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Divine Wisdom

M: "Sir, what is the Spirit-form of God like?"

Sri Ramakrishna reflected a moment and said softly: "Shall I tell you what it is like? It is like water. . . . One understands all this through spiritual discipline.

"Believe in the form of God. It is only after attaining Brahmajnana that one sees non-duality, the oneness of Brahman and Its Shakti. Brahman and Shakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. When a man thinks of fire, he must also think of its power to burn. Again, when he thinks of the power to burn, he must also think of fire. Further, Brahman and Shakti are like milk and its whiteness, water and its wetness.

"But there is a stage beyond even Brahmajnana. After jnana comes vijnana. He who is aware of knowledge is also aware of ignorance. The sage Vasishtha was stricken with grief at the death of his hundred sons. Asked by Lakshmana why a man of knowledge should grieve for such a reason, Rama said, 'Brother, go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.' He who has knowledge has ignorance also. If a thorn has entered your foot, get another thorn and with its help take out the first; then throw away the second also."

M: "Should one throw away both knowledge and ignorance?"

MASTER: "Yes. That is why one should acquire vijnana. You see, he who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who is aware of happiness is also aware of suffering. He who is

aware of virtue is also aware of vice. He who is aware of good is also aware of evil. He who is aware of holiness is also aware of unholiness. He who is aware of 'I' is also aware of 'you.'

"What is vijnana? It is knowing God in a special way. The awareness and conviction that fire exists in wood is jnana, knowledge. But to cook rice on that fire, eat the rice, and get nourishment from it is vijnana. To know by one's inner experience that God exists is jnana. But to talk to Him, to enjoy Him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved, is vijnana. The realization that God alone has become the universe and all living beings is vijnana.

Devotion and Knowledge

Editorial

There is a mistaken notion that devotion and knowledge are contradictory, and that devotion is the easier path. The path of devotion and the path of knowledge; both equally lead one to the same goal. It is a question of personality type. If one is endowed more with emotion the path of devotion is best for him. If one has a sharp and searching intellect then the path of knowledge is more suitable. Both reach the same goal.

Once Swami Vivekananda declared at Almora: "Sri Ramakrishna was all devotion without, but all knowledge within. I am all knowledge without but all devotion within." Great people like Sri Ramakrishna are all harmony both within and without and can express devotion, knowledge and Yoga as and when necessary. Within it is all one, though what we see outside is but an expression.

Devotion and knowledge are but two modes of expressing one's spiritual relation with God. If spiritual aspiration manifests in the form of emotion and feeling it is known as devotion, and if it is expressed through the intellect it becomes known as knowledge. If an aspirant is devoted to the personal, manifested aspect of God he is called a devotee. If the person is devoted to the impersonal he will be known as a Jnani. There is no contradiction, the difference is merely in the expression.

Devotion is, in fact, an expression of knowledge. According to Ramanujacharya when the mind becomes pure it gives rise to the knowledge of both God and the individual. With surety the soul knows it is divine and is eternally related to God. This knowledge manifests in the form of intense devotion with the least effort. One can never be a true devotee until one becomes pure and gets this knowledge of one's relationship with God.

Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, said that he had Nirvikalpa Samadhi thrice during the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna. But we find him full of devotion towards Sri

Ramakrishna and tenderness towards all beings.

Another example is Sankaracharya. He was a devotee and a man of knowledge rolled into one. Though an out and out non-dualist he wrote many beautiful hymns and songs in honour of various gods and goddesses.

Though Sankaracharya spoke of Maya he was not a preacher of illusion; he was a Brahmovadin who posited Brahman against the absolute nihilism of the Buddhists. His famous couplet in the Visnu-satpadi runs thus:

"O Lord, even when duality vanishes I am Yours, and not You mine. For the waves belong to the sea, and never the sea to the waves."

The Bhagavatam also declares that devotion comes automatically to the man of the highest enlightenment:

"Hari (God) is possessed of such excellent qualities that even sages who delight in their Self and are free from all bondages entertain selfless love for Him!"

The Bhagavad Gita admits that practice of either devotion or knowledge lead to the other, and then both continue side by side. It says:

"Through devotion he knows Me in reality, as to what and who I am. Then, having known Me in truth, he enters into Me immediately after that (knowledge)."

This verse shows that devotion leads to knowledge.

Sri Ramakrishna also said that if one becomes devoted to the Mother of the universe, She opens the door of knowledge for him as well. He illustrates this through the example of Hanuman.

"Hanuman, the prince of devotees, said to Ramachandra, 'Lord, when I have consciousness of the body, then Thou art the Master and I am thy servant. When I consider myself as a jiva, or individual soul, then Thou art the whole and I am thy part. And when I think I am the Atman, that is, in the samadhi state, I feel Thou art I and I am Thou. There is no difference.'"

Sri Ramakrishna said: "Through the grace of God some may get both jnana and bhakti."

"Again, jnana and bhakti are twin paths. Whichever you follow, it is God that you will ultimately reach. The jnani looks on God in one way and the bhakta looks on Him in another way. The God of the jnani is full of brilliance, and the God of the bhakta full of sweetness.

"Jnana and bhakti are one and the same thing. The difference is like this: one man says 'water', and another, 'a block of ice.'"

Illuminating on the present topic Swami Vivekananda said:

"Sri Ramakrishna used to say that pure knowledge and pure devotion are one and the same.

"When one is immersed in the highest ecstasy of divine vision or is in the state of Samadhi, then alone the idea of duality ceases, and the distinction between the devotee and his God

vanishes. When one goes beyond this Maya, then only the Oneness is realised, and then man is neither a dualist nor an Advaitist - to him all is One. All this difference that you notice between a bhakta and a jnani is in the preparatory stage - one sees God outside, and the other sees Him within. There is no difference between the supreme bhakti and the supreme jnana.

"Realisation of love comes to none unless one becomes a perfect Jnani. Does not the Vedanta say that Brahman is Sat-Chit-Ananda, the absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss? The phrase Sat-Chit-Ananda means: Sat, i.e. existence, Chit, i.e. consciousness or knowledge, and Ananda, i.e. bliss which is the same as love. There is no controversy between the bhakta and the jnani regarding the Sat aspect of Brahman. Only, the jnanis lay greater stress on His aspect of Chit or knowledge, while the bhaktas keep the aspect of ananda or love more in view. But no sooner is the essence of Chit realised than the essence of Ananda is also realised. Because what is Chit is verily the same as Ananda."

Swami Dayatmananda

Pathways of Realization (cont.)

Clement James Knott

A Meditation on Realization

I am the Self that perceives through the mind, the nerve centres, the instruments of perception and the senses in this body, but I am not any of them. I am the inner source, separable but indivisible. I am located at the still centre of formless awareness, ever flowing outwards to become as one with the greater Self.

Therefore, I can communicate directly with all the elements of this body and this being, including any parts that are malfunctioning and in need of healing, in order to attain the realization of their true nature, through purifying the mind and the body.

Concentration and Meditation

Swami Abhedananda has told us: "The object of meditation is to understand the real meaning and to realise it; not merely to know it intellectually, but to feel it and to be one with the ideal...As you go deeper and deeper, you would grasp the real significance and meaning, and that is realization. Therefore, realization means to be one with the object. Knowing is being." So we are each seeking to be delivered, as it were, from the limitations of the state of one's mind, as it was previously.

Having acquired the state of onepointedness through concentration, we can direct the mind at will to a single point, the object of our quest; our ideal. We can fix one's mind on the chosen ideal; on infinite wisdom, or on love, or on devotion, on purity, on the flame of love ever seated in the heart (Purusha) or on anything through which one can sense the flow of divine energy to oneself. Having chosen our ideal, we need to continue with it in thought, becoming absorbed into it and finally submitting one's will wholly to it so that we become as one with the ideal. Pure devotion to one's chosen ideal: that is the object of our concentration and meditation.

The latent power of thought is much greater than we could imagine. What we think, we become after a while. The realized idealistic thoughts are transformed into realities. We can observe the innate faculty of the selectivity of the intelligence as another example of the marvellous power of the spirit manipulating the mind. If we meditate on the pure heart of the

master, we can develop that purity ourselves.

Obstacles to Realization

Sri Patanjali has said:

"Attachment is that which dwells on pleasure, aversion is that which dwells on pain."

The ideal free soul would not be attached to anything or to any kind of sensation. By coming into contact with the objects of the senses, we are obliged to receive the impressions. As long as we do not become attached to them, they will not have an adverse effect on us, but if we become attached to them, then they can cause us dissatisfaction and discontent. So attachment to sensations or to modifications of the mind that dwell on pleasure are obstructions to attaining realisation.

The new aspirant will discover some obstacles in his or her path to realization. These may include distractions of mind and body; or an imbalance of thinking, feeling and spirituality; imposed negative modes of the mind; or Avidya (limited awareness of spirituality and discernment of it) and others. These obstacles can all be surmounted by the earnest seeker, since they have all been created by oneself, either in whole or in part, willingly or unwillingly.

There are appropriate methods for removing these obstacles. There is a preliminary step in Raja Yoga. It is called pratyahara, meaning gathering in our natural force and energy. In externalizing our attention onto the myriad objects of the world outside us, our awareness becomes widely diffused and scattered and this is reflected in the state of one's mind. We need to gather in these dispersed energies, withdrawing our attention from those external objects and instead focussing the energy on one point through the mind. This is a preliminary step in concentration.

Most of us will have experience of living and working in a culture that is divided (and divisive), with its own patterns of thought and acceptable ethical standards. One effect of this separatism in our cultures is that the mind is not integrated with other vital aspects of beingness; body, mind, feeling and spirituality. The mind in such a situation may come to be treated as a stop/start mechanism, useful for problem solving. This attitude can cause blank periods in the mind - awaiting the next issue or problem - which may get filled by random thoughts or images. This lack of continuity in the mind also has an adverse effect on the memory. On the other hand, many individuals have the impression that using the mind is an acquired skill like playing golf or cooking, to be called into use when necessary or when one feels like doing it. This attitude arises from a lack of understanding of the nature of the human mind and of the powers that the mind is capable of attaining.

The nature of the mind is of continuous awareness that can be directed at will to objects of perception. It is always there, ready to function continuously and beneficially for us.

Desire and Attachment

Physical desires are our reactions to perceptions of the senses or to images in the imagination or in the memory. Our instincts and the pleasurable experiences resulting from them, are linked in the subconscious. Instincts have a long memory which tends to produce: repeated reactions from many past impressions. Today's desire is the progeny of yesterday's yearning and it will be the father of tomorrow's desire, but it is all from the same root. It is an endless chain continued by the irresolute will. Desire is never fully satisfied. If it were so, it would cease to exist. Every submission increases the strength of the yearning: "Perhaps this time it will be different." But afterwards there may be a shade of disappointment tinged with regret. The keys that can unlock this chain are knowledge and discernment of the real and the unreal.

Another aspect of physical desire is the element of escapism; a need to make worldly problems disappear for the time being by diverting our attention from thinking about them, so as to enjoy a spurious feeling of well-being and satisfaction. But the problems and conflicts do not go away; they are still there. We find the same daily problems waiting for us.

Eroticism can also be a problematic distraction from applying ourselves to the practice of concentration. It is an aftermath of physical desire. As a mental phenomenon, it is a mixture

of instinct, imagination and recalled experience. There is also an element of ignorance arising from a lack of knowledge of the several aspects. Our instincts lie in the subconscious awaiting arousal either with our awareness or without it. Impressions or experience are also held in the subconscious until they are raised to our conscious awareness as memories. Imagination is a present-time function which can be used to create images of present reality or of appearances. It can also be used to create images of postulated realities and ideals. It is necessary for the aspirant to discern the products of the imagination from actual reality so as to exclude any unwanted images that would be a distraction from concentration of the mind. Mental eroticism, arising from physical desire, tends to be anarchic in its effects on individual conduct, making its own rules or none, and claiming precedence over other rules. But in origin it is similar to other persistent physical desires and can be approached in a similar way to the desires for food, possessions, pleasure, or for a more comfortable life, physically and emotionally.

The subconscious instinctual elements have their origins in a primeval survival mode. The conditions of life on the planet have changed drastically but the instincts have not changed in step with civilization. There is a time lag between the evolution of physical life and the evolution of instincts arising from it. This can cause counter intentions to lie in the subconscious. Compulsive physical desires and attachments can become contra-survival for the essential being.

Why should we need to counter the effects of physical desire? Because it ties us more into the physical body to the detriment of the other vital aspects of our beingness. In this way it reduces one's chances of escaping the bondage of this worldly material existence and so it hinders our progress toward the attainment of our ideal.

It is necessary to discern the basic elements; the desire, the object of desire and the reactive feeling are different things though they seem to act together as one compulsive flow. They can be separated in the self-aware mind by means of self-observation and assessment. If energy is diverted from the desire, there are then no associated perceptions and consequently no reactive feelings. Once we know how to deal with this mechanism of desire, we can become free of any unwanted attachments.

Redirecting the Mind

Sri Patanjali has said: "By raising opposite thought waves we can conquer those we wish to reject."

We can also direct our feeling waves in the same way. Many people are more aware of their waves of feeling than of their waves of thought. We should redirect some of the energy expended in personal feelings into the continual conscious direction of our waves of thought. This also involves co-ordinating and integrating the thinking and feeling aspects of beingness. In meditation we can direct waves to the person or the incident concerned. For Instance, beginning as follows: "I am not guilty of harming anyone deliberately in thought, word or deed." We can then raise opposite waves of thought and feeling to counter those that we wish to reject, sending a current of forgiveness, love or of devotion. One should hold this feeling in the mind. Sending out feelings of unifying compassion brings to us waves of love from other beings in return. We will have created good vibrations within ourselves and we have saved the energy that would have been wasted in vengeful feelings and in mental images.

The several aspects of the mind produce different sorts of outflows, and each type of flow is self-aware with it's own memory or chain of recollection as follows:

- 1) The feeling principle which anticipates a reaction; liking, disliking or desire, attraction or repulsion of whatever is perceived.
- 2) The mental principle which anticipates understanding and comprehension, and has the capacity to duplicate, memorize and recall the perception.
- 3) The spiritual principle which expects to unify, inspire and to subsume what is perceived into becoming a part of oneself.

We need to discern what sort of mind waves we are emitting at any one time. What is our intention or expectation and what response we have received, as a result. The realized mind can combine all three of these vital aspects together and can perceive with feeling, with understanding and with the unifying spiritual power of the self, so becoming one with the

thing perceived.

The unintegrated mind tends to perceive via one of its fields of reality at a time. The mental, feeling and spiritual bodies have become uncoordinated causing conflicting thoughts and sometimes contradictory actions. In order to rebalance the three non-material bodies we need to discern our mind waves perceiving external objects, persons or creatures. They may be discerned by practicing the redirecting of the mind waves separately and jointly as follows:

- 1) Perceiving the object, person or creature through the feeling body.
- 2) Perceiving the object, person or creature through the mental body.
- 3) Perceiving through the feeling body and the mental bodies together.
- 4) Perceiving with thought, feeling and spirituality, simultaneously, integrating the perceptions as one.

This method is a way of enhancing our sensitivity to our own waves of thought and feeling. It can be directed to any person or object that we encounter. The mind waves are all the same energy, Prana, which manifests in various intensities, from the most subtle to the more gross. The individual self is able to perceive the cosmic Self through the unifying power of the one true Spirit.

We have each of us acquired our own collection of obstacles and attachments in our lifetime, many of them of our own volition. These can all be surmounted, one by one, by means of appropriate sadhanas (spiritual practices). An obstacle to realization can be anything that is delaying one's advance to attaining the ideal of freedom from the bondage of worldly materialism. Swami Abhedananda has told us:

"we find that truth in our own soul, and the practice of concentration and meditation is just like the worship of that truth...Every moment of life will be an act of worship. Our whole life will be a series of actions which would be leading to the one goal of the realization of the Infinite. It is a regular process. Nothing is lost...if we think of God (or the Ishta), the Supreme Being, the highest Spirit and hold that thought at the time of death, and pass away with it, we do not remain earthbound, but we are enlightened. We see the light, and proceed onto higher planes of consciousness; and we are no longer subject to rebirth."

Ref: from the book Yoga Psychology by Swami Abhedananda.

(to be continued)

Thomas a Kempis

Nancy Pope Mayorga

THOMAS HAMMERKEN, born in 1380 at Kempen, Germany, lived his long life, from age twelve to age ninety-one, in a monastery. It was there, isolated from the business of the world, that Thomas grew in wisdom and spirit - exploding once and for all the notion that man must perform actions in the world in order to live a full and successful life. Thomas' success lay in the world of the spirit, carrying out the commands which God dictated to him through the heart. And from these travels in the country of his heart, he produced a phenomenally successful book, a book which has gone through more than six thousand editions, has been translated into at least fifty languages, and is second only to the Bible in popularity. It is called *The Imitation of Christ*, He wrote it as a handbook of spiritual instruction meant primarily for the monks of his order, but so fundamental and incontrovertible is its message that people of every age in every walk of life, in every country, have been and still are profoundly moved by its teachings. It is the one Christian book that Swami Vivekananda

carried with him, along with the Gita, wherever he went.

Thomas' father, John, was a poor man and a silversmith - hence the name Hammer ken which means "little hammer." His mother, Gertrude, devout and intelligent, helped the family finances by running a nursery school for the children of the town. There was one other son, John, who was thirteen years older than Thomas. Their parents gave the boys a careful religious training, and John very early left home to enter a religious school. The school to which he went and to which Thomas would follow him later, was at Deventer, Holland. It had been established by an inspired lay preacher, Gerhard Groot, and was the first belonging to a number of communities known as the Brothers of the Common Life. Thomas was later to write a biography of Groot and an account of the life of these lay brothers.

Groot was converted from a luxurious, secular and selfish life to one of meditation and prayer, and from this contemplative state he emerged to be a brilliant preacher. According to Thomas, people left their businesses and their meals to hear him preach and the churches could not hold the crowds. Groot had been to visit the beautiful and serene mystic, Ruysbroek, and was greatly attracted to the life of the community which Ruysbroek had gathered around him. There he got the idea for his Brothers of the Common Life, an establishment for devout men to live together without monastic vows. The first house was founded at Deventer, and about a hundred others followed later. These brothers lived lives of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They did not beg, but worked at jobs and placed all earnings in a common fund.

Their ambition was to live as the early Christians did, simply, in the love of God and neighbor, with humility and devotion. Thomas probably never heard Gerhard Groot preach. He was only four years old when Groot, at forty-four, died of the plague.

Groot's idea was carried forward by Florentius Radewyn, and it was to Radewyn that Thomas' brother John sent him when, at the age of twelve, Thomas left home and trudged off to Holland. Radewyn was greatly drawn to the young boy. He treated him as a son, kept him in his own home for a while, then found him board and lodging, helped him with his school fees and gave him books. Thomas was seven years at the Deventer school. There, according to the fashion of the time, he dropped his family name and became just Thomas from Kempen (a Kempis), There he developed the two accomplishments which seemed to have given him the most satisfaction: singing and the art of manuscript copying. His other great satisfaction was the presence of Radewyn, whom he not only admired, but revered. "The mere presence of so holy a man," he wrote, "inspired me with such awe that I dared not speak.

"On one occasion it happened that I was standing near him in the choir and he turned to the book we had and sang with us. And standing close behind me, he supported himself by placing

both his hands on my shoulders; and I stood quite still, scarcely daring to move, so astonished was I at the honor he had done me."

It was Radewyn who advised him that the monastic life would suit him best. By his own admission, Thomas was the kind of man who was happiest "in a little nook with a little book." So at twenty, he joined the Augustinian Order and entered the monastery of Mount St. Agnes at Zwolle where his brother John was already prior.

Life was busy within the walls. Thomas took his turn at hauling water and fuel, working at kitchen and other household tasks. There was choir singing, and of course, the lifelong business of copying manuscripts. Of this latter work, he noted that to the monk, writing was far more than just a trade. He is quoted as saying, "If he shall not lose his reward who gives a cup of water to a thirsty neighbor, what will not be the reward of those who, by putting good books into the hands of those neighbors, open to them the fountains of eternal life? Blessed are the hands of such transcribers." Manuscript copying was ever his favorite work and he is known to have made one copy of the whole Bible, which took him fifteen years.

At thirty-four he entered the priesthood, and after that he began to preach. His sermons were fervent and thoughtful. The fame of his eloquence spread, and he preached to crowded audiences. In 1425 he was promoted to superior, which meant spiritual adviser and instructor. Later his brothers elected him prefect of the monastery, but it turned out that he was too simple-minded in business, too absent-minded, and altogether temperamentally unsuited to the administrative job. He went back very happily to his old position.

Besides his sermons, he found time to write many tracts on the monastic life: *The Discipline of Cloisters*, *The Life of the Good Monk*, *Sermons to Novices*, *The Solitary Life*, and so forth.

From these, and from contemporary accounts of him, we get a fairly rounded picture of the man. He was diligent, kind, most reserved, but not anti-social. He enjoyed religious talks with his brothers and was eloquent and inspired on the subjects of God and the soul; but whenever the subject turned to mundane matters, he grew uncomfortable. "My brothers," he would say, "I must go. Someone is waiting to converse with me in my cell." About his physical appearance it is written that he had a sweet expression and lustrous, at times, intense brown eyes. His complexion to the day of his death was fresh-colored, vivid. He must have stooped a little from so much bending over his desk, for it is mentioned that he straightened up when singing, even rose upon his toes with his face turned upward. He worked to the last days of his life and never needed spectacles for even the most delicate tracing.

His reading was wide. Besides the scriptures, he read the writings of St. Bernard, St. Gregory, St. Ambrose, St. Thomas, but also Aristotle, Ovid, Seneca, and Dante.

However, his experience was entirely bookish, his life entirely within. The turbulent world

outside the monastery, wars and revolts, the split in the church and two popes anathematizing each other, one in Rome, one in France, futile church councils trying to restore peace, left him undismayed. He believed that all problems could be solved by retiring into Christ. If life is lived with the sole purpose of drawing near to God, then, no doubt, the fever of living dies down. It is this glimpse of a fruitful peace within the endless, futile turmoil of worldly life that gives *The Imitation* its perennial appeal.

Shortly after he was ordained as a priest, Thomas began work on his great book. It was to occupy him for ten years. He wrote it meticulously in the finest medieval Latin and in a rhythmical style that suggests he intended it to be chanted. The book is a miracle of simplicity and straight-thinking. There is very little theology. "Of what use is your subtle talk about the Blessed Trinity if you are not humble?" he asks. He goes right to the heart of Christianity, of all religion. And the heart of the matter is, as Henri Bergson put it, that this universe is nothing but a machine for the making of gods. This is not a book for the pretender, the dilettante, nor the faint-hearted. "Heaven help us if we find easy reading in *The Imitation of Christ!*" exclaims Monsignor Knox, one of its translators. But any sincere aspirant, wondering how self-purification is to be accomplished, can take a course in sainthood here.

He starts out in Book I in a most businesslike manner. Here is a man who knows what he is dealing with, and he is dealing with psychology. After a short chapter of propaganda for the godly life, he begins searching out every corner of the human psyche for weaknesses and falsities. The chapter headings show what he is about: On taking a low view of oneself; About immoderate passions; How to get rid of self-conceit; About useless gossiping; Why it is good for us not to have everything our own way; On putting up with other people's faults; How temptations are to be kept at bay.

Where human behavior is concerned, he is shrewd. "How can a man expect to have peace when he is always minding other people's business?"

"Prune away your own bad habits now," he urges, "for nothing will be more consolation to you than a clean conscience." "Forgive an injury with your whole heart." More than forgive, be indifferent to it. How is this to be done? Live in the inner world. "Turn to God and you will be lifted out of yourself and rest in Him contentedly."

He does not pretend that all this is going to be easy. He says, "The conquest of self demands the hardest struggle of all; but this has got to be our real business in life, the conquest of self." Because, "Once a man is integrated, once his inner life has become simplified, all of a piece, he begins to attain a richer and deeper knowledge - quite effortlessly, because his knowledge comes from above."

This would be the effortlessness of the athlete integrally trained for the moment of contest.

One who has earnestly tried to follow Thomas a Kempis through such a strenuous preparation must come from this pitiless paring away, rooting out and exercise of will with a feeling of cleanness, power, exhilaration, "rejoicing as a strong man to run a race." Many tired and jaded people of the world might consider this state of health enough reward. But to Thomas this was just a prelude. He had something more in mind.

Book II, which is much deeper, follows naturally and logically. It deals with the compensations, consolations, and joys of living an interior life. Here he discusses peace, purity, singleness of purpose, and God's grace. "You must make room deep in your heart to entertain Him as He deserves; it is for the inward eye, all the splendor and beauty of Him; deep in your heart where He likes to be. Where He finds a man whose thoughts go deep. He is a frequent visitor; such pleasant converse, such welcome words of comfort, such deep repose, such intimate friendship are well-nigh past belief." And "the more a man dies to himself, the more he begins to live in God. So then, when we have made an end of reading and studying, this is the conclusion we should reach at last."

In book III the character of *The Imitation* changes. The format changes, too. It becomes a dialog between God, whom Thomas calls *The Beloved*, and the human soul, whom he calls *The Disciple* or *The Learner*. In it God instructs, exhorts, encourages, promises. The disciple reveals his doubts and discouragements, has his questions answered, is even allowed to put God to the test. The intimate friendship between Thomas and God is touching. He complains to God with utter familiarity, "Lord, what a state things have got into these days!" And God answers him as reassuring father and friend, "Stand your ground, son, and trust in me." It is no wonder that in the course of this long dialog, the disciple falls in love with God and breaks forth again and again into hymns of praise and adoration.

"If anyone has this love, he will know what I mean. A loud cry in the ears of God is that burning love for Him in the soul which says, 'My God, my love, You are all mine and I am all Yours.

"Let me sing the song of love and follow You, my Beloved, to high heaven. Let my soul grow faint in praising You, rejoicing in Your love. Let me love You more than myself, love myself only for Your sake; let me love in You all who truly love You."

But the great value of Book III for spiritual aspirants is that we can identify with the learner. The disciple's doubts are our doubts. He asks the questions that are in our hearts. And the answers come surely from God to every question, from every angle. *The Imitation* becomes a handhold in the swamp of our life, a handhold to help us up and out of the mire.

Book IV is a short discussion of the Holy Communion. Thomas raises the subject above ritualism and puts it where it belongs, on the lofty and universal basis of mysticism. "This most high and adorable Sacrament is the health of body and soul, the remedy for every spiritual disease." *The Beloved* advises us: "If you have no wish to drown in the deep gulf of

doubt, don't busy yourself with useless attempts to analyze this deep Sacrament. There are many people who, in their desire to fathom mysteries too deep for them, have lost all feeling of devotion...

What God wants of you is faith and a life of unalloyed goodness, not loftiness of understanding... Do you, then, if you would be my disciple, offer yourself to me in this Sacrament, together with all the powers of your heart."

Toward the end of the great dialog, God says, as a kind of summing up, "It is a pure heart that I look for; that is the place in which I rest." And Thomas, from his long lifetime of friendship with the Lord, has these final, warm words of advice:

"Go forward, then, with simple, unfaltering faith. Leave your worries behind and trust in Almighty God. God never misleads you."

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The Concept of Divine Grace According to the Upanishads

Swami Prabuddhananda

A spiritual seeker's life is a long succession of delicate experiments with Truth. His entire psycho-physical system and the external world are involved in this undertaking. There is beauty and grandeur in every aspect of it. Assiduously striving to rise above his limitations, he makes breakthroughs and discovers new facts in the spiritual realm. The factors that contribute to the operation and success of such an all-absorbing endeavour are varied; some are obvious, others concealed. A congenial family background, exposure to spiritual ideas, inspiration from spiritual luminaries, and a co-operative body-mind complex are all conducive to this inner unfoldment. In addition to these elements there are his natural proclivities and wisdom accumulated from past experiences. If he intelligently avails himself of all these, he will travel quite a long distance.

In the process he is constantly subjected to fluctuations of mind, both positive and negative. He feels elated when there are breakthroughs, and dejected when there are obstacles. He swings from hope to despair; from an attitude of uncompromising onepointedness, confidence, and strength, to actual doubts concerning the efficacy of even a virtuous life, what to speak of higher ideals; from a spurt of indefatigable energy and enthusiasm to a state of lukewarmness and irresolution. Sometimes these changes are very rapid and obvious, and at other times they are gradual and inconspicuous. Occasionally he perceives why his mind is wavering, but he feels powerless to rectify the situation.

One problem he may suffer from is a lack of strong motivation to cut through the barriers. He wants to intensify his spiritual disciplines, to accelerate his progress, but his will is weak. He desperately feels the urgent need for some benign power to goad him to spiritual endeavour. At other times he feels that he has struck rock bottom, or that he has fallen from a precipice into a yawning chasm. Again, he appears to be trapped in a whirlpool of his own ego, mind, body, and various inner and outer forces.

When he is virtuous he grows in inner strength and stability, at least to some extent; but when he violates the moral law, he disturbs his centre of gravity and feels out of joint. Thus he moves in a series of vicious circles of cause and effect. He finds there isn't any available power that can extricate him from this complicated network, just as dirt cannot be removed by dirty water, a whirlpool cannot extract one from another whirlpool. The remedy often becomes worse than the disease. The more he struggles to escape, the more he entangles himself, in spite of good intentions. His mental condition becomes so complex that he discovers it is difficult to cope with it, both rationally and emotionally. He seems to ensnare himself like a bird caught in a net, and is bewildered by his inner reactions. He realizes that according to the law of Karma, or the law of cause and effect, there is no release from the consequences of an act already performed. Every action has a corresponding result. In the relative world this law operates very impartially.

"Know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free; For fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind." (Vivekananda)

The door seems to be closed in all directions, but the momentum of life forcefully pushes him here and there irrespective of these difficulties. Sooner or later he discerns that his available reserves, no matter how extensive, and his own effort have become inadequate, and he longs for help. From the bottom of his heart he wishes that the Supreme Being, whom he hitherto knew hazily, may free him from his egocentric whirlpool, actuate his understanding so that he can enliven his spiritual practices, lead him forward, protect him from possible dangers, and reveal the Truth. He appeals to the Divine:

"May that all-pervading Spirit guide our understanding." (Mahanarayana Up. 1.29)

"May He endow us with good thoughts." (Svet. Up. 3.4)

"Seeking liberation I go for refuge to that Effulgent One whose light turns the understanding towards the Atman." (ibid. 6.18)

"O Rudra, deign to protect me with that benevolent face of Thine." (ibid. 4.21)

Help does come. He then feels encouraged and uplifted. This power is purifying, soothing, strength-giving, and enlightening. It is reliable and inexhaustible. This he calls the mercy of the Lord, His *prasada*, or grace.

This unconditional mercy falls equally on all, regardless of their merit, solicitation, inner tendencies, or past *karma*. It has no causal relationship whatsoever. Therefore one who is spiritually striving, but lacks propitious circumstances, also receives unexpected favour in diverse ways, and thus, further impetus for his spiritual life. And then there are those who have been dogged by unspiritual elements all their life, others who are not at all inclined toward a higher life, and still others who are positively antagonistic to a spiritually idealistic life; and yet this 'kindly light' awakens their spiritual consciousness, turning them from worldliness to spirituality.

What actually is this grace? Let us see what can we understand about it from the Upanishads.

The Upanishads are the treasure house of superconscious experiences of the ancient seers. What they experienced, they simply spoke out. They were not concerned about philosophical consistency of thought, nor did they become involved with mental gymnastics.

"This Atman cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, nor by intellect, nor even by much learning." (Katha Up. 1.2.23)

During the course of their spiritual inquiry they also discovered a law that a compound, which is the result of some action, will inevitably revert to its liner elements. Actions can only combine the fundamental elements into a product, but cannot produce an element. Brahman, or the Spirit, being the eternal un-compounded substratum of everything, and the Element of elements, cannot be produced by any effort or action, including spiritual practices, which only remove the obstacles to the vision of Truth, "...for deeds, which are originated, cannot win the Supreme, who is unoriginated." (Mu. Up. 1.2.12)

The Divine has to reveal Itself: "...by him it is attained whom it chooses; this, his Atman, reveals its own form (Katha Up. 1.2.23)."

This Self-revelation of the ever-free Divine Spirit is called grace by the seers.

So these wise ones, after struggling intensely with their whole being, found out that through unaided individual effort they could not realise the Atman; through the grace of the Supreme Spirit alone could they reach it.

"By the grace of the Creator, one becomes free from sorrows and desires, and then realizes Him as the Great Lord." (Svet. Up. 3.20)

These sages experienced the eternal Truth as their very Self and the Self of all; as their own beloved: as ever pure, ever free, ever blissful; as one without a second; and as infinite Knowledge and Light, untouched by evil and sorrow. They ecstatically gave expression to their realizations:

"I have realized this Great Being who shines effulgent like the sun beyond all darkness. One passes beyond death only on realizing Him. There is no other way of escape from the circle of

births and deaths." (ibid. 3.8)

They also realized spiritual truth as a mighty, unlimited supreme Power, or Shakti. "The sages, absorbed in meditation through onepointedness of mind, discovered the one Self-luminous power." (ibid. 1.3)

These Vedic seers had an all-comprehensive view of Truth. They perceived that there is nothing else outside of this power, and yet it has many aspects depending on the observer's level of consciousness, or standpoint. This primordial Shakti is Free from any law or limitation. A small portion of It, as it were, manifests as the universe of time, space, and causation. The Upanishads poetically describe this idea:

"What is invisible, ungraspable, unoriginated and attributeless; what has neither eyes, nor ears, nor hands, nor feet; what is eternal, all-pervading, immeasurably subtle and limitless in manifestation: that Imperishable Being is what the wise perceive as the source of all creation." (Mu. Up. 1.1.6)

"Itself remaining intrinsically free, It continuously acts upon the universe conditioned by cause and effect; but It is wholly inexplicable from the plane of relativity. Although It is an impelling force, It is not controlled by that which It controls. The One Atman that exists in all beings appears in (different) forms according to the different objects (it enters); and it exists also beyond them." (Katha Up. 2.2.9)

"It is the Atman, the Spirit, by whose power the ear hears, the eye sees, the tongue speaks, the mind understands and life functions." (Kena Up. 1.2)

"He is the soul of the universe, He is immortal, and His is the rulership." (Svet. Up. 6.17)

"Some deluded thinkers speak of Nature, and others of time, as the force that revolves this wheel of Brahman. But really all this is only the glory of God manifested in the world." (Svet. Up. 6.1)

Because He is the Indwelling Spirit, He responds from within to the prayers of the seeker. Whatever help he receives is from his own Self, which is the Soul of his soul, and the Soul of everything.

"He who inhabits all beings, and who controls all beings from within - He is your Self, the Inner Controller, the Immortal." (Br. Up. 3:7.15)

"They realize Him as shining by the functions of all the senses yet without the senses, as the lord of all. the ruler of all, the refuge of all and friend of all." (Svet. Up. 3.17)

"He is also the supervisor of all actions, and the dispenser of the fruits thereof. He impels the whole universe to action, but He is not impelled by it; He operates through individuals, yet simultaneously He is not bound by their actions. No one in the world is His master, nor has anybody any control over Him. There is no sign by which He can be inferred. He is the cause of all, and the ruler of individual souls." (Svet. Up. 6.9)

The Lord, through His gracious free power, provides opportunities in the cosmic scheme for an individual to make choices and also to reap the results of his action according to the law of causation. Otherwise, without this universal law, everything would be chaotic; there wouldn't be any place for systematic effort. The seeker would reap something other than what he had sown. His everyday life consisting of actions and their results - duties, responsibilities, and human achievements including even the practice of spiritual disciplines - would be meaningless. There would be no possibility of correcting his mistakes. On the moral plane this law puts a tremendous responsibility on the seeker and simultaneously gives him freedom to work out his destiny without any interference from others. Thus this law is a great blessing, but ultimately he has to transcend that too.

However, the aspirant's freedom of choice, which depends upon his inner tendencies, his consequent action, and the law of Karma, is dependent on God's power. He dispenses the fruits of actions according to the deserts of the person. "He has created at first creatures according to the deserts of their various past deeds. He is the ruler of the universe, and the munificent giver of gifts to the devotees. He is the Lord who delights the individual souls by guiding according to their deeds and conferring on them the fruits of their actions."

(Mahanarayana Up. 1.70)

"It is He who inspires them all to do their respective duties in accordance with the knowledge, past actions, and tendencies of the various beings." (Svet. Up. 3.3)

"He leads creatures to perfection according to their deserts, and endows each being with its distinguishing characteristics. Thus He presides over the whole universe." (ibid. 5.5)

"He is the repository of all good qualities, and the master of all sciences. He is the controller of matter and spirit, He is the cause of liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and of bondage which results in its continuance." (ibid. 6.16)

"He confers bliss and wisdom on the devoted, destroys their sins and sorrows, and punishes all breaches of law." (ibid. 4.12)

"Moreover, He not only gives what is earned through individual effort, but out of His grace, He gives more than what is earned. He though One, fulfils the desires of many." (Katha Up. 2.2.13)

Sri Sankara, commenting on this verse, states, "The omniscient Lord of all dispenses desirable things, the fruits of work, according to merit, as also out of His own grace."

The seers point to yet another facet of this Power: Its deluding force. Although man's nature is Divine, one side of this Power which functions as Maya, the cosmic illusion, binds him through the law of cause and effect, and thus limits and blurs his vision. Because of this blinding and stupefying influence he fails to see this Divine Power working through him and all his actions. He credits himself, the ego, for the slightest achievement. The story of Uma

Haimavati in the Kena Upanishad illustrates this point very clearly:

Brahman, that Supreme Power, secured a victory for the gods over the demons. The devas Agni, Vayu, and Indra, caught in the law of causation, were not aware that this boundless supreme Power alone does everything for Its own incomprehensible purpose, and that it is the repository for all apparently independent powers like cognition, volition, and incentive to action. Brahman perceiving their false pride desired, out of His grace, to free them from their ignorance. He appeared before them incognito. The gods sent one deity after another to ascertain the identity of this venerable Being. As each one in turn approached the Spirit, he was asked to demonstrate his particular power.

The Spirit placed a straw before them. Agni, the god of fire, could not burn it; Vayu, the god of wind, failed to blow it off. Being puzzled and humiliated by their lack of power, they returned, defeated, to the gods. Then Indra, king of gods, advanced. But the Spirit vanished, and in His stead, the supremely graceful and auspicious Uma Haimavati revealed herself. To Indra she unravelled the mystery that, devoid of the marvellous Power of Brahman, even the most insignificant acts are impossible.

For this reason the seers earnestly draw the seeker's attention to the fact that this same enigmatic and inscrutable Power in Its beneficent aspect, known as Divine grace, alone can release one from Maya's insidious grip. They entreat him to expose himself to Its influence. "In this infinite wheel of Brahman in which everything lives and rests, the pilgrim soul is whirled about. Knowing the individual soul, hitherto regarded as separate, to be itself the Moving Force, and blessed by Him, it attains immortality." (Svet. Up. 1.6)

"One attains infinite peace on realizing that self-effulgent Adorable Lord, the bestower of blessings, who though one, appears in manifold forms." (ibid. 4.11)

"O Lord, who blessed all creatures by revealing the Vedas, deign to make us happy by Thy calm and blissful self, which roots out terror as well as sin." (ibid. 3.5)

"Thou controller and supporter of all, contract Thy rays, withdraw Thy light. Through Thy grace, I shall behold the most blessed form of Thine." (Isa Up. 16)

The enlightening and transforming power that works through the spiritual teachers is also another aspect of that Power. In fact it is through these teachers that the seeker most tangibly feels the grace of God flowing. They are, as it were, the pure conduits of that almighty Power.

"The man of Self-realization knows the Supreme Brahman on whom this world is based, and who shines radiantly. And those wise men who are devoted to such a person, without any worldly desire, go beyond all chances of rebirth." (Mu. Up. 3.2.1.)

"To such a seeker, whose mind is tranquil and senses are controlled, and who approaches him in proper form, let the wise teacher impart the science of Brahman in its very essence; the

science by which one knows the true, imperishable Being." (ibid 1 .2.13)

"Arise, awake! Realize that Atman, having approached the excellent teachers." (Katha Up. 1.3.14)

"That Atman can never be reached by the speech, nor by the eyes, nor even by the mind. How can it be realized otherwise than from those who say that it exists?" (ibid. 2.3.12)

Since spiritual life is intricate and subtle, it calls for sustained and integrated effort; therefore, the seeker requires guidance and inspiration from such a qualified teacher. That is why the Upanishads emphasize the value of the teacher-student relationship.

"For knowing that Reality he should go, with gifts in hand, to a teacher, versed in the Vedas and absorbed in Brahman." (Mu. Up. 1.2.12)

Sri Sankara further elaborates this point in his commentary: "He should not seek for the knowledge of Brahman independently even though he is a great scholar versed in the scriptures." The student feels the need for the teacher's benediction, especially at times of crisis, and approaches him with humility and reverence. The teacher blesses him with the words:

"May you be free from hindrances in going to the other shore beyond darkness." (Mu. Up. 2.2.6)

These blessings give tremendous strength and assurance to the aspirant, and lead him to the goal.

Grace is that Power which the seeker feels as unconditioned, bountiful, and benevolent, coming in various ways and helping him at every step. Initially, he considers the help he receives, whether solicited or unsolicited, in the course of his spiritual practices to be coming from an unaccountable source and being conferred on him regardless of his merit. This alone he calls Divine grace. As he progresses along the path, however, his insight deepens. He comes to feel that whatever results come to him according to the law of causation are also due to that Divine Power. The existence of cosmic laws which enable him to struggle spiritually in a methodical way, he now perceives as Divine grace too. Later when he becomes spiritually mature, that is, when he sees God face to face, he recognizes that everything - his own initiative past or present, the inspiration imbibed from spiritual teachers, all aspects of spiritual endeavour, and his final realization are all possible only because of this gracious Divine Power. Thus this entire universe, and his own quest for spiritual freedom and attainment of it, are the play of Grace, or the inexplicable free Power of the Divine.

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Indian Thought and Carmelite Spirituality

The Raja Yoga of Saint John of the Cross

Swami Siddheshwarananda

Raja-yoga is the royal road which leads to union with the divine. Use of the term "yoga" is legitimate when it is a matter of a school of religious thought, since it designates the union of the soul with God. Conceptions of God vary according to the doctrine, but yoga includes all methods of approach, and each of them can rightly claim the use of the term. Moreover one can even practice yoga in schools of spirituality which have no notion of God and do not formulate precise postulates concerning the ultimate Reality. That is the case, for instance, with Buddhist schools. Yoga is there assimilated into a psychological or parapsychological approach to Reality. That Reality is expressed, in positive terms by the Vedantin by the affirmation all is Brahman, or whether in negative terms by the Buddhists when they declare that from the beginning nothing exists.

Yoga does not take sides and propagates no particular school of thought; it maintains an impartial attitude towards all its partisans; religious minds as well as those whose attitude is extra-religious make use of yoga as a means of approaching Reality, and each school remains entirely free to formulate, according to its faith, its own conception of Reality. We must, furthermore, envisage that method from a purely psychological viewpoint and not allow any theological or doctrinal consideration to blind us in relation to the human mind when in the course of its spiritual quest it determines to explore its capacities. The greatest possibility for a human being is certainly the power to impose silence on one's thought by the annihilation of the vrittis: "yoga consists in preventing the mental content (chitta) from taking various forms (vrittis)" (Second sutra of Patanjali). Or, to use the words of St. John of the Cross:

"The Soul, before attaining the state of perfection, must ordinarily pass first two main kinds of nights which spiritual writers call the way of purgation or purification, which here we call "nights" because, in both cases, the soul walks, so to speak, in night and darkness." (AMC. Bk I. Ch.1)

In his prologue St. John of the Cross says, "Our Lord wishes to plunge souls into the dark night so that He may lead them from there to the divine union." (AMC. Prolog. 3)

A little further on he writes, "It is thus clear that in order, while here below, to succeed in uniting oneself to God by grace and love, the soul must be in darkness relative to all that the eye sees, the ear hears, imagination represents, and the heart perceives."

Concerning the realisation of the Dark Night of the soul, St. John of the Cross writes, "We are

going to prove how faith is a night for the mind. We are going to speak of obstacles which faith encounters and of the active role which faith itself must undertake." Hence we read, "Such is the spiritual night which we have called active because the soul depends on herself to pierce it."

We underline these words in order to indicate clearly that, according to the yoga of St. John of the Cross, the disciple must engage in a certain amount of activity. These words of the saint serve as a response to certain critics of yoga who claim that yoga does not adapt to Christian mentality and is directly opposed to Christian theology, for (according to these critics) the disciple is incapable of taking any action leading towards spiritual advancement, since because the soul is contaminated from birth by original sin, no human effort is efficacious for redemption and only divine action can save him. The theologians who raise these objections insist that the disciple is incapable of taking an active part in his spiritual progress; they insist on the necessity of complete submission to the will of the Lord. St. John of the Cross would reply that such an opinion clearly denotes a misunderstanding of the proper attitude for a disciple.

On the other hand, the criticisms of those theologians would be perfectly applicable to the second stage of spiritual life, when the active role of the soul is terminated; that is to say, as soon as the soul has gone beyond the purgative way. She now enters a passive state, according to the saint. The passive way includes what the soul does not do by itself nor by its own diligence, but what God does in the soul which then becomes, as it were, passive. This second stage is that of infused contemplation; here the activity of the soul no longer has a part, and it is there that our theologians could legitimately try to oppose yoga. But in the last stage of spiritual life, yoga accords the highest importance to complete renunciation of the human will; the soul then remains entirely passive. That degree is, according to the Vaishnavite schools, a union with the divine called savikalpa samadhi (a state of union where duality subsists). According to the teaching of a great spiritual master of South India, the soul then becomes like a block of marble in the hands of a sculptor. Here is the description Saint John of the Cross gives of the contribution of the soul:

"As the transformation in God depends neither on the senses nor on human skill, the soul must strip itself completely and voluntarily of all which it might contain of affection for things high and low; the soul will do all that it can of itself; and then what will prevent God from acting freely in that humbled, stripped, annihilated soul?"

A little further on, he says, "The soul must make every effort to know nothing ... the soul must reduce all its imperfections to nothing."

These few lines, and other passages too numerous to be cited, describe the effort which the

soul must put forth before being admitted to the passive stage. This degree is described thus in the Bhagavad Gita: "Abandon all dharmas (duties) and take refuge in Me only." (XVIII, 66)

According to mystical theology, there are three degrees in spiritual life. The first, the *via purgativa*, describes the work which the soul must accomplish by itself; this stage is indicated in yoga by the terms *yama* and *niyama* (rules of mental discipline and purification); then comes the second degree, the *via contemplativa*, which in yoga corresponds to *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*: that is to say, silent reflection, concentration, and a state of contemplative meditation.

The beginning of the *via contemplativa* involves a period of meditation, but according to St. John of the Cross, discursive meditation soon gives way to infused contemplation; between the two there is an intermediary degree during which one can not determine whether the soul acts or God is active in the soul, "so long as one has not arrived at that advanced state, there is a mixture of ways," writes St. John of the Cross. Discursive meditation corresponds to the practice of *pratyahara* and *dharana*; and when the aspirant arrives at *dhyana*, he finds himself at the limit of two states where one cannot distinguish between human action and the divine action infused in the soul. Sometimes it seems that the latter tries to attract God; sometimes it appears inactive and it seems as though God lets his grace flow into the heart of the disciple. We can read those descriptions in the litanies which the Vaishnava saints have left us. Such is the *via contemplativa* according to the method of yoga.

The last stage of spiritual life, the *via unitiva*, is that of union with the divine; here, according to both Christian theology and Indian method, it is God Himself who enters into union with the soul. From time to time, the Lord permits the soul to think that she still engages in some activity; but according to Indian yoga, it is simply a matter of God's play. In the state of union, only the Lord acts, and his action is to possess the soul completely. According to the words of St. John of the Cross, "the soul becomes God by participation."

Misunderstandings with theologians always occur when they are presented with the problem of the annihilation of mental waves. In Yoga those whose interpretation of spiritual effort is limited to reducing the mind to immobility are right to be pessimistic, for in itself, mental suicide proves nothing. Theologians, yogis, philosophers, and metaphysicians who undertake the realisation of the second sutra of Patanjali do not see there an end in itself but a way of access to a correct view of Reality.

The third sutra is conceived thus: "Then (at the time of concentration) the seer (*purusha*) resides in his own state (unmodified)." In this degree of concentration, all mental waves are suppressed; this state of annihilation seems negative. The third sutra describes the opposite,

the positive aspect; any fact whatsoever has always two aspects: positive and negative. If we plant a seed in the earth, it germinates. We can say that the skin of the seed has burst and is destroyed, or that the germ is born: the first statement is negative, the second positive. Between the two points of view there is temporal succession. There is no chronological relationship between the bursting of the skin and the germination of the plant. The event takes place in the eternity of the instant. Thus, there is no duration between the destruction of mental waves and the possession of the soul by the Purusha. St. John of the Cross tells us that the resplendent sun appears on the horizon as soon as the third part of the night is terminated.

In the metaphysical teaching of Advaita, the annihilation of mental waves has a definite purpose: it is a means which allows Reality to be apprehended. We habitually know only one aspect of Reality: the manifest aspect, expressed in consciousness by a series of perceptions; these perceptions, recorded by the mind as soon as they penetrate in the form of waves, are interpreted as actions. But that is only half of Reality; we are ignorant of the other aspect of the Real: Silence.

Silence appears as soon as perceptions cease. The phenomenon of perception is possible, according to Indian epistemology, only in relationship to its opposite, non-perception, which we experience in deep sleep. It is in contrasts and oppositions that life is felt as a living experience. Silence is what contradicts the movement of mental waves. Indian metaphysics does not manifest any preference for one aspect over the other; but our mental activity presents us with a false vision of Reality.

For Vedanta, as for Zen, clinging to opinions is the greatest obstacle to realisation of the Supreme Doctrine. We must, at whatever cost, detach ourselves from life, without, for all that, attaching ourselves to Silence, to Samadhi, the non-manifest aspect called, in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, death. Our preferences must go neither for life nor for death; it is only then that Reality unveils its secret in the realisation of the transcendental Consciousness. The discipline of Yoga is inevitable in order to make us grasp the importance of letting go, but this ultimate abandon occurs only when the most powerful of all our thoughts, the sense of "I," becomes detached from us. The greatest challenge we have to face is, according to St. John of the Cross, immersing the will into night, for the sense of the ego is attached to the will. We will take up this subject later.

The whole importance of the way of devotion is epitomized by the manner in which the disciple practices charity. For those who follow the metaphysical way (Jnana), annihilation of all thoughts recorded in the mental substance is particularly needful, for only that destruction will permit experiencing the interstitial void, namely, samadhi. Satori considered

as an event seizes the disciple just at the moment when these two aspects of Reality, expression and non-expression, are placed on the same level simultaneously with the rising knowledge that the state of jnana or satori has always been present. Vedanta, Zen, and St. John of the Cross unanimously affirm that no discipline will give the aspirant access to this final state. Vaishnava schools categorically deny the efficacy of personal effort in the last phase of sadhana, for it is accomplished only by the grace of the Lord in response to the total abandonment of the disciple.

Advaitic metaphysics is not found in the yoga of St. John of the Cross, nor, for that matter, in Vaishnava or Shaivite teachings; for, no more than in the schools of Christian metaphysics, the extra-religious position is not considered. The teachings of St. John of the Cross remain circumscribed by the dogmas of the Holy Church, to which he affirms his complete submission. The faith of St. John of the Cross is the credo of the Church: God is a Trinity in persons and a Unity in nature. The Vaishnavite saints of India have a determined dogmatism from which they cannot depart. But the attitude imposed by the dogmas leaves us free to observe the full flowering of Raja yoga in St. John of the Cross. Raja yoga is not allied with any theology whatsoever, although it exists as the most powerful moving force which propels us towards the realisation of mystical theology, whatever our religions may be.

Dogmas come in only when it becomes a matter of interpreting the substance of infused contemplation, for the actual fact of infused contemplation is never questioned by either Indian or Christian schools. Our sole aim here is to interpret for our Western friends, who are attracted to the Hindu approach, the extraordinary fact which has fascinated us ever since we arrived in Europe: the discovery of Raja yoga in St. John of the Cross. When visitors interested in India come to us and deplore, with a feeling of inferiority, that no equivalent for Raja yoga exists in the tradition of the Occident, we advise them to read over and over the complete works of St. John of the Cross. We have done that ourselves, and we can say without any hesitation that we consider St. John of the Cross to be the Patanjali of the West.

Before continuing our study and establishing a parallel with the terminology of yoga, let us define clearly four terms used continually by St. John of the Cross: concentration, meditation, contemplation, and infused contemplation. We will take up the first three terms later. For the moment let us take up "infused contemplation" in the way the saint habitually uses it, and try to find its equivalent in the terms a sadhaka of yoga would use.

Infused contemplation, according to St. John of the Cross, is the stage where the disciple abandons once and for all the initiative in his spiritual development. If we accept this definition, the Indian term which corresponds to this conception will be pratyaksha or ambhava, generally translated as "realisation." It is what St John of the Cross calls the "final

term" which the soul discovers when she arrives at the end of her spiritual journey.

This realisation is accomplished by God in the human soul, but by pure convention we speak of the disciple's realisation. The Bhagavad Gita refers to this very clearly in Chapter XI, when Sri Krishna reveals his cosmic form to Arjuna: "I have granted you the boon, Arjuna, of seeing this supreme form revealed by my yoga." In the following sloka, the Lord specifies: "Neither sacrifice, nor the Vedas, nor alms, nor works, nor great austerity, nor deep study can bring forth the vision of this form."

According to mystical theology, contemplation appears only after meditation has been abandoned, when the shadows of understanding, memory, and will have covered over the mind, announcing the dawn of the union of the soul with God. When the disciple has given up austerities and when a long series of successive humiliations have humbled his soul, humility is born of the knowledge that human efforts are powerless in this last stage of the evolution of the soul; after having gone through the active way, then comes the passive way - at that point contemplation begins, of which we have given the example of the vision Sri Krishna grants to Arjuna. Infused contemplation is the substance of Christian faith: "God is a Trinity in Persons and a Unity in nature" It is the descent of God in man.

This realisation is accomplished by God; but man, in his ignorance, tries to appropriate it to himself by means of austerities, sacrifices, study, and other forms of spiritual practice. Likewise in the advaitic tradition, the ego is extinguished in contemplation, the realisation of the Eternal. Sankara, in the verses which precede the text of the Mandukyopanishad, affirms without any possible equivocation, that Brahman itself contemplates the universe in the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, and remains immutably identical to the intemporal.

According to St. John of the Cross, man does not know the highest of all truths: God alone is, man appropriates to himself what legitimately belongs only to God. According to the words of Sri Ramakrishna, "God is in all men, but all men are not in God, which is the reason we suffer." St. John of the Cross, like the author of the Bhagavad Gita, declares that this knowledge is given to man only by supernatural means, when the disciple practises the yoga of discrimination, and the Lord gives him the gift of the "divine eye".

According to Vedanta, the Eternal is never limited by the manifestation contemplated by the soul. When we use the term "unconditioned" in order to indicate what cannot be defined, we mean to give that term the sense of "absence of all conditions." Subjectively, we can suppress the conditions of the mind by stopping all mental movements, but that does not imply that the exterior world will cease to exist. When I go to sleep, the world does not at that time enter into silence. Vedanta and yoga are not to be equated with either subjective idealism or

objective realism. The Real is expressed equally in either. The true sense of the term "unconditioned" is the infinite possibility of all conditions.

According to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, divine forms are eternal, but it is not a matter of the simple physical forms of Krishna or Rama. The illustration of clay enables us to grasp correctly this point of view. (We ask the reader to refer to the commentaries Sankara has devoted to this question in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, pp. 17-22 in the Mayavati edition.) No one sees the clay independently of the forms which it takes; no form is eternal. Each of the forms which pass successively before our vision is fashioned from clay; however, we cannot affirm that we see clay itself, since we cannot perceive the clay independently of the forms; we cannot, moreover, declare that we do not see the clay. We have a direct intuition of clay, and that intuition is unconditioned; but the forms are conditioned. Clay is endowed with infinite possibilities. Likewise the Eternal is never conditioned but possesses infinite possible ways of self-presentation.

From the Vedantic point of view, worshippers of the Eternal contemplate Him according to various religions, under a multiplicity of forms, which are so many revelations of the Eternal to men. From the esoteric point of view, these forms are presentations operated by Purusha itself when the substance of the Faith is revealed to a soul. The substance of Vaishnava or Shaivite contemplations are not the same; thus we are justified in speaking equally of the substance of Christian faith: "God is a Trinity in Persons and a Unity in nature."

After having helped the disciple to pass through the dark night by means of the trials of stopping the mental modifications, Raja yoga deposits him on the other shore, this time before a positive aspect: infused contemplation. In the course of this journey of transformation the soul has passed from the active state to the passive stage by the supernatural action of God's grace; or, putting it in Advaitic terms, she has arrived at the point where "Reality reveals itself." Raja yoga does not experience the least difficulty in accepting Christian dogmas and considering them as numbered among the infinite possibilities which the Eternal uses in order to permit the disciple to contemplate Him.

With some trepidation we will try to establish the distinction between "contemplation" and "infused contemplation", as used by St. John of the Cross. The first designates that state in which the disciple "has that knowledge or loving view of God in a general manner." This stage is anterior to that of infused contemplation and posterior to discursive meditation; contemplative consciousness is knowledge identified with love, for which the Vedantic equivalent, in Sanskrit, asti-bhati (existence-knowledge) or sat-chit. It is equally priya or ananda - which is to say, love. This knowledge, or loving view, is identical to metaphysical intuition.

Without having beforehand a firm intellectual conviction, our engagement in spiritual life will not be integral. Affective reactions change constantly, but intellectual convictions, born of buddhi (intellectual intuition) and sanctioned by it, are permanent, because, by workings of the buddhi we penetrate into universal regions. The particular is the field of emotional reactions, a veritable garden of errors; whereas intellectual intuition, the field of operation of the buddhi, becomes God by participation (to use the words of St. John of the Cross).

The buddhi we are concerned with here is not the individual buddhi of the antahkarana (mind), but the very light of the Eternal which strikes the mental substance; and instead of letting the power of maya project its multiplicity, this superior buddhi permits it to shine forth in all its glory. The inferior buddhi united to the superior buddhi constitutes the Mahat. The intellectual truth contained in the Vedantic formula "Thou art That" is the mainstay of students of Vedanta; but in dualistic traditions, intellectual conviction is just as necessary. In the Christian tradition, it is the moment when contemplation begins to intervene; let us read what the saint tells us about this knowledge or general view of God:

"For if the soul did not yet have this knowledge and this presence of God, it would follow that she would do nothing and know nothing; and, in fact, after having abandoned the meditation which helps her in discoursing through the senses, if contemplation was also missing, or the general knowledge we have spoken of - memory, understanding and will, which are already united in that knowledge - she would necessarily be deprived of all use of it in relation to God; for the soul can neither act nor receive nor conserve what she has acquired, unless it be by means of these two powers (sense and spirit). . . Hence it is necessary for her to possess that general knowledge before abandoning the way of meditation and reasoning . . . The soul neither sees nor feels the knowledge we speak of . . . Thus the soul, lacking the knowledge furnished by understanding and the senses according to their usual capacities, no longer feels them. The soul no longer has her usual sensibility... although this knowledge is purer, simpler, more perfect, it is less conscious and seems more obscure..."

(to be continued)

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Leaves of an Ashrama 29: The Devotee as Warrior

Swami Vidyatmananda

With the publication of his Tales of Power, Carlos Castaneda has completed his astonishing four-volume work on Yaqui Indian magic. The Mexican wonderworker, Don Juan, has become

a hero to thousands of yesterday's and today's young. For who would not like to learn, as the author claims he has - as result of his terrifying apprenticeship - to perceive the world and inhabit it as a man of knowledge? Whether Don Juan and a brotherhood of other shamans exist in Latin America has not been verified. But real or invented, Don Juan and his wisdom course hold for a current generation an attraction like that felt in medieval times for the quest of the Holy Grail.

In *Tales of Power* Castaneda's training is completed. And now Don Juan gives his valedictory. Through four books one has seen Castaneda angered, frightened, sickened, paralyzed, and nearly killed as he pursued a novitiate designed to smash reason, overthrow the accepted vision of the world, and refashion the candidate's character. Now that the student has succeeded, Don Juan at last tells the meaning of the struggle.

"To make you live as a warrior," he explains. "A warrior does what must be done, is never afraid, and goes his way in joy. A warrior acknowledges his pain but he doesn't indulge in it. Thus the mood of the warrior who enters into the unknown is not one of sadness; on the contrary he feels humbled by his great fortune, confident that his spirit is impeccable, and above all, fully aware of his efficiency. A warrior's joyfulness comes from having accepted his fate."

A restatement in today's terms of the old wisdom which affirms that man has but one calling: to live in the world as a hero and hence to become a God. It is to express this idea perhaps that in Hindu scriptures the word dharma is often spelled with a capital D. Long ago a holy man repeated to me the stern maxim: "Death being so certain, life's highest end is to give up one's life for a great purpose." A bit shakily, I admit, but it has been to this goal that I have since tried to direct my efforts.

In a world of fainthearted utilitarians, searching apprehensively their joys in flesh and self-promotion, the hero's stance is the only posture worthy of a real man. The hero is a joy to himself; and it is the hero who furnishes the moral cement which keeps the world from falling to pieces. Samurai of the self, knight-errant of the spirit, fisher of men, custodian of the Tao, victor of Kurukshetra's challenge. Don Juan's graduates are brothers of St. Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

The holy man who urged me to be worthy of preparing to die a hero's death also said something else: "It does work, my child. I assure you that it really does work." Now that I have reached the latter part of my life I have come to see that this is true. One does begin to arrive. The arduous probation does in truth produce a new man. One senses that one has become strong, daring, skilled, unafraid. Whether fact or fiction, whether other things in the

Yaqui books appeal to one or not, Castaneda's warrior is a new and grateful drawing of the immemorial archetype one is called upon to emulate, which emulation cannot but result in one's delight.