial of finite beings nor does it concede to them absolute and self-dependent reality. They are dependent and derivative principles. To over-assert the reality of the finite is to divest it of its basis and intelligibility. To over-negate it as merely illusory is to attribute to the supreme principle all the finitude implied in the liability to illusion. Hence Brahman is neither the God of deism nor the Absolute of an illusionistic monism.

Brahman is the ultimate Being of which the cosmos of finite entities is a mode, adjective or body. The final truth is concrete, organic and comprehensive, since it envisages the One as appropriating the many as part of its infinite actuality. The total metaphysical fact is inclusive and determinate.

Brahman is Absolute Spirit. For only as such, can It transcend and account for the non-spiritual. It is perfect and self-fulfilled, for It transcends the finite selves and sustains them. It is infinite. The principles of finitude do not condition it; viz.:

(a) Time, (b) Space, (c) The separateness of the empirical order, and (d) The qualitative deficiencies which are the principles of finitude. It is *Ananda* (Bliss), the supreme perfection of conscious existence. The fundamental characterization of Brahman according to Ramanuja is that it is *Satya-Jnan-Ananda-Nirmala - Ananta* (Existence - Knowledge - Bliss – Purity - Infinity).

For Ramanuja, to be spiritual is to be personal. Consciousness for him is the attribute of personality. Hence the ultimate principle is the supreme personality. Personality as such does not involve finitude. The implications

of personality are only self-consciousness and self-identity. These are eternally and fully realized conditions in the Absolute. As such it is personal. Distinction from the non-self does not imply the autonomy and absoluteness of the non-self. Therefore, the self-distinction of the Supreme from the derivative-reals, does not amount to conferring on them a self-dependent status. They are modes of the Supreme, distinguished no doubt, but not discarded or alienated. They are distinct moments within Its complete expanse of being.

In his delineation of the nature of Brahman, Ramanuja seeks to do justice to both its ultimacy and intimacy. Its metaphysical attributes are outlined and its religious aspect is also brought out. The Absolute is God. The supreme object of metaphysical contemplation is also the final object of religious adoration. God is infinite and incomprehensible in His Majesty but is also the fountain of infinite love and compassion. The Upanishads say that He is dearer than all! They attribute His creativity to the abundance of love. The knowledge of the Supreme Being cannot just remain knowledge in knowing the infinite; one attains plenitude of peace and the joy of self-perfection. Human love can find no object worthy of it except God. The metaphysical knowing of the Absolute and the religious love of the Deity must become one in their final phase of fullness. Thus, there can be no tenable distinction between the Absolute and God, and none whatever between apprehension and enjoyment. Such a distinction is the result of a double belittling of both the Absolute-and-God and of knowledge-and-love. Thus, Ramanuja's conception of Brahman makes it one with the Supreme Deity of Vaishnavism, the God of love and beauty, the compassionate refuge and the final destination of the finite self.

From this philosophical doctrine, the plan of spiritual culture formulated in Visishtadwaita naturally and inevitably follows. The goal of human endeavour must be communion with God. All affliction is due to the neglect of this supreme concern. This neglect is rendered possible by individual freedom, which, as a necessary requisite for the spiritual self-development of the individual, is provided and sustained by God. Freedom abused - the

possibility of abuse is an implication of freedom - leads the individual to the peace-less career of evil and transmigration from life to life. It is imperative to turn away from this darkness and desolation and to undertake the journey to the peace and joy of God. There is true life, the life of liberation and fullness of being, only in communion with the Infinite Source of all value.

In conformity with the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Ramanuja works out the plan of sadhana.

The first state of endeavour is *Karma Yoga*. This is a life of dedicated action. It involves all the duties of man comprising social and individual morality. Selfless and God-centered action releases the inward resources of the spirit. Passion and inertia are overcome and the calm power of the spirit in man is aroused to activity.

The second stage is marked by the exercise of this liberated inner energy in the field of contemplation. This is *Jnana Yoga*. It is self-development for contemplation is the proper excellence of the soul. It is also self-recovery, for only the developed soul can intuit itself as it is in its essential nature. This achievement of self-increase and self-understanding is the culmination of *Jnana Yoga*. But to comprehend the self is to realize vividly that its true destiny is God-realization. The self is so constituted that it can fulfil itself in all the amplitude of its being only in God. Thus, the true purpose, the proper objective, is engendered by self-intuition. This is the birth of *Bhakti Yoga*.

Bhakti Yoga is seeking God with all one's heart and soul and strength.

It is love and contemplation.

It is meditation and worship.

It is aided by moral virtues.

It involves renunciation of unworthy ends.

It is backed by the devout study of sacred wisdom and a reflective and critical assimilation of it.

(In essence) It is an intense outpouring of love in the steady practice of the presence of God. When this reaches maturity and fullness, the vision of God is graciously granted.

The vision is a gift of Grace, and the Grace is in answer to love absolute and unconditional.

It marks the transition from the mundane to eternal life. The finite soul is awakened to the plenitude of its being.

In addition to the three phases of spiritual life indicated, Ramanuja posits another factor as essential in the pathway to God. It is self-surrender or *prapatti*. It is necessary as an element in all the other yogas and it can itself be efficacious as an independent yoga also. It is necessary in that as it makes amends for one's deficiencies in the practice of the other means. When one realizes one's total incompetence in all the other methods, it can be adopted as a self-sufficient means by itself.

Prapatti means the surrendering of one's spiritual responsibilities wholly to God and making him the only means of one's good.

The retention of human initiative restricts the divine power of redeeming to the sphere of co-operation with and response to human initiative. But when human initiative is surrendered wholly, the redeeming power of God is released in all its might and magnitude, and the salvation of the devotee is worked out unfailingly in accordance with the absolute spontaneity of Divine love and grace.

Prapatti is the technique of substituting the infinite power of the Supreme for the imperfect effort of the individual. It puts weakness itself to a constructive use and appropriates the Infinite itself as a means to the Infinite end. All that is required is a genuine self-oblation to God.

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, September-October 1960)

Teachings of Swami Adbhutananda

One day Rajkumar Banerji of Ahiritola came and told Latu Maharaj with much contrition and humility:

‘Maharaj, we are worms, being crushed by worldliness. Can we not be saved? Is there no way out for these unfortunates? Are we destined to be drowned in the filthy waters of this well of worldliness? Be a little gracious on us, lift us up from this well’.

Latu Maharaj calmly heard these words and softly said, ‘You see, man cannot help man. There are two, only two, who can do it — Satchidananda — God in the shape of Guru and Satchidananda God Himself. You have already got a true guru; why are you worrying then for your future? When you have got such a guru, you have secured a safe haven; your life’s boat will surely carry you to it in proper time. Realization of God is only question of time. Have patience’.

Rajkumar Babu : ‘It will come in time —this faith I have. But I doubt if it will come in this life itself.’

Latu Maharaj: ‘Don’t allow such doubts to assail your mind. Doubts and misgivings are the deadliest enemies in the spiritual path. They loosen the foundation of faith.’

Rajkumar Babu : ‘It is not for nothing that doubts are assailing me; even the words of the Guru I fail to carry out, I have become so mean, debased, and despicable. It seems this life of mine is blasted. This body serves me no purpose.’

Latu Maharaj : ‘What makes you so hopeless as that? Have you understood the entire purpose of this life? In this imperial court of the Lord no injustice can ever be done anywhere; no life can ever go in vain. Once Sashibhai (Swami Ramakrishnananda) gave a very apt reply to one like you. That gentleman spoke almost in the same language as you. Brother Sashi said, ” Suppose you are going somewhere; on the way you come across a small open drain. You come back eleven or twelve steps, then run forward

and jump over the drain. Tell me if the few steps backward were necessary for his forward progress or not. It is like that". Perhaps in one life a man has to take some backward steps, to play his role well in the eternal life. In the next life he will have to run with much greater speed. No life can ever go in vain. But remember one thing well — you must live the life fixing your eyes ever on the Lord. He will then lead you as He likes. Whatever is really necessary at any time will be supplied in exact quantity. He knows man's past, present and future. So the best thing a man can do is to resign himself unreservedly unto Him.'

Thus did Latu Maharaj put courage into the despaired hearts of his devotees. How many times did we hear him repeat these words : 'Whether you catch hold of the Lord's hand or not, He has caught yours, there is not the slightest doubt about it — so great is His grace and mercy for all'. He never allowed his devotees to feel hopeless. To put hope and cheer into the hearts of the depressed was his very breath of life. He would say, 'If you feel it difficult for you to catch hold of the Lord's feet because you have not seen Him, then do one thing, catch hold of one of his devotees. That is as good as holding fast to Him. Their prayer the Lord never rejects. . . You have seen the Master, you have seen Swamiji; you know the ideal lived and preached by them. Keep it bright before your eyes and live the life'.

Biharibabu said one day, 'Maharaj, can the Master and Swamiji be ideals for all?'

Latu Maharaj : 'What do you say? The Master is the ideal for all. He is an ideal Sannyasin and an ideal householder; an ideal Guru and an ideal disciple. He is the ideal for all faiths, all sects. He is the ideal for the followers of tantras; He practised and reached the culmination in all the sadhanas laid down in all the important Tantric books. He is an ideal Vaishnava. Such devotion for Sri Hari cannot be found anywhere and he realized Hari. He is an ideal Saiva. He realized Siva too. He is the ideal of the devotees of Sri Ram. He realized Sri Ram and Sri Sita. He is the ideal for the Vedantins as well. He reached the culmination of the Vedantic sadhana, the Nirvikalpa samadhi, in one day. He is the ideal for the

Christians and Muslims also. He had the vision of Christ and the Prophet. He is the ideal for all, for he is the only one who practised the sadhanas of all faiths and reached the ideal preached by each.'

In Balarambabu's house as also in Varanasi Lata Maharaj incessantly preached the glories of the Master, but never for a moment did he show any sign of bigotry. He held very liberal views about all faiths and religions. He paid great respect even for the rituals of all faiths. We have seen him offering bread and meat to Jesus Christ on Christmas Day and garland on the Good Friday; on the Id and Mohurram days he used to send offerings to the dargahs (*Mosques*) of some *Pirs* (Muslim saints). On the birthday of the Prophet he paid his special reverence to him. We have also seen him sending offerings to the temples of the depressed classes on the occasions of their special ceremonies, and sharing the prasada brought from those places with the devotees, with great joy. That he himself worshipped Siva has been mentioned. On the occasion of the Diwali we have seen him making arrangements through a priest, for the worship of Mother Lakshmi in the image. To whatever temple he went he invariably offered some money. Although so liberal he held his life wholly dedicated to the Master and his chosen deity (who to him, were one).

Once some one complained to Lata Maharaj about some communal incidents that took place at Gaya and said that all this was done to injure Hinduism. We give below a short description of the dialogue that took place then.

Lata Maharaj : 'My boy, who can harm another's religion? Is faith or religion a matter of externals that others can harm it? All troubles emanate from this wrong notion that religion is rituals, external formalities.'

The devotee : 'Can you discard rituals, Maharaj, altogether from religion? If they are not parts of religion what about the Vedic sacrifices — modern systems of worship in temples, churches etc. and ceremonials and Festivals in all religions? If some people oppose these would you still say that they have not laid hands on our religion?'

Latu Maharaj : ‘I don’t exactly say that. But as long as you regard faith as consisting of external ceremonies these riots, and killings will continue. Know it for certain and admit it that you have forgotten your real religion, you have lost sight of the kernel and are quarrelling over the husk of religion. Sri Chaitanya introduced the congregational singing. What a nice thing it was? Morning and evening — only two times — he asked you to sing Lord’s name all together. How many do it? You have given it up. Who teaches a Hindu boy to do anything about his religion? Only some Brahmin boys are taught something. That practice is also waning. What about other Hindu children? You have taken religion as something for the old age. But real religion is not meant for that age. It is impossible to practise religion in old age. In old age your mind is scattered over a hundred and one things; it is then impossible to collect the forces of the mind and get them concentrated on the Lord. It is not the case in childhood and adolescence; your mind is not scattered, it is yet soft and pliant, you can give it any shape you like. Dhruva was five when he saw God. But now no child is taught to take the name of Ram even once a day. You can see for yourself what a dense ignorance has covered our society.’

‘One evening Dr. De Mello, who had spent some time at our Advaita Ashram, Mayavati came to Latu Maharaj. When he came to see Latu Maharaj the latter was heard saying to himself, “lord, of course, is without form; but He is with forms too”. Strangely enough, that was the thought uppermost in the visitor’s mind. So he asked Latu Maharaj, “If He is with forms, we can surely see Him?”

Latu Maharaj : ‘Yes, certainly. I am not lying. The Master has said it. Not only that. You can talk with Him.’

Bibhutibabu told us that Latu Maharaj spoke these words with such great emphasis that they startled all those who were present.

(From ‘Swami Adbhutananda as we saw him’)

Leaves from an Ashrama: 61

Daily Puja

Swami Vidyatmananda

Every morning in scores of Ramakrishna chapels a swami spends an hour or two performing the daily worship or *puja*. This is a ritual by way of which the Lord is invited to install himself in the sanctuary, there to be treated as an incomparably welcome guest, and offered all that man can offer to the Divine – praise, devotion, the components of the universe, and among other offerings, water for bathing and food for eating. After the puja the bathwater and food are distributed to devotees as sacred leavings, or *prasada*.

But must I see the ceremony as confined to a particular place and fixed hour? May I not think of my actions of every day, every moment, as constituting a *puja*? The routines that I must go through as a human being, can I not turn these into ritual gestures pleasing to God? May I not consider this world in which I have been placed as a holy temple, and the situations to which I have been assigned as a shrine housing my Ideal? Each morning may I not arrive anew before this altar, clean in mind and cleanly clothed in motives of conciliation? And as I take my seat, which is to say, enter into the current responsibilities that are mine, may I not visualize those I must deal with in the street, office, or home as the Lord before me, smilingly prepared to receive the homage of the conscientious performance of my tasks?

A good idea, and yet again, as every worshiper knows, in performing the puja one can really offer nothing to the Divine, since all is His already. The *pujari* (*worshipper*) overcomes this difficulty by, in a sense, divinizing himself through a certain rite at the outset of the office, with the result that the puja becomes an act of God worshipping God.

How can I do the same? Well, I must try to draw the essence of holiness into myself, or discover it there, with thoughts of the unity of existence. Thus as a kind of divine being I should be able to go through the ritual of my day's concerns oblivious to all that would force me to feel myself an ordinary mortal. My mind centered on Who I am, I can offer to my Ideal the flame of patience, the flowers of cheerfulness plucked from the rude ground of pessimism and the world's despair, the bath of my perseverance, and the food of my selfless zeal.

When the day is over I must offer it all back to God, as the pujari offers at the end of the ceremony whatever merit doing the puja has brought him.

And what about the prasad? Day after day spent like this – will it result in some leftovers for others? Why not? *'If the Lord is pleased, all are pleased.'* The reason why a handful of loaves and fishes could feed a multitude is that they were held first in the hands of the Savior.

One of the members of an ashrama that I know about had a tendency to be lazy. She didn't like to participate in the heavier duties of the center – the washing and the cooking. She insisted on performing the daily puja as her work, considering it easier. One of the other inmates remonstrated: *'But Sister, work is worship.'* To which the member replied, *'Maybe so, but worship is worship, too!'*

Of course. All I am saying is that life can be made a daily puja and everything one does a sort of *mudra**, with admirable results. One can make it a practice to divinize oneself and act accordingly. And this sort of practice should, as the saying goes, in a very real sense make perfect.

* *Mudra*: Ritual gesture in Hinduism.

Programme for March - April 2018

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

Mar	4	Jnana Yoga 33	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	11	Jnana Yoga 34	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	18	Jnana Yoga 35	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	25	Jnana Yoga 36	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	1	Day Retreat	
Apr	8	Jnana Yoga 37	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	15	Jnana Yoga 38	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	22	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 20	Swami Shivarupananda
Apr	29	Jnana Yoga 40	Swami Dayatmananda

Day Retreat

**With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 1st April
from 10:00 am until 7:00 p.m.**

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

continued from the front cover

A Gopi was shut up in her room by her husband. Her intense anguish at being separated from Shri Krishna destroyed her sins; and the joy she felt by meditating on Him destroyed her religious merits (*Punya*); and she was liberated."

Disciple: "But we are told that when devotion grows intense, one forgets the Divine majesties of God."

Swami: "That is after the devotee has realized God. He then carefully obliterates all consciousness of Divine powers in order to approach Him closer and closer. The Gopis were not ordinary human beings. Theirs were spiritual bodies.

Continence is essential for Divine realization. If one can maintain *Brahmacharya* for twenty-eight years, one will realize devotion, knowledge, everything. Lust is called *Manasija*, 'born in the mind'. Only a hero can conquer the senses and go beyond them to the superconscious planes.

"I do not agree with you if you consider stubbornness as strength. Stubbornness is a cloak for weakness. The weak put it on in order to hide their weakness. Real strength knows how to bend and yet regain its true position."

(Swami Turiyananda)

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“None else, He alone is my all in all'-when you will feel like this and will not rely on anything, then will you be right.

Now you are depending on earthly things, on wealth, man, and learning. Even great scholars get mad by a single screw getting loose in the brain. We do not rely on God. We rely on our money, our relations, our friends. But 'O king, know that He is the treasure of those who have nothing.' When nothing will intervene between you and Him, then you will realize Him. Shri Krishna had broken all the ties of the Gopis.”

But their sense of shame still remained. That tie also he broke at last. When the Lord sees that man is finding it hard to give up anything for Him, then He Himself takes it away.

Swami Turiananda



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