

# Vedanta

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354 JULY - AUGUST 2010

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Surrender to God  
*Swami Prabhavananda*

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Sri Ramakrishna and Monasticism  
*Swami Chetanananda*

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## Divine Wisdom

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MASTER: *"There is a sign of Perfect Knowledge. Man becomes silent when It is attained. Then the 'I', which may be likened to the salt doll, melts in the Ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute and becomes one with It. Not the slightest trace of distinction is left.*

*"As long as his self-analysis is not complete, man argues with much ado. But he becomes silent when he completes it. When the empty pitcher has been filled with water, when the water inside the pitcher becomes one with the water of the lake outside, no more sound is heard. Sound comes from the pitcher as long as the pitcher is not filled with water.*

*"People used to say in olden days that no boat returns after having once entered the 'black waters' of the ocean.*

*"All trouble and botheration come to an end when the 'I' dies. You may indulge in thousands of reasonings, but still the 'I' doesn't disappear. For people like you and me, it is good to have the feeling, 'I am a lover of God.'*

*"The Saguna Brahman is meant for the bhaktas. In other words, a bhakta believes that God has attributes and reveals Himself to men as a Person, assuming forms. It is He who listens to our prayers. The prayers that you utter are directed to Him alone. You are bhaktas, not jnanis or Vedantists. It doesn't matter whether you accept God with form or not. It is enough to feel that God is a Person who listens to our prayers, who creates, preserves, and destroys the universe, and who is endowed with infinite power.*

*"It is easier to attain God by following the path of devotion."*

BRAHMO DEVOTEE: *"What are the means by which one can see God?"*

MASTER: *"Can you weep for Him with intense longing*

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## Is Buddha relevant for us ?

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**W**e are passing through troubled and turbulent times; no day goes by without our hearing news of wars, murders, strife and disasters, natural or man-made. Many suffer from stress, worry and anxiety. All long for peace, joy and happiness. Is there anyone who can help inspire us to lead a better life, whose teachings can restore us to a state of peace, love, joy and friendship?

Indeed there is such a one, the Buddha. Gautama Buddha is peace, serenity, love and wisdom personified. Even a look at his image or picture brings us thoughts of peace, joy and tranquillity. Once more Buddhism is on the resurge and inspiring millions of people to live a life of peace, meditation and compassion. His teachings are bringing peace and blessedness wherever they have spread. Buddha shines in the hearts of millions all over the world as the harbinger of peace and compassion.

There are three reasons why Buddhism is attracting so many.

1. One may not believe in any God or religion, but still become spiritual.

2. The idea of loving compassion and service appeals strongly to the modern man.

3. Buddhism encourages meditation and rational thought.

Swami Vivekananda had the deepest reverence for Lord Buddha. It is said that while meditating in his youth he had a vision of Buddha. Many believe that since then Swami Vivekananda's heart was possessed by Buddha's compassion.

Speaking of Buddha, Swami Vivekananda says: "Let me tell you . . . about one man . . . All the prophets of the world, except

Buddha, had external motives to move them to unselfish action. . . But Buddha is the only prophet who said, 'I do not care to know your various theories about God. Do good and be good and this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is.' Buddha brought the Vedanta to light, gave it to the people, and saved India."

Buddha was given the title 'Supreme Physician for the ills of the world.' Here is an invocation of the Buddha found in the *Lalita Vistara*:

"O Buddha! The human world has long been sick and it has suffered from the disease of passions and torments, but you have appeared (on earth) as the supreme physician to heal all these diseases."

Gautama Buddha was born to King Shuddhodana and queen Mayavati about 2600 years ago. At his birth the court astrologers predicted that this royal infant would either become the greatest of emperors or the greatest of monks. As the boy was growing into maturity, his father's determination to guard against this latter eventuality began to grow. So he arranged to keep the son attached to worldly pleasures and strove his utmost to ward off all sights from his son's eyes, that might turn his son's mind away from the world. But destiny has its own purpose.

When Gautama attained sixteen years of age his father arranged for his son to marry a beautiful royal princess, Yashodhara. Soon Gautama had a son whom he named Rahula. These many years Shuddhodana did not allow Gautama to go outside the palace lest he might encounter some distressing sights and his mind may turn toward renunciation. When, in his twenty-ninth year, the young Gautama wanted to see the world, his father at first tried to prevent him, but eventually had to yield to his son's request. But he ordered his ministers to see that his son could come across no unpleasant sight. But, again, destiny had its way.

It was said that when the young prince Gautama was

driving around the city he beheld four visions. He saw an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a shaven-headed monk with a peaceful countenance. Through these visions Gautama saw the existential problems of life and the only remedy for the ills of the world. That very night he renounced the world and went into in search of illumination.

Another version of this event goes thus:

His Father Shuddhodana, on hearing of his son's resolve, hurried to request him to defer renunciation at least during his (father's) lifetime. Then came the son's reply that he would accede to this request of his father and postpone his renunciation if he (the father) could stand surety for four things. These four things have been mentioned in a famous gatha-verse in the *Mahavastu-Avadana* which reads as follows: "Gautama wanted assurance from his father that no decrepitude or old age would attack him, but perpetual youth would prevail instead; that no disease would befall him, but permanent good health would remain; that death would not occur to him, but this life would proceed continuously and that no adversity would disturb him, but he would have a life only of happiness. His father's reply was that no man was or ever can be immune from the assaults of decrepitude, disease, death and adversity in life."

So Gautama resolved to renounce home and strive for nirvana. Meanwhile the three visions of an old man, a sick man, and a dead man touched his heart very sorrowfully. He used to sit in his garden and plunge into the depths of meditation. Girish Ghosh, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, in his drama on the life of Buddha, depicted the agony of Buddha so poignantly: "We moan for rest, alas! but rest can never find; We know not whence we come, nor where we float away. Time and again we tread this round of smiles and tears; In vain we pine to know whither our pathway leads, And why we play this empty play. . . ."

But the fourth vision of a serene and tranquil-minded holy

ascetic, clad in his yellow garment, impressed him with the idea that it was such a person alone who could rise superior to all the ills of the world and become worthy of attainment of the highest beatitude.

He gave up his home on the very day his father wanted him to be anointed as the crown prince. When his father brought to Gautama the happy news of the birth of a son to his wife, Yashodhara, he exclaimed, "Rahula is born - the chain of bondage is strengthened."

After having left home at the age of twenty-nine, he wandered in many a place and performed the severest kinds of penances. But having passed such a hard life for six years, he could not attain the enlightenment which he was seeking so ardently. He felt that extreme self-mortification was not the way to perfection.

Then he proceeded to the bank of the Nairanjana river under the pipal tree at Bodh-Gaya, took his seat there, firmly declaring that "he should not leave it before he succeeded in attaining perfect knowledge, although his skin, bones, and flesh wasted away and his body dried up." He remained absolutely immovable in that position, and became *sambuddha* (perfectly enlightened) during that very night. It is said in Pali works that in the first watch of that particular night he obtained the knowledge of his own previous existences; in the second, of all the present states of beings; in the third, of the chain of causes and effects; and at the dawn of day, he came to know of all things, i.e. he became Buddha, the Enlightened. After attaining illumination he proceeded to Varanasi to give his first sermon.

*(to be continued)*

*Swami Dayatmananda*

## Sri Ramakrishna and Monasticism

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The traditional concept of Indian monasticism is one of austerity, seclusion from society and mankind and striving only for one's own liberation. Shankara graphically described this traditional monk in his famous hymn, *Kaupina-panchakam*:

Roaming ever in the grove of *Vedanta*,  
Ever pleased with his beggar's morsel,  
Ever walking with heart free from sorrow,  
Blest indeed is the wearer of the loin-cloth.

In contradistinction, Sri Ramakrishna would pray, "Oh, Mother, don't make me a dry monk." He did not come to oppose the traditional values of monasticism, for he came to fulfill and not to destroy. On the contrary, he built a new, beautiful and harmonious edifice of monastic life upon the old structure, preserving all the ancient values and blending them with the life-style and temperament of modern times, thus giving the world of today a much needed restatement, in contemporary terms, of the ideals of the past.

Shankara mentioned in the introduction of his commentary on the *Gita*, "Of two kinds is the *dharma* dealt with in the *Vedas*: the one characterized by activity and the other by renunciation." This twofold *dharma*, the cause of the stability of the world order and also the direct means by which men attain prosperity and the Highest Good, was followed by members of the different *ashramas*, desirous to secure their welfare. People practised *Vedic dharma* for a long time. Then lust arose among them; discrimination and wisdom declined. Unrighteousness began to outweigh righteousness. Thus, when unrighteousness prevailed in the world, Vishnu, the first creator, wishing to ensure

the continuance of the universe, incarnated Himself as Krishna.”

When God incarnates as a man, he behaves like a human being, but at the same time his every action is extraordinary and meaningful. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, we see that he married, he took *sannyasa*, and he also preached religion. In fact, his main attraction is his universality. To quote his own words: “One player is producing only a monotone on his flute, while another is creating waves of melodies in different ragas and raginis. That is my attitude. Why should I produce only a monotone when I have an instrument with seven holes? Why should I say nothing but, ‘I am He, I am He’ ... I want to call on God through all the moods: through *santa*, *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya*, and *madhur*. I want to make merry with God. I want to sport with God.” Thus, he was the prophet of the harmony so badly needed in this age, a spiritual phenomenon who could serve his manna to all, irrespective of caste or creed, and his life becomes the meeting point of all sects and paths.

One day he asked one of his disciples, “What do you think of me?” The disciple replied, “Sir, you are neither a householder nor a monk.” Apparently pleased, Sri Ramakrishna said, “How do you know such a truth?”

The goal of human life is to realize God; and this realization does not depend on whether one leads a monastic life or the life of a householder. Some people think that Sri Ramakrishna came for householders and some think that he came for monks. Actually, he came to demonstrate for modern man how to live a God-centred life.

Once one of his householder disciples expressed his desire to renounce the world, but Sri Ramakrishna did not give him permission. “What harm is there to remain a householder?” he said to the disciple. “Only keep the mind fixed upon God. The life of a householder is fighting from within the fortress.” Sri

Ramakrishna taught that it is better to be normal and natural and grow in one's, own way, and that it is not good to force oneself into renunciation. He once said, in regard to *garhasthya-sannyasa*: "There are two kinds of yogis, the 'revealed' and the 'hidden.' The householder may be a 'hidden' yogi. None recognizes him. The householder must renounce mentally, not outwardly."

*Kamini kanchan maya* (i.e. lust and gold are *maya*) was an oft-repeated utterance of Sri Ramakrishna. And about monastic rules he was uncompromising. For the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, is the *sannyasin* born. Vain is his life who, embracing *sannyasa*, forgets this ideal. His attitude in this respect was unequivocal as these remarks show : "A *sannyasin* associated with 'woman and gold' is like a beautiful damsel with a bad odour. The odour makes her beauty useless."

"Do you know how it looks for a *sannyasin* to accept money or to be attached to an object of temptation? It is as if a brahmin widow who had practised continence and lived on simple boiled rice and vegetables and milk for many years, were suddenly to accept an untouchable as her paramour."

"*Sadhus* (monks) should depend one hundred per cent on God. Birds and monks do not hoard. Don't trust a *sadhu* if he keeps bag and baggage with him and a bundle of clothes with many knots."

According to Hindu tradition, a man must pass through four successive stages during his life-time: *Brahmacharya* (student life), *Garhasthya* (householder's life), *Vanaprastha* (life of a forest-dweller) and *Sannyasa* (monastic life). So at the end one will have to embrace the monastic life, severing all worldly ties and attachments. However, this Hindu view (that the life of renunciation is the culmination of human aspiration) is very flexible ; it does not bind man with strict rules. For example, the *Jabala Upanishad* says: "Let one renounce even from the state of a

student or from the state of a house-holder or from that of a forest-dweller. On whatever day a man has the spirit of renunciation, that very day let him renounce.”

Once Sri Sarada Devi, the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, was asked about the speciality of Sri Ramakrishna and she replied, “Renunciation is his speciality in this age. Did anyone see such natural (and total) renunciation ever before?”

It is literally true that we do not see such renunciation, which is the very essence of monastic life, even among the mythological gods. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says, “Desiring the *Atman* alone, monks renounce their homes. The sages, having risen above the desire for offspring, the desire for wealth, the desire for name and fame, led the life of a mendicant.” These three desires were so completely absent from Sri Ramakrishna's life that he had to create desires in order to keep his mind down to the level of ordinary consciousness.

Mathura Nath Biswas, son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, tested Sri Ramakrishna in many ways. First, he offered him a vast property worth millions of rupees which Sri Ramakrishna refused. Then, he took him to a famous courtesan of Calcutta, but the very sight of her plunged Sri Ramakrishna into deep *samadhi*. The highest respect one can offer another person is to worship him as God. Sri Ramakrishna was offered this honour during his lifetime, but not even a hint of ego cropped up in his mind.

In the Hindu scriptures, four types of *sannyasins* have been mentioned: *Kutichaka* - a man of renunciation but incapable of moving from place to place; *Bahudaka* - an itinerant monk; *Hamsa* - a monk of superb renunciation and discrimination; and *Paramahamsa* - an illumined soul who has transcended the dualities and so is beyond injunction and prohibition.

Again, *sannyasa* is of two kinds: *Vividiska-sannyasa*, i.e., a person takes monastic vows with a view to attaining the

knowledge of *Brahman*; and *Vidvat-sannyasa*, i.e., when, after illumination, formal vows are taken with a view to enjoying the bliss of living free of all bondage.

Sri Ramakrishna was a *Paramahansa sannyasin* and he took *sannyasa* after God-realization; in his own words: "My experiences are for others to refer to."

As we know, Sri Ramakrishna took monastic vows from Tota Puri, an illumined monk of the Puri sect which is one of the ten sects founded by Shankara. It is interesting to note that whenever Sri Ramakrishna needed a teacher, he or she came of his or her own accord, and whomsoever he accepted as his guru he followed the guru's bidding to the letter with unlimited faith.

Swami Saradananda has given a graphic description of Sri Ramakrishna's initiation into *sannyasa* in *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*: "The preliminaries finished, the *Homa* fire was lighted. And the forest and gardens round the *Panchavati* reverberated the holy profound sound of the *mantras* . . . that came down in an unbroken line from the Guru to the disciple from the beginning of time till today. The delicate, affectionate bosom of the Ganga of holy waters vibrating with the delightful touch of that sound fell an extraordinary infusion of a new life. She flowed dancing with joy."

First, the prayer *mantras* were recited: "May the truth of the Supreme *Brahman* reach me. May the Reality having the characteristic of supreme bliss reach me. May the indivisible, homogeneous, sweet reality of *Brahman* manifest itself in me."

"Oh, great Lord, the destroyer of the evil dream of the worlds, destroy all my evil dreams, the perceptions of duality. Oh, shining one, I offer oblations to thee who art fire, with a view to achieving, through the purity of body and mind, the capacity to retain the knowledge of the Reality. Be gracious."

Sri Ramakrishna said emphatically that "the spiritual

experiences of this person (meaning himself) have gone beyond those recorded in the *Vedas* and *Vedanta*." Yet while taking *sannyasa* he followed all the injunctions of the scriptures. He offered up the five elements, the live *pranas*, the five sheaths, mind, speech, body, actions, desires as oblations in the fire of *Brahman*. He thus performed the *Viraja homa*, put on an ochre cloth and was given the name Ramakrishna by his guru.

"Nangta instructed me in *Vedanta*," Ramakrishna narrated. "In three days I went into *samadhi*. At the sight of my *samadhi*, he was quite taken aback and exclaimed, Ah! What is this? We talked only *Vedanta*. The Brahmani used to say to me; "Don't listen to *Vedanta*. It will injure your devotion to God."

This is the widespread conception (a wrong notion, incidentally), that monistic *Vedanta* is antagonistic to the path of devotion. That this is not true was pointed out by Madhusudan Saraswati, the author of *Advaita Siddhi*: "Before the dawn of knowledge, duality is the cause of delusion; but when true knowledge is awakened through intuition, duality is imagined for the sake of devotion to God. This blissful state is even more beautiful than non-dualism."

Sri Ramakrishna never cared for dry philosophical discussion or crude types of asceticism. His way was this: after reaching the *Nitya* (the absolute) he would return to dwell in the *Lila* (the relative), and again climb from the *Lila* to the *Nitya*. His simile for this is unique: "Mere dry knowledge is like an ordinary rocket; it bursts with a few sparks and then dies out. But the knowledge of sages like Narada and Sukadeva is like a good rocket: for a while it showers balls of different colours, and then it stops ; again it throws out new balls and again it stops; and thus it goes on. Those sages had *prema* (pure love) for God. *Prema* is the rope by which one can reach *Satchidananda*."

Many people are confused by the active lives of the

Ramakrisima monks. A Vedanta monk is supposed to give up work if he is a true seeker of actionless *Brahman*. The scripture says, "liberation is not possible through action." Moreover, Shankara wrote in his *Gita-Bashya*: "The path of action as taught in the scriptures is the path of bondage." But he also admitted in his commentary, "For him whose mind has thus been purified by performance of regular acts and who thus becomes inclined to knowledge of the Self, *Jnana-nishta* (steadfast meditation of the Self) is the gradual step."

Thus the question of which is the way - work or meditation - creates an eternal dilemma for the traditional monks. But Sri Ramakrishna's succinct saying, "you may perform any work you like, by keeping the knowledge of *Advaita* in your pocket," solved that riddle. If God can be seen by closing the eyes, why not by opening them? If the all-pervading God appears in the temple, then why not in the forest or factory? This, of course, means that every action of the spiritual aspirant must be transformed into worship.

Swami Vivekananda puts this quite clearly in his lecture *Sannyasa: Its Ideal and Practise*. "You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate these fields (meadows of the Math). You must be prepared to explain the difficult intricacies of the scriptures now, and the next moment to go and sell the products of the fields in the market." This is a new approach to the monastic ideal of India and it is based on the concept that there is no contradiction between *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman) and *Tattvamasi* (Thou art That). By closing the eyes a spiritual aspirant can say "I am *Brahman*:" then, opening his eyes, he can say "Thou art That" and with that attitude worship all beings.

Sri Ramakrishna never advocated that his disciples be selfish spiritual aspirants who work only for their own liberation. To him such aspirants were inferior. One day in Cossipore Garden House, Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) expressed a desire to be immersed in *samadhi* for three or four days at a stretch, interrupting his meditation now and then for a bite of food. Sri Ramakrishna reprimanded him for his selfish attitude. "Shame on you," he said, "You are asking for such an insignificant thing. I thought that you would be like a big banyan tree, and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation."

In later life, it was Swami Vivekananda who formulated the motto of the Ramakrishna Order: *Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha* i.e. for the emancipation of the Self and for the well-being of the world. Thus, Swamiji tried to express the ancient monastic ideals not only through the old methods of spiritual discipline and silent preaching, but also by utilising the spiritual energy, generated by those disciplines, for the good of humanity. "The *sannyasin*, verily, is born into this world to lay down his life for others, to stop the bitter cries of men, to wipe away the tears of the widow, to bring peace to the soul of the bereaved mother, to equip the ignorant masses for the struggle for existence, to accomplish the secular and spiritual well-being of all through the diffusion of spiritual teaching and to arouse the sleeping lion of *Brahman* in all by throwing in the light of knowledge." In this magnificent passage, an echo of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji declared the purpose of monastic life.

One should not misunderstand that the Ramakrishna Order is like other philanthropic organizations and is maintained only for social services, relief work and so on. Be God yourself and also make others God - this was the message of Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna Order is preeminently a

religious body, its service to others forming part of its *sadhana* or spiritual practice.

Religiosity was unbearable for Sri Ramakrishna. Though he took monastic vows he wore ordinary plain dress, instead of an ochre cloth, all through his life. For as the scriptrue says: "Where is there any injunction or prohibition for him whose mind is always above the play of the gunas?"

Once an unknown man dressed in the ochre cloth of a monk came to visit Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswa. On seeing such ostentatious dress he commented: "Why this gerua(ochre cloth)? Should one put on such a thing for a mere fancy? If the outer garb does not correspond to the inner thought, it gradually brings ruin. Uttering false words or doing false deeds, one gradually loses all fear. Far better is the white cloth of a householder. Attachment to worldliness, occasional lapses from the ideal, and an outer garb of gerua - how dreadfull."

But we know Sri Ramakrishna initiated Narayana Shastri into *sannyasa* long before his disciples came to him. Narayana Shastri was a great scholar and logician. Coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar and observing his *nirvikalpa samadhi* Shastri thought: "Ah! How wonderful! Where else shall I find such a person to teach and explain to me the hidden meaning of the scriptures? The means of immediate knowledge of *Brahman* must he obtained from him at any cost." And he prayed for monastic vows with such eagerness that Sri Ramakrishna agreed and initialed him on an auspicious day. As far as we know, this was the first time Sri Ramakrishna conferred *sannyasa*.

Sri Ramakrishna founded his Order while he was in Cossipore Garden House towards the later part of his life. One of his biographers writes: "One day Gopal Senior (later Swami Advaitananda) expressed his desire to the Master to distribute ochre cloths and Rudraksha rosaries among *sannyasins*. Pointing

to his young disciples. Sri Ramakrishna answered. "You won't find better monks than these anywhere. Give your cloths and rosaries to them." Gopal placed a bundle of ochre cloths before the Master, who distributed them among his young disciples. One cloth was left, and the Master ordered it to be preserved for Girish, who was second to none in his spirit of renunciation. One evening the Master made the young boys go through a ceremony and permitted them to receive food from the houses of all irrespective of caste. Thus it was that the disciples were initiated into the monastic order by the Master himself, and the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Order was laid.

"Kindness to all creatures." This traditional attitude was given a new direction by Sri Ramakrishna. "Serve all beings as God." In later life Swami Vivekananda formulated his Practical Vedanta from the aforesaid teachings of his Master. Proclaiming the monasticism of the new era, he heralded in a trumpet voice: "Oh man, from the worship of the dead, I call thee to the worship of the living. By discarding vain misgivings, weaknesses, hatred and jealousy, help ye all on the coming of a new age."

"Worship of the living," not of the dead. It is this significant remark that indicates the noble objective which brought the Order of Sri Ramakrishna into existence.

Compare these statements with those of Manu, the Hindu law-giver, when he speaks of the *sannyasa-dharma* in his *Samhita* (VI. 40-43. 45): "For that monk, by whom not the smallest danger even, is caused to created beings, there will be no danger from any quarter after he is freed from his body.

"Departing from his house fully provided with the means of purification, let him wander about absolutely silent, and caring nothing for enjoyments that may be offered to him.

"Let him always wander alone without any companion, in order to attain final liberation, fully understanding that the

solitary man, who neither forsakes nor is forsaken, gains his end.

“He shall neither possess fire, run a dwelling, he may go to a village for his food, he shall be indifferent to everything, firm of purpose, meditating and concentrating his mind on *Brahman*.

“Let him not desire to die, let him not desire to live; let him wait for his appointed time of final departure, as a servant waits for the payment of his wages.”

Similar injunctions for the monastic may be found in the *Shanti Parvan* (Ch. 192) of the *Mahabharata*. So it can be seen that there is a definite contrast between the old and the modern approach to monastic life and discipline. For monasticism as propounded by Ramakrishna - Vivekananda is more a renovation than a revival of the ancient system. It is undoubtedly a new turn with a new purpose: to work for your own liberation by doing good to humanity and to the world at large. “Go to hell yourself to buy salvation for others;” that is the clarion call of the great-hearted Vivekananda. □

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As a matter of fact all men are loving God; for every man loves eternal life, all knowledge and all blissfulness, and these are God. But few men know they are loving God. They are like a man who has been hearing of mangoes all his life but has never seen one. He may eat a mango and not know it unless someone comes and tells him. So all men are loving God; but only when someone comes and tells them, do they know it. If they can once realize that God is the most lovable being in the whole universe they will learn to love Him consciously; all their thoughts will flow towards Him and they will be naturally religious.

*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

## Plotinus on Prayer

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**T**he whole object of prayer is to become one with the Being to whom prayer is addressed, and so to win the blessed life. Even here below, a wise life is the most truly grand and beautiful thing. And yet here we see but dimly; yonder the vision is clear. For it gives to the seer the faculty of seeing, and the power for the higher life, the power by living more intensely to see better and to become what he sees."

So the whole of religion is summed up in the vision of God. It is the experimental verification of the act of faith in which religion begins, by virtue of "consciousness inherent in the finite - infinite being, so far as his full nature affirms itself, that he is one with something which cannot be shaken or destroyed, and the value of which is the source and standard of values." This is the substance of the Neoplatonist's creed. What Mr. Bosanquet calls the finite infinite nature of the finite spirit is a truth revealed to our consciousness with increasing clearness as we advance morally and intellectually.

Plotinus repeatedly appeals to the religious experience of his readers; he knows that he cannot carry us with him further than we have the power to see for ourselves. For it is as the greater Self that we come to know God, not as a separate anthropomorphic Being ever against ourselves. Our struggle to reach Him is at the same time a struggle for self liberation. We lose our Soul in order to find it again in God. There is no barrier between the human and divine natures. The human Soul has only to strip itself of those outer integuments which are not part of its true nature, in order to expand freely by means of the organic

filaments which unite it with all spiritual being. This expansion is at the same time an intensifying of life, an awakening from the dream of sensuous existence. Our environment, which we make while it makes us, changes all the time. Our perception becomes spiritual intuition; the air we breathe becomes the atmosphere of eternity, not of time. The problem of immortality is changed for us in such a way that it ceases to be a vague and chimerical hope and becomes an experience. The question of the survival in time of the empirical ego loses its interest, since the empirical ego is no longer the centre, much less the circumference, of our thoughts. The Soul that never dies is not something that belongs to us but something to which we belong. We shall belong to it after we are dead, as we belonged to it before we were born. Its history is our history and its super-historical existence is our immortality.

The life of this great Soul to which we belong has two aspects -contemplation and creation. Its gaze is turned steadily upon the eternal archetypes of all that is good and true and beautiful in the universe. The inner religious life consists of continual acts of recollection, when we turn away our eyes lest they behold vanity; and resolutely try to realise the glories of the unseen world which encompasses us. The other activity of the Soul, creation of good, true, and beautiful things and actions in the world of space and time, follows so naturally and necessarily from a right direction of the thought and will and affections, that it is not worth while to bring forward other motives for leading an active and useful life. The true contemplative cannot be selfish and indolent. He makes the world better, both consciously and unconsciously, by the very fact that his conversation is in heaven. It is other-worldliness that alone can transform the world. □

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## Strength

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If we happen to traverse through the pages of history ,all the world over ,we shall invariably find that prosperity and glory opened up before the strong and the weak and the cowards went to the wall .Empires have risen with the strength of particular people and dwindled and died with their weakness .Darwin's theory ,survival of the fittest 'which has been so well proved in the subhuman species illustrates this fact to a large extent . Probably physical strength alone could not prove even Darwin's theory .The Indian history of the past few centuries will show how some small hordes were able to run over the whole land . What was it due to but our own disunity which was the most vulnerable spot that the conquerors chose to exploit !

The current events in the world too show that might still rules though in a different mask .A nation ,therefore ,has to be strong if it is to remain independent and ward off the grasping hands of the neighbours from its territories .Strength is also a necessity for even the internal development of a nation .The weak may be pitied but only the strong will be respected .And anything that is received without a requisite repayment in some form or other will bear down heavily on the recipient .It is a debt and an obligation .

This preamble has been to show that what law holds good in the world outside ,is applicable to the regions of the mind and soul too ,but with the difference that in the latter case one has also to possess moral and spiritual excellences

The *Upanisads* declare :“This *Atman* cannot be attained by the weak ” .Strength of the muscles alone will have nothing to

do with the inner world ,nor intellectual power keep the mind from wandering It is the life righteously lived ,which generates a moral force and which runs as a precursor to the dawn of a higher mode of life - the life of the spirit -that is spoken of in this statement of the *Upanisads* as strength .In it all these types of strength are included and none is excluded . Physical strength is as important to withstand the strain of spiritual disciplines one has to undergo , as intellectual acumen is incumbent to understand the subtle truths of religion .

In secular and political pursuits intellectual power may be put to the meanest possible use ,and yet one may succeed in one's endeavour in those fields . But the way of the spirit is quite different .An inch you swerve from the right path and a thousand feet away will you be flung from it: "narrow is the way of righteousness ,like the sharp edge of a razor ", as the *Upanisads* describe it . Or as Sri Ramakrishna used to say , "Man does not know what it is that causes his downfall ." He then illustrates this by an example : " Once ,while going to the Fort ,I could not see at all that I was driving down a sloping road; but when the carriage went inside the Fort I realized how far down I had come ." That is the way one slides from the right path little by little , imperceptibly ,unknowingly ,so much so that when one comes to know of it ,one has travelled a long way down the wrong path . The allurements of the world are many and strong and therefore one has not only to be physically fit .but mentally alert and morally toned up to resist them .

An appreciation of Nachiketa by Yama ,the king of death , when the former refused to be drawn and entangled by the rewards of the earth and heaven that were offered to him ,will bear evidence as to the importance that is laid on the strength of the mind to deny oneself the luxuries ,comforts and enjoyments

that can be had here or hereafter .Yama is profuse in the praise of Nachiketa .Again ,and again ,amidst his teaching he stops and puts in a word of encomium about Naciketa's self-denial .Here are his words :“ You have discarded after well discerning all that was offered to you in the shape of pleasing and pleasurable things . You have not deigned to accept this wealth ,which is another name for transmigration ,in which the majority of mankind choose to sink .” “I wish there was some one among us ,my disciples ,who could be an inquirer like you .”Again , I deem that the portals of Liberation are open to Naciketa .”All this points out how lofty is that power and how mighty and covetable is that strength which in the end endows us with a blissful life for ever .

Here the sophisticated may think :“If it is such a botheration ,such a hard task ,if it is so impossible a thing to realize an unknown God ,why not try to make the world more and more perfect ? Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task of realization , man seeks perfection in an imperfect world; happiness in a vale of misery .For the world is an existence of contraries .It is an imbalance in the *gunas* (substantive forces) *sattva* ,*rajas* and *tamas* ,of *Prakrti* that has caused the projection of the universe .When that balance will be regained there will not be this manifested universe .It will be resolved into its cause ,the *Prakrti* .But still man thinks that he can progressively improve the world phenomena .Swami Vivekananda ,speaking of progress remarks , “To live in the world where it is all good and no evil is what Sanskrit logicians call a ‘dream in the air ’” Continuing he says ,“Another theory, in modern times, has been presented by many schools, that man's destiny is to go on always improving, always struggling onwards but never reaching the goal.” Commenting on this theory, he concludes, “This statement, though apparently very nice, is also absurd, because there is no

such thing as a motion in a straight line. Every motion is in a circle. A straight line infinitely projected must end in a circle. Therefore, this idea that the destiny of man is progressing ever forward and forward and never stopping is absurd.”

So to seek perfection in the created world is a wild goose chase. Is then all work to improve the world condition to be given up? The answer is no; the efforts to help the world in every possible way are to be continued. At the same time it should be remembered that we do not actually help the world but help ourselves to become more liberal in our outlook on life. Again, we cannot cease from work, cannot even live without work. Since it is so, is it not better for man to do something good instead of becoming more and more selfish and self-seeking?

Having seen that there is no happiness in the created world, the sages sought it in the Uncreated, by cultivating dispassion towards the things of the creation. “Having examined the worlds attainable by actions, a *brahmana* (a man of wisdom) should inculcate dispassion. For the Uncreated cannot be had by sacrifices by acts;” says the *Mundakopanisad*. Now as it is a long journey from the created to the Uncreated, the equipment required also should be commensurate with the hazards and situations one may meet on the way. For in the world also we note that the equipment of a mountain expeditioner is not the same as a North Pole explorer nor like that of a space walker. The expedition into the Unknown has its own peculiar requirements. We have already said that all types of strength were essential for spiritual growth. We can understand what is meant by physical strength and intellectual acumen. But what is moral strength? What is spiritual force?

We need not discuss here the term moral from the point of view of society. For there can be no one standard for all

countries and all societies and for all time .We are here concerned with that which leads to a religious life . There are some fundamentals on which even a society is dependent ,or to be more explicit on which its growth its usefulness to the world as a whole and its glory rest .And these are common to the spiritual life also .For when we say society we are going into an abstract construction ,but what is society but a collection of individuals ? So it is the individuals ,who constitute society ,that are expected to maintain certain norms .And one among these norms is truth . Here again ,there may be an endless controversy as how far one should be truthful and so on .Allowing every margin to the prevalence of falsehood in the life of man ,we find that there is an element of truth behind the universe ,and it is this truth which upholds it .Sri Sankara in his *Brahma Sutra Bhasya* aptly observes : “All transactions in the world are through the combination of *satya* (truth )and *anta* (untruth )” Sankara might have stated this truth from a higher plane of consciousness ,but even from the lower standpoint it is found to be valid .

Swami Vivekananda ,speaking about the potency of truth , remarks : “Truth is like a corrosive substance .It can penetrate everything ,soft things quickly and even hard granite rocks slowly but surely .No one can resist it .”We all know that ultimately truth alone triumphs and not untruth . But such is the lure of wealth and the like that though repeatedly reminded of this fact we forget it at the moment .Perhaps the readers will be wondering what connection has this truth to do with our subject matter .However ,if we remember that truth forms the moral base on which the structure of society is built it will not be difficult to relate the two .In the religious field too moral goodness must precede the spiritual hankering .Besides ,truth is an element of the spiritual life .It makes one courageous ,whereas falsehood

transforms us into cowards .With truth one can face tribulations bravely and that is what made the martyrs live and die for their cause cheerfully .

The second equipment that is necessary for our journey is dispassion towards the transient things .There should not even be lingering back glances on what has been once discarded . Nevertheless ,it does not mean that the passions leave man the moment he resolves to lead a spiritual life .The meaning is that the passions should not be entertained ,even when they arise : courting them would be dangerous .

The third requirement is chastity .There is a beautiful story in the *Upanisads* to illustrate the value of *brahmacharya* (chastity) as well as the necessity to cultivate other virtues .Once the gods ,men and demons went to Prajapati and lived with him the life of continence .After their term of *brahmacharya* the gods asked him ,“Tell us how we can conduct ourselves in life .” Prajapati uttered the letter *da* and asked them whether they had understood the meaning of his teaching .They replied that they had .that he meant that they should control themselves .He said : “Yes it is so; you have understood well .”The gods are denizens of the heavens and given to a great deal of enjoyment .After living the life of *brahmacharya* with the teacher their eyes of knowledge had opened , they had come to know of their own defects and hence had no difficulty in comprehending what Prajapati expected of them .

Then the men said to him , ‘Please instruct us .’To them too he repeated the word ‘*da*’ and asked them whether they understood the meaning of what he had said .They said they had understood him; that he meant that they should give . ‘Yes it is so; you have understood .’said he .Men usually are of the hoarding nature .Man puts by things thinking it is only for a rainy

day but it is not always so. More often than not his avarice makes him self-centred and callous towards others' sufferings. After having lived the life of continence with the Lord of creatures the men came to know wherein was their fault and could understand the cryptic message so easily.

Lastly the demons said "Please instruct us." To them he said *da* 'and asked whether they had understood him. They replied, "We have; you ask us to be compassionate." "Yes, so it is, you have understood well," said he. The demons are cruel and always indulging in killing, so to them the message of Prajapati was to be compassionate towards beings. In Sanskrit all the three words representing the above three meanings begin with the letter *da* 'viz. *ḍamyata*, *ḍatta* and *dayadhvam* respectively.

What is obviously evident from the story is that *brahmacharya* a life of continence and restraint is essential for the religious. Men cannot find out their own drawbacks until they have lived a life of continence. And once they know their defects it is easy for them to get over them when they are commanded to do so by the teacher.

The second conclusion is that we have to inculcate all the three virtues mentioned herein in order to be morally uplifted. For it is these virtues that form into a moral force in man; a force that opens further and new vistas of a higher life. What a mere intellectual man, a mere scholar, can comprehend but not experience, that Self-knowledge becomes easily accessible to a man of virtues by a little practice. For morality is the ground of all spiritual evolution. "He who has not desisted from wicked actions, has not controlled himself, nor has a collected mind, nor whose mind is restless can ever attain *Brahman* by knowledge," says the *Katha Upanisad*. Sri Ramakrishna as it were echoes these very statements of the *Vedas* when he says: "The first sign of

knowledge is a peaceful nature and second is the absence of egotism .”About mere scholars , without discrimination and dispassion he had a very poor opinion He used to say , Kites and vultures soar very high but they keep their gaze fixed on the charnel pit .What I mean is that these pundits, who merely talk words of wisdom and do not live up to them, are attached to the world ,to lust and greed .If I hear that pandits are practising discrimination and dispassion then I fear them .Otherwise I look upon them as mere straw .”Intellectualism and erudition to explain the scriptures without yearning for God does not make for liberation ,though they may bring one all the worldly goods , name and fame .

Now ,one should not stop with being morally good .It is only a foundation .And a foundation however strong is not able to give us shelter from sun , wind and rain , if there is no superstructure on it just as a ship though large and built with all modern devices against weather gales and storms cannot be a good means to cross the ocean ,if its engines fail or is put in an harbour which is not its destination .The superstructure is spiritual life and when it is built on a strong moral base there is no danger of its collapse .

A life of devotion to God with firm faith and all the attendant virtues is the life of the spirit for a devotee to a follower of the path of knowledge it is to look upon every being as the manifestation of the One Divine Principle ,*Brahman*, and the continuous attempt on his part to be in communion with that One . The strength born out of leading such a life is not only beneficial to the person who practises but also to those who come in contact with him as well .

Swami Vivekananda speaking of such a strength ,says, “Strength is the idea which is raising the brute into man and man

into God .”In the *Kena upanisad* is a story introduced to illustrate this fact .Once *Brahman* obtained victory for the gods over the demons and the former thought that they themselves had won the victory and that it was their own glory But in order to remove this wrong notion of the devas, *Brahman* appeared before them in the form of a Yaksa an effulgent being .The gods afraid and at the same time anxious to know who that being was ,deputed Agni and Vayu successively to ascertain about it .In its presence they were struck dumb and when the Yaksa asked who they were and what was their special prowess ,Agni said that he could burn whatever there was in the world and Vayu said that he could blow away everything .The Yaksa placed a straw before them and asked Agni to burn it ,which with all his might he could not do . He asked Vayu to blow away the straw but Vayu could not move it .They returned thus discomfited to the gods, and then Indra approached It. But *Brahman* did not even deign to give an interview to him but vanished from his sight Indra however ,did not go away from the place but stayed on and meditated as to who that being could be .Finding him eager to know about the Yaksa ,*Brahma* itself in the form of a beautiful woman appeared there .Indra asked of her who that Yaksa was who had appeared and then vanished .She teaches him that it was *Brahman* ,because of whom they had won the victory and had falsely been elated considering the victory as their own .Thus it is seen that all source of strength is *Brahman* .Because of His presence in the universe in all that is living and moving and in all that is immovable also ,the world phenomena goes on .He is therefore ,the foundation ,the basis of life □

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## Fruits of Spiritual Practice

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Hold fast to the lotus feet of the Lord .Remember him constantly .Don't waste your time in idle thoughts . Struggle to control the outgoing mind and fix it on God . Struggle . Struggle hard !Then you will realize what joy there is in spiritual life ,what fun it is .You must overcome *maya* ,ignorance ,even in this life .It won't be easy unless you devote yourself to the work of the spirit .You must have faith ,intense faith .Let no doubt enter your mind .

God cannot be known by the finite mind .He is beyond this mortal mind and far beyond the human intellect .This apparent universe which you see is within the domain of the mind .The mind has conjured it up; it is its author ,and the mind cannot go beyond its own domain .

Behind the mind of which we are aware is a subtle , spiritual mind ,existing in seed form .Through contemplation and prayer this mind develops and with its unfoldment a new vision opens . The aspirant realizes many spiritual truths . However ,this is not the final experience .The subtle mind also cannot reach God ,the supreme *Atman* ,but it leads you nearer to him .At this stage the world loses all its charms for the aspirant; he remains absorbed in the consciousness of God .

Next comes what is called *samadhi* .The experience of *samadhi* is indescribable ,beyond is and is not .In this blessed experience ,there is neither happiness nor misery ,neither light nor darkness . All is Infinite Being; inexpressible " - Swami Brahmananda.

In ancient days ,long ,long ago ,a sage of the *Upanishads*

declared : I have known that supreme Being who is beyond the ocean of infinite darkness ,by knowing whom only one can conquer death .There is no other way ” That is perhaps the earliest record still in existence of a person who came face to face with the ultimate reality .There are other sages also mentioned in the *Upanishads* who spoke of their direct experience of the ultimate reality thus : We have known that reality .That is the only way to have bliss in life .That is the only way to conquer death and to conquer life .Those who have not realized that are objects of pity ”

Not only the *Upanishadic* sages .Saints belonging to all religions say more or less the same thing .Some of the Hebrew prophets also spoke of direct communication with God or the ultimate reality .Buddha spoke of Enlightenment ,which means great joy .He did not go into the details .He did not talk of a personal God ,but he spoke of infinite bliss .Christ said that he had the direct experience .He said clearly , Who hath seen me , hath seen the Father . He was so positive .Records say that once he was transfigured .In the medieval age ,many Christian saints spoke of their direct experience .The pagan Greek mystic , Plotinus ,said he had direct experience of the ultimate truth .His disciple ,Porphyry ,testified that Plotinus had the experience three or four times ,and he himself had it once .In India ,in the medieval age ,many saints ,some of them unlettered ,had direct access to God .

But the vision of God was experienced by persons not only in ancient days and in the medieval age ,there are reliable records of some saints in modern times who had such experience . The experiences of the *Upanishads* were repeated in their lives . Truth does not pay homage to time .

If it was realized in the past ,it can be realized in the

present . In the modern age , in India , some got the direct experience of those truths . Their realizations were tested by agnostics and atheists , by persons who were not sentimental , who were not gullible , who had open minds and modern education . More than that , the influence of those persons who realized the Truth was immense , stupendous in their time . And their influence is still going on .

If you keep an open mind you will find that religion is not an idle man's dream; it is not 'other-worldliness' . It brings the 'other world' right into the present world , into our mundane existence . It has a direct relation to our mundane existence . Real religion brings heaven down to earth . We have not to wait for death to have an experience of heaven . If that were so , heaven would not even be worth the attempt . If there is such a thing as heaven , it must be brought right here . It is not a fact that heaven is a limited geographical area beyond this world . There is only one world , one existence , one life . As the *Upanishads* say , if there is Truth , it must be realized in this very life , in this very world , while living in this human body; otherwise life is a failure . Those persons who have realized Truth directly speak in such a bold , clear-cut way , with no ambiguity . Truth must be known here and now .

But in modern times we find it hard to believe that these things are true . In spite of the fact that these truths have been directly experienced by persons even in the modern age , still we find it hard to believe that they are true . But ignorance is not the criterion of truth . If we are ignorant , we find it hard to believe what is true . We are to be pitied for our ignorance . We should try to find out how to remove that ignorance . That is rational . That makes sense .

Even many persons who have a little spiritual inclination

will say that these things could happen only in the remote past ,in ancient times or in the medieval age .Some will say , 'The saints and prophets of the past were so great .It is not possible for us to become like them . And so they do not think the struggle is worthwhile .And the result is ,even what could be expected of them they do not do .They do not do even what they could .Other persons make an attempt ,but they are unable to continue . Because of their self-love or self-will they go astray .They become stranded on the path .They do not get anything .

If we are to judge what happens in spiritual life ,what are the fruits of spiritual practice ,we must remember one thing .In worldly life ,many of those who have had splendid success did not dream that their success in life would be so great .They began their life in an ordinary way ,they were struggling ,and success began to come .The greater the success ,the greater was their boldness .They began to aspire for more and more .Success leads to success .In the beginning they were not so bold .Einstein was dull when young .His father despaired of him .Afterwards things came out .So also in spiritual life .Let us not just in the beginning ,think in terms of the highest .Naturally we shall get frightened . We shall see a great distance between us and the ideal .That is not the way to reach the ideal .

In mountain climbing ,from the foot of the hill you see first a peak perhaps one thousand feet high ,and what lies beyond is covered .When you go to the top of that peak ,you find another thousand or two thousand feet above you .I remember the first time I went mountain climbing .From the foot of the hill we could see ,at a great height ,a peak covered with forest .When we reached that peak ,we saw another big peak in front of us .That is what happens in mountain climbing ,until you reach Mount Everest .

This is the way one attains the highest worldly success . Why should you think ,as soon as you feel interested in religion , that the spiritual struggle is not possible for you because you will not be able to reach the highest ?When you go to school and learn the alphabet ,you do not think at that time that you will become a great scholar .Before beginning our religious life we should not ask ,what does one gain ? Or even being in religious life ,we should not ask ,what have we gained ?We should not think that way .We do not have that attitude in worldly life; why should we do so in spiritual life ?

The question is ,are we dissatisfied with the present ?That is the important point .If we are not dissatisfied with the present , we cannot aspire to real religion .Most people are satisfied with the *status quo* ,with eating ,drinking and making merry (provided you can remain merry always )The first pre-requisite for spiritual life is a great dissatisfaction with the present .That does not mean preaching that the world is full of misery .Let those who think the world is good be satisfied with it .But fortunately there are persons who are not satisfied with the *status quo* .They want to break this dream .However great might be our share of joys ,we cannot make any head or tail of this world .We do not know where we come from ,where we shall go ,or what will be the outcome of our effort .Each generation thinks it will bring the millenium to this world .And each generation leaves the world as it was before ,if not in a worse condition .This is how things are going on .

But there are some persons who boldly refuse to spend their lives going after earthly enjoyment - physical or mental . They do not want enjoyment in heaven ,either .They want to know truth and nothing but truth; not relative truths ,but the essence of truth .Some persons are ready to sacrifice everything to

know that truth . In his search for truth , a scientist sacrifices many comforts and becomes absorbed in his laboratory work . In the same way , when our dissatisfaction is great , we feel that at any cost we must know the meaning of life , we must know what is the real truth , not just partial truths .

That feeling also increases . You begin with some dissatisfaction , and you try to find out the remedy for that dissatisfaction . When there is dissatisfaction , when there is a problem , sooner or later a solution comes . It has been the experience of all saints that when there is spiritual dissatisfaction in us , help comes . Sometimes help comes unexpectedly . You may perchance come across a book , or a friend , or a guide , or even a saint . That has been the experience of saints . Water finds its own level . We also find our own level . When there is great spiritual dissatisfaction , we begin to grow . Movement comes , and we find our level , where we are at home . But we do not remain at that level . We go higher and higher .

What happens to those who deliberately try to live a spiritual life and do spiritual practice ? In the beginning some find it all mechanical and dry , extremely dry . Others are carried along for a while by the excitement of new things . They will sit in lotus posture and stop their nostrils and think they are becoming great yogis . But afterward the novelty wears off and there comes depression . Religious life is not a question of newness . You have to struggle and struggle till you reach the goal . This is an eternal problem . Those who are attracted by the novelty of something exotic are bound to be disillusioned , unless before that time they gain strength .

One must be ready to struggle . If you really want a thing , you will not grudge struggling for it . In the beginning , in most cases , the struggle will be mechanical . There might be a little

excitement just in the beginning; but after the novelty wears off , you have to struggle by the common light of day .It is a stark reality .Don't go by dreams .For the time being ,leave the dream higher up .Let our eyes be on the ground .We are 'of the earth and earthly ' , so we must struggle from where we are .The result comes sooner or later ,depending on the person .Some persons get the result immediately .Others may have to wait a shorter or longer period of time .Then interest grows .That is the important thing - interest grows .That means one is getting some result .

But even when interest grows ,it does not at once take us higher up .Interest grows ,but doubt also comes - sometimes doubt about the truth of what you are seeking ,sometimes doubt about your ability to reach the goal .These things will come ,more or less ,to everyone .There will be ups and downs ,as in every sphere of life ,in every business .But if doubt is conquered ,you get greater strength ,greater interest .Love for God begins to grow .

Other things come ,too .Your understanding becomes clearer and clearer .Sentimentality drops off .Many persons sentimentally dream about spiritual life ,waiting for something spectacular to happen .But as you do your spiritual practice regularly ,you live by the light of day ,you live by the light of truth , even though it is still relative truth .Your understanding becomes clearer .You can easily detect what is wrong and what is false .Your reason becomes sharp ,your emotion becomes chastened .The mind sometimes comes under great control .But one cannot be sure of that .Sometimes the mind will be in a very favourable condition .You might have some spiritual experience which gives you great joy ,but afterwards for a long time you might not have anything .It is something like fishing .When you put the bait in the water ,sometimes there is a little nibbling ,but afterwards nothing bites .According to some ,God tests you in that way .In

any case these are the facts of spiritual life .

As you progress , your ego becomes less and less . Introspection grows; self-examination becomes automatic . You begin to see your shortcomings . You clearly see your ego; you clearly perceive your pride your self-conceit . An ordinary person does not see his shortcomings . Or even if he sees them ,he does not like to look at them . He suppresses his awareness of them . Some persons even say that you should not try to find out your shortcomings ,because your ego will resent it . But a religious person will see his own shortcomings . Sometimes it might be frightening . When the mind becomes sharp ,one can see more clearly , and one sees one's shortcomings . The greater your progress in spiritual life ,the greater will be your sensibility ,the more you will see your shortcomings . One has to put up with these things . This is the struggle . When your mind becomes subtle you can easily detect what is in your subconscious mind .

*(to be continued)*

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Listen, can anyone deviate from his real nature? If he does, it cannot be called his real nature; for it is changeable. Man's real nature is covered by a dense cloud of ignorance, and consequently he appears to be something different, but that does not mean he has deviated from his real nature.

*Swami Adbhutananda*

## Leaves of an Ashrama 35: To Feel for Others

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**T**o feel compassion for others ,to have affection toward all; how very difficult that is ! People are just not very lovable in the main .Yet affectionate acceptance must manifest itself in a spiritual aspirant . Your religious development will not be authentic ,and sweetness of temper cannot be gained ,until your heart habitually goes out toward others .

I often think of the French expression :*Tout comprendre , c'est tout pardonner* (To understand everything is to forgive everything ) Nicely said ,and superficially true .But not quite sufficient .For understanding is just as hard to come by as the pardonning it is supposed to induce .

When you first come to religion ,like as not you think of yourself as rather far advanced .Saintliness should be within easy reach . But meditation has a way of revealing unsuspected weaknesses .Tendencies you never suspected could lie in your subconscious will assert themselves .Many spiritual seekers feel after a few years that they were almost better before they began .

How strange .Yet I see it is perhaps good that things should work this way .For otherwise our hearts might stiffen with spiritual pride .To wish to be helpful ,yet find dark selfishness overwhelming you instead ,is surprising and educational .To try for purity and yet find lusts gnawing at you ,chastens you .To have peace of mind as your goal yet to be racked by furies is most deflating .In contrast to that elevated condition you are striving for ,the presence of these negative pressures reveals a humanness which seemingly will not let up .

It is at this point that you begin to appreciate the good in

others !For practically every weakness anybody else has you now see that you have too .You are as bad as all those others . Indeed , many may actually be succeeding better than you .And observing this - as you have long understood and consequently pardoned your own inadequacies - you now begin ,for the first time ,to understand and pardon those in your brother .

I wonder if 'been guilty of' would not be better than to understand. To be guilty of everything is to forgive everything . For we can never genuinely accept another unless we can feel that we are like him I can identify with another when I can put myself in his place .

I am glad that I have 'deteriorated,' I am glad that my shortcomings have been revealed to me .I am glad that I have been squelched . Without chastening we could not have the psychological readiness which makes it possible to learn; and we could certainly never gain that identification with other human beings which makes it natural in time to truly love them □

If instead of thinking of the Lord your mind wanders while you chant his name, how can you expect the desired result? It will be just like rowing a boat without pulling up the anchor. So you must repeat the name and meditate on its meaning so that your mind may be withdrawn from sense objects and fastened on God. This is what Sri Ramakrishna asks us to do in his precept: 'Make mind and mouth one. Harmonize your words and thoughts. If they are united, success is bound to come.' Patanjali says the same thing in his aphorism, 'One must repeat Om and reflect on its meaning.' One can meditate on Om as well as on divine forms. But you are to follow the instructions of your teacher and repeat the name given by him.

*Swami Saradananda*

## Surrender to God

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**T**he idea of renunciation and surrender to God is the ultimate goal of spiritual life .It is expressed by Sri Krishna to his disciple in the last chapter of the *Gita* ,verse 66 : 'Abandon all duties ,take refuge in Me ,and Me alone .' That total surrender is the last stage of spiritual life .To attain it ,we must practice two disciplines of a psychological nature :1 .The total and complete obliteration of the ego; 2 A constant remembrance in ourselves of the presence of God .

This is not accomplished in a single stroke but progressively ,after long training; we can then have a constant vision of Reality .Vivekananda said : 'Don't seek God ,see Him .' To see God is the supreme experience of our life .Shankara presents the same idea in philosophical language in his Commentaries our perception of the universe even in ignorance , is a continual perception of *Brahman* .*Brahman* cannot be absent , even for an instant .The ignorant person is not 'outside' of Him .If *Brahman* is everywhere , it is from Him that we receive all experience; only our ignorance prevents us from feeling it .Our goal is : 'See *Brahman* with open eyes .'

This brings to my mind one of the greatest disciples of Ramakrishna ,Swami Shivananda; near the end of his life he saw the presence of *Brahman* everywhere .The way he expressed this made a great impression on his disciples .When these disciples , old or young ,drew near to him it was he who saluted them first . One day one of them asked him : 'Why ,Mahapurush Maharaj ,do you salute us in this way ?' "My children ," replied Swami Shivananda , 'I cannot do otherwise I see the presence of *Brahman*

everywhere and only afterwards do your particular forms appear to me .I am unable to see you separate from *Brahman* . It is that that is the Reality .That spiritual experience is the highest there is; it is ecstasy ,the greatest joy ,bliss, which is the very nature of *Brahman* ,which is one of the dimensions of being .

What is the highest ideal ,the goal of our life ?According to our great philosopher Kapila ,it is the cessation of misery ,of suffering .This answer seems to indicate a negative state ,but in reality behind that cessation of misery appears a positive state , Joy ,which can be experienced .It is the essence of being .Why is it then that we don't all feel it spontaneously ?Shankara answers : "Only the ignorant do not feel it ." What then is this ignorance ? According to Patanjali it is the sense of ego that gives birth to suffering; by constantly making false identifications ,we identify the Self with the non Self ,thereby indirectly producing feelings of attachment and aversion ,and suffering ensues .This way of clinging to the physical life alters the quality of consciousness .

Here is lodged the root of the ego .If we analyze now to find the base ,the foundation of the ego ,we arrive at the solution taught to us by Sri Ramakrishna on this subject :he compares the ego to an onion that is peeled endlessly without finding any supports to the layers successively removed .The ego therefore has no foundation ,it is only a shadow .Nevertheless ,it is extremely difficult to give it up .How can we discipline it ?

Ramakrishna teaches us that if we cannot succeed in destroying this illusion of the ego we can keep it ,but by transforming it in such a way as to see ourselves as servants of God .

The highest example of self-renunciation is given by Girish Ghosh ,the great lay disciple of Ramakrishna ,whom you have all heard of .I will briefly speak of his past .He lived

excommunicated from society because of his life of unbridled debauchery; but one day he felt himself to be in the depths of spiritual isolation and he searched out Ramakrishna who immediately accepted him as a disciple .Girish told him : I have not come to receive teachings for I am myself the author of a great number of works and plays of a spiritual inspiration I know the scriptures I can recite them by heart . "

"You must practice some disciplines ", the Master replied .  
I don't believe in it !

Then briefly repeat each day ,morning and night ,the name of the Lord ." But Girish replied again quite frankly :“I am too busy and I am under the influence of alcohol all day; I feel that I could not keep a promise to repeat regularly the name of the Lord ."

Since that is the case ", said Ramakrishna , 'It is not necessary for you to practice any discipline .Give me your power of attorney' and I will do it for you ." Girish consented immediately without measuring the consequences of that act; to give to his Guru the power of attorney ! But Girish was sincerity itself ,it was the most striking trait of his character ,and it was because of this that he achieved a spiritual life .

What is sincerity ? It is the perfect harmony of the teachings of the sacred books with the heart ,it is the direct expression of what is felt .One day I asked Swami Turiyananda, to whom I felt very close ,“Give me a definition of spiritual life ." He answered me : Your heart and the words that leave your lips should be in perfect accord ."

Girish achieved profoundly that state . Leaving Ramakrishna he thought : Oh I must quickly get to work I must organize the rehearsals ,I must write another play ,etc . ." But he immediately heard another voice inside : How is it that I have

these desires ?I have no duties It is Ramakrishna who is acting in me; what need have I to act according to my will ? And it was thus that he began to feel the presence of his Master .It is what is called the state of eternal vigilance .His whole life ,his very being was transformed .It is an extraordinary case .Ramakrishna did not ask him to renounce everything ,but only to give him his power of attorney. '

I will tell you now how Girish gave up drinking .It was Swami Premananda ,a great disciple of Ramakrishna ,who told me about it one day .Ramakrishna was invited to Calcutta by a family of Brahmos .Brahmos are protestants who are very puritan and austere in their habits .Romain Rolland ,in his book on Ramakrishna ,speaks of the Brahmo Samaj; it was a movement of religious reform . Ramakrishna , then , went to that family accompanied by Swami Premananda and Latu Maharaj (Swami Adbhutananda). Girish arrived just as they were leaving Dakshineswar; he was coming to see Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and had not omitted to bring two bottles of alcohol with him .Ramakrishna invited him to accompany them , and Girish climbed into the carriage with his two bottles .But as it happened ,just as Ramakrishna was leaving the carriage at Calcutta the bottles fell to the pavement and broke :the odour of wine spread in the air .The Brahmos ,who had come to welcome Ramakrishna on his arrival , were extremely shocked and dismayed at the sight of this spectacle .No doubt they thought that Ramakrishna was in the habit of drinking .And now they hesitated to let him attend a religious meeting where praises of God were to be sung and where spiritual subjects were to be discussed .But Ramakrishna declared : Look ,it is only medicine , it is not wine ." They then saw that a bitter medicine was spilled about , and that the bottles carried the label of the Gupta

Pharmacy .They were stupified ,overwhelmed ,to see that even the label was changed !Even so ,Girish was disappointed at not having alcohol .Without alcohol he wouldn t be able to write .He looked everywhere in the house; in the liquor cabinet he indeed saw a great number of bottles but they all carried the label of that medicine He was astonished; he suspected a mistake and broke a bottle to verify the contents; he recognized the same pharmaceutical odour .He then felt fully the active presence of Ramakrishna in him .Ramakrishna had never asked him to renounce alcohol ,but he had led him in that way to total detachment .

Swami Vivekananda said that after Shakespeare ,Girish was the greatest dramatic writer that the world had ever known . He created in Bengali poetry a meter that still carries his name . I will now tell you about my personal experience ,my meeting with Girish when I was 16 or 17 .Ramakrishna sometimes said to Girish : When the world knows you it will be astonished ,for there is no greater miracle than you ." Indeed ,when I approached him ,I felt his powerful spiritual radiation .It is not enough to say that he was a saint; he was sainthood itself .When I arrived ,he was writing about and giving a discourse on Shankara .He was not writing himself for when he was inspired like that he lived in a state of ecstasy .He was therefore dictating to two or three stenographers .Sometimes these stenographers ,not managing to follow him ,asked him to repeat his last sentences but he could not remember and answered ; " I don t know ." It was Ramakrishna himself who dictated everything through him .

Another time I went to see Girish with the editor of the Bengali review the *Udbodhan* .We asked him to write an article or a poem on Ramakrishna for our publication .He at once called for a secretary ,entered into a state of ecstasy ,and dictated a

magnificent poem overflowing with devotion .

This memory brings another recollection to my mind :a direct disciple of Ramakrishna , Swami Ramakrishnananda , founder of the Madras Monastery ,came to Calcutta where he died shortly afterwards .During his final moments he expressed the desire to hear a song about Ramakrishna whose first line he could only recall .An excellent singer from Calcutta ,Pulin Mitra , was sent for and was asked to sing this song .However he did not know it .Thinking that Girish was the author of it ,he went to find him and said : 'Swami Ramakrishnananda is about to die .He would like to hear the song that you composed ' . Girish recited it at once :he had found it intact immediately in his mind .When Swami Ramakrishnananda heard it he cried out : 'That expresses perfectly the feeling I have at this moment ' . He sang it like a litany and felt an extraordinary peace fill him .

If Girish was able to achieve such a spiritual life it was because he had ,above all ,sincerity and faith .Ramakrishna often said that Girish possessed faith of a level of 175 per cent .It is so difficult to understand such a faith .One day I asked M . the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* ,a work written according to notes taken during conversations between Ramakrishna and the faithful : 'What did you gain by your intimate contact with Ramakrishna ?' He replied : 'I gained faith ' . That astonished me . I didn't know then the meaning of faith .But after several years I understood the meaning . Faith is generally taken to mean religion or religious experience and what insight can reveal to us; *samadhi* ,or the state of *turiya* ,the fourth state .But all that is on a lower level than spiritual life :the experience of *Brahman* ,*samadhi* is not enough . Much more is necessary . Doubtless these experiences transform our lives .But what is necessary is faith , that is to say to live ,as St .Paul said ,by dwelling continually in

God . Faith is alive at each moment of our existence; to feel Brahman always behind you ,to remain bathed in Him without losing track of His presence even for a second ,to live ,to move , and to have the root of one's being in Him - that is true religion , that is the spiritual life .

And this state leads to the realization of the highest virtues .The realm of metaphysics is touched here .Faith gives a harmony and balance in our interior and exterior lives .All of the contradictions and oppositions which generally disrupt our peace are reconciled and we remain calm ,resting on the very inner being of our nature ,which is *Brahman* .We cannot find this through the intellect ,only through intuition .To live continually in that intuition of *Brahman* is faith .

I will now recount several memories that illustrate the meaning of the words faith ,samesightedness and peace .I knew Swamis Saradananda and Turiyananda ,two great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna .Swami Turiyananda was very seriously ill .He had to undergo five operations for skin abscesses without anesthesia . He asked only for several minutes to compose himself before the operation .While the surgeon operated on him he spoke calmly of one thing or another .He was in the habit of often repeating a saying of the Master : Oh my body ,occupy yourself with your affairs ,with your sufferings; but you ,my mind ,do not remain in its company ,stay away from all association with suffering .”

Swami Brahmananda said one day : My brother Turiyananda has attained supreme equanimity of vision ,he is so great that I wish to prostrate myself at his feet .” He really had to be one of intense spirituality ,for Swami Brahmananda ,the venerated leader of all ,to express the desire to bow down before him .Swami Turiyananda heard these words but maintained his calm serenity .But one day Swami Saradananda put into practice

the words of Swami Brahmananda .He entered the room of Swami Turiyananda ,who was very ill by passing through a door behind the Swami's bed .Upon seeing Swami Saradananda ,who was secretary of the Order ,the attendant wished to awaken Turiyananda .Swami Saradananda stopped him; he approached the bed ,prostrated himself ,and took Swami Turiyananda's feet in his hands .The Swami awoke : 'What are you doing ?' I heard the words of Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda )and I have come to extend to you our veneration ,for you have attained the supreme state ." Swami Turiyananda replied : "I myself consider that you have achieved this supreme experience .Do you remember that incident ,after Ramakrishna's death ,when we were together in the Himalayas ?"

Here is the story :one day in the Himalayas ,Swami Saradananda and Swami Turiyananda became lost .The region was infested with tigers and they could hear their growling all around them .They decided not to remain together so that at least one of them might save himself for the cause of the Ramakrishna Order . They therefore separated . Swami Turiyananda soon perceived a faint light .After many difficulties he came to a small hut in which a hermit lived .He asked; 'Can you help me find my brother ?' Not now, replied the hermit ." "We were together ,I can't stay without him ." No ,no ,my child ,this area is infested with tigers ,and if one goes out there one won't come back ." Swami Turiyananda then found in the hut a sort of conch which he sounded ,hoping that Swami Saradananda might hear it .Then , at dawn ,he wished to go out in search of his brother .The hermit stopped him saying that because of the fog it was extremely dangerous to go out before eleven o'clock . But Swami Turiyananda did not listen to him and left .After a long search , what did he see ?On a rock an immobile man deep in meditation .

He calls No answer He approaches It was Swami Saradananda . Swami Turiyananda shook him to awaken him and they embraced warmly .Swami Saradananda then explained that , feeling himself surrounded by tigers and sure of being devoured , he did not wish to let himself die in fear but rather in meditation . And as soon as he was plunged in meditation he entered into samadhi .The long hours of the night and of the morning passed like this He had in the midst of danger conserved that peace and that tranquillity that are the result of faith .

There are then here in this world ,such as all the direct disciples of Ramakrishna ,some who have continually achieved that state of peace and who have taught us the way to attain it and to achieve ourselves that ideal of abnegation of self ,abnegation inspired by faith .To arrive there we must constantly remember the thought of God ,to be unfailingly vigilant .We are not able to achieve this state immediately ,but little by little it will establish itself .Maharaj said to me one day, My son ,only five minutes of the thought of Brahman ,of the thought of God ,brings a state of blessedness .Try to cultivate that state by continually thinking of love .Love can only grow if we think of Him to whom we offer adoration .To constantly keep that thought in us is the way to live always in love to keep in touch with the eternal source ”

We must then keep the spirit gathered at the feet of the Lord .We must learn how: through faith through the love of God . Before leaving India to go to America ,I went to see Swami Turiyananda .The simple advice he gave me was to cultivate sincerity .He told me also “ If you give light to others ,you will yourself receive more ” That was for me a subject of deep reflection .How to obtain more light and love ?One day ,I told Maharaj that I wanted to go see a great saint about whom someone had spoken to me . Maharaj replied : You have already

seen many; now practice spiritual disciplines ,try to do more meditation and japa .It is only when you have more love in your heart that you will have the need and the ability to be united with the misery of the people ,in tune with the suffering of the world . To remain in contact with suffering ,to help the world overcome it , that is the expression of love .Try to show sympathy to others , then you will feel that truth ”

Jesus taught love of one's neighbour .That ideal is difficult to live without meditation ,without having made contact with God inside oneself .That is the goal of these spiritual exercises; it is not the supreme vision or *samadhi* but it is to feel love ,to pour it out to the world ,to those in our entourage who need it .and to diminish suffering around us .

Here is a recollection that illustrates this love :Around 1914 or 1916 ,I was struck with a very dangerous illness in India; tropical smallpox .Very few persons survive that illness .Swami Turiyananda and I were in Benares at that time .As soon as a person is struck with smallpox he is isolated .I was therefore alone in a small room ,where the Swami came to see me every day . He was very learned .He had been to America ,and he knew the dangers of contagion .Nevertheless ,he remained near me .I looked repulsive because of the sores that covered my body . Every day ,with his hand ,he touched my entire body to calm the burning .One day ,seeing me very upset and perhaps fearing for my life ,he said to me : "Ask me anything ,I will bless you with it ” . As a direct disciple of Ramakrishna the words that he pronounced had the power to come true immediately ,and if one asks for the realization of *Brahman* ,for example ,it is obtained .I said to him: "Don't come anymore to my room ,for your person is so precious that it would be a misfortune if you caught this illness . Don't come any more ” . He was very struck by this answer .From

that time on he did not enter my room ,but even so he came to ask about me from the door .Beginning to convalesce ,I took a bath; that is the most dangerous period for contagion because of the peeling of the skin .Swami Turiyananda was in a room with many people around him .Everyone was terrified upon seeing me . He will contaminate us ”; they cried .But I stayed at the threshold ,at a great distance .“Come near me ”, said Swami Turiyananda .“Those who are afraid of germs can go .” And I crossed the whole assembly to go and seat myself at the feet of the Swami .

With the Divine Mother ,by Her power ,fire will lose the ability to burn ,and wind will lose the ability to carry us away . Always rest in that consciousness of the Divine Mother □

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### **Programme for July and August 2010**

There will be no discourses during the months of  
July and August

Sri Krishna's Puja  
Sunday, 29th August  
at Bourne End at 4.00pm

*continued from the inside front cover*

*of heart? Men shed a jugful of tears for the sake of their children, for their wives, or for money. But who weeps for God? So long as the child remains engrossed with its toys, the mother looks after her cooking and other household duties. But when the child no longer relishes the toys, it throws them aside and yells for its mother. Then the mother takes the rice-pot down from the hearth, runs in haste, and takes the child in her arms."*

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, October 28, 1882*

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Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him!

*Swami Vivekananda*



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