

# Vedanta

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**Sri Sarada Devi and Her Universal Love**

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**Breaking Through**

*David Black*

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## Divine Wisdom

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MASTER: "Krishnakishore used to say that he was 'Kha.' One day I visited him at his home and found him worried. He wouldn't talk to me freely. I asked him: "What's the matter? Why are you brooding like this?" Krishna kishore said: "The tax - collector came today. He said my pots and pans would be sold at auction if I didn't pay my taxes. That's what I am worrying about." I laughed and said: "How is that? You are surely "Kha," the akasa. Let the rascals take away your pots and pans. What is that to you?"

(To Narendra) "So I am saying that you are "Kha." Why are you so worried? Don't you know that Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, "If you have one of the eight siddhis, you may get a little power, but you will not realize Me." By siddhis one may acquire powers, strength, money, and such things, but not God. Go beyond duality "Let me tell you something else. Go beyond knowledge and ignorance. People say that such and such a one is a jnani; but in reality it is not so. Vasishtha was a great jnani, but even he was stricken with grief on account of the death of his sons. At this Lakshmana said to Rama: "This is amazing, Rama. Even Vasishtha is so grief-stricken!" Rama said: "Brother, he who has knowledge has ignorance as well. He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who knows good also knows bad. He who knows happiness also know misery. Brother, go beyond duality, beyond pleasure and pain, beyond knowledge and ignorance." (To Narendra) So I am asking you to go beyond both knowledge and ignorance."

MASTER (to Surendra): "Come here every now and then. Nangta used to say that a brass pot must be polished every day;



## Shankaracharya: Life & Teachings

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Sri Ramakrishna took *sanyasa* (monastic vows) from Sri Totapuri who belonged to the Order of Sri Shankaracharya. Thus the monks of the Ramakrishna Order belong to the Order of Shankaracharya.

Sri Ramakrishna had the highest regard for Shankaracharya. He used to say often: "Shankaracharya and Shukadeva kept the 'ego of Knowledge.'"

"Shankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' in order to teach others."

Swami Vivekananda used to say that *Vedanta* philosophy saved India three times. He said: "... it was found out that *Advaita* was the only way to save India from materialism." Buddha brought the *Vedanta* to light, gave it to the people, and saved India. A thousand years after his death ... Shankaracharya arose and once more revived the *Vedanta* philosophy. He worked out, rationalized, and placed before men the wonderful coherent system of *Advaita*." Thus has *Advaita* twice saved India from materialism. The third time was, of course, through the great Swami Vivekananda himself as the voice of his master Sri Ramakrishna!

### Birth of Shankaracharya

Shankaracharya was born, according to popular tradition, in an orthodox Nambudiri family in Kaladi, a village in Kerala. His father was Shivaguru and his mother Aryambika, both of whom were great devotees of Lord Shiva. It is believed that the Lord granted their prayer for a son and that Shankaracharya was Shiva himself born to revive *Vedanta* philosophy and save India.

Hindus believe that the good Lord incarnates in a human form whenever virtue is in danger. Hindus also believe that through sincere prayers one can obtain God as their child. Kshudiram, Sri Ramakrishna's father, firmly believed that one of his sons, Rameshwar, was born by the grace of Rameshwara Shiva, and Lord Vishnu had taken birth as his other son Sri Ramakrishna.

His father passed away when Shankara was a few years old and his mother got him invested with the sacred thread and sent him to study *Vedas* and *Vedanta*. Shankaracharya was, undoubtedly, a child prodigy. Being precocious, by the age of three, he was said to have mastered all the knowledge that was prevalent.

The life of Shankaracharya was full of miracles. Though we need not believe in all the miracles, nor do we need to place any importance on them, it would be wrong to dismiss them as mere cock and bull stories. There are many things in this world that we are ignorant of.

### **Poorna river changing its course**

Shankaracharya's mother was in the habit of taking bath in the river Poorna which was some distance away from her house. In her old age she found it difficult to walk to the river. Sensing her distress the young Shankara prayed to the Divine Mother and as a result the river changed its course overnight and started flowing near their house. Today we can see the river Poorna flowing behind the temple built in the name of Shankaracharya in Kalady near his birthplace. (Let us not forget how Mother Ganga sprang in the compound of Nag Mahashaya, a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna)

### **The compassion of Shankaracharya**

It was the habit of Shankaracharya as a young novice to

collect alms in the morning. One day he went to the house of a poor widow who had little to offer him. With tears in her eyes she placed an Amalaki, a small Indian gooseberry, in his hands, distressed that she had nothing better to offer him. Seeing her pitiable condition, Shankaracharya at once lifted his heart in prayer to the Goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, in the form of a beautiful hymn. It is said that golden berries rained down in her compound removing her poverty forever. (We may, in this connection, recall how Sri Ramakrishna blessed Upendranath Mukhopadhyaya with wealth, who in the course of time became a millionaire! ) This famous hymn is now known as *kanakadhara stava*. Many believe that regular chanting of this hymn confers wealth on the votary.

### **Taking monastic vows (Sanyasa) and devotion to mother**

From a young age (like Swami Vivekananda) Shankaracharya had a burning desire to renounce the world and lead the life of a *Sanyasi*. Moreover he came to sense that he was not an ordinary mortal but was born to fulfil a great mission in life. Shankara's mission in life was to reconcile and unify all the prevalent forms of the Vedic faiths and give them a common basis. Being the only son of his mother, he found it difficult to get her permission. After all, which loving mother can see her only son take to the life of a mendicant? But destiny has its own plans. One day while he was taking a bath in the river a crocodile caught his leg and was drawing him deep into the waters. The young Shankaracharya cried out in distress and begged his mother to grant him permission to take *Apat Sanyasa* (under emergency conditions the scriptures permit a person to take monastic vows by oneself. The belief is that if the person dies he will attain to higher worlds. But if he survives - he cannot return to normal life

- he must take formal vows and lead the life of a monk. Fearing for his life, the poor mother had no option but to grant his desire. As soon as Shankaracharya took the vows, mysteriously the crocodile left him!

Soon after he begged permission of his mother to leave home and wander about the land of India. But Shankaracharya was not a dry monk. He had the highest devotion for his mother. Hence he promised her that he would always be with her in his heart and whenever she needed him he would hasten and serve her. He also promised that during her last days he would be with her. In fact he visited his mother many times. At last when she was on her death bed he hastened to her and remained with her till she attained the highest state of liberation. It is said, after her death, Shankaracharya's relatives jeered (it is against tradition for a monk to come home and attend to householder's duties) and refused to assist him in her funeral. So he had to perform her last rites all by himself in the compound of the house itself. He became angry at the heartlessness of his relatives and cursed them that, henceforward, they too would have to bury their dead in the same way.

In this connection also we can recall the extraordinary devotion Sri Ramakrishna had towards his mother. Even though a monk he kept his mother near him at Dakshineswar and served her devoutly until she passed away. We can also recall how devoted Sri Chaitanya was to his mother. Ramana Maharshi also kept his mother's head (also of a cow called 'Lakshmi') on his lap and conferred on both *Moksha* or liberation. These incidents clearly show that monks can be most loving and devoted. In fact, without this devotion towards parents and elders one can never progress in life.

*(To be continued)*

Swami Dayatmananda

## Sri Sarada Devi and Her Universal Love

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The Holy Mother Sarada Devi believed that man is an image of the Divine. God dwells in all beings, and man is not a mere creature of flesh and blood. He is an embodiment of the Spirit (*Atma*). The *Upanishads* say, "All this verily is *Brahman*." She recognised the Divine in all beings, that is, all beings are one.

Endowed with Motherhood, she could stand above all humanity, whether of the East or the West, from India or abroad, virtuous or erring, and view all alike in an attitude of universal love that broke all barriers between men. The universal love taught by non-dualism is based upon the realization of the fundamental oneness of all living beings. The apparent difference between one being and another, is entirely due to ignorance; the wise see the same spirit everywhere. Even the exclusive love shown by the ignorant is an expression of the universal love based upon the non-duality of the spirit. Whether one knows it or not, the oneness of existence is the only source of mutual attraction.

Sarada Devi held her motherland and the whole universe with both hands. Her motherly love was the unifying force. She wanted to bring together each and every one without discrimination of caste and religion. In the prevalent social situation, nobody thought about globalisation. Being a Hindu Brahmin lady, Sarada Devi wanted to unite the different strata of society, which was a revolutionary concept. To her Hindus, Muslims, lower and upper castes, male and female were all equal - she was the Mother of all. Her house was open to everyone, and people of all classes came to visit her. She served her guests food and tried to cultivate the spirit of oneness. She was criticised by many, but would not stop her efforts to unify society.

The Holy Mother's love was universal in all respects and encompassed all people, without any moderation of intensity. Various incidents in her life portray the Mother bestowing her love on strangers, on criminals, on the rich as well as the poor, on the sick and the suffering, on saints and spiritual aspirants, alike. Once a disciple was asked to purchase a particular kind of cloth to be given as a present. It was to be of British make and not Indian. The disciple was deeply imbued with the prevailing sentiment against foreign cloth, the boycott that was preached as a primary act of patriotism by the national leaders of India at that time. So he objected to the Mother that this particular brand of cloth was made by the British, who were the oppressors and therefore the enemies of India. But the Mother's quick reply was: "No, I cannot be narrow; they too are my children." But, in order to respect the disciple's sentiment, she exempted him from the work and asked someone else to purchase the cloth. Mother said, "The foreigners too are my children. I have to carry on with all. Can I afford to be partial?"

Sri Ramakrishna's niece once asked Sarada Devi whether his family members would take care of the temple of Sri Ramakrishna at his birth-place Kamarpukur and whether they would perform the worship and other rites. "How can that be?" Mother objected. She forcefully asserted that the temple would be under the Ramakrishna Order. Regarding the monks she said, "What do they care for caste? So many people will be coming from various countries - Europeans, Americans and other foreigners - who will stay there and receive Prasad. We have to deal with all kinds of devotees." Such a broad social outlook from a village woman without any formal education was unimaginable.

In those days Indians were not allowed to cross the oceans. If any one did so, he used to be treated as an outcaste and ostracised from society. Swami Vivekananda had a vision that

his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, directed him to attend the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, but he hesitated for various factors. When he asked for advice from Sarada Devi, she blessed him and insisted that he should go ahead, knowing fully well the adverse social consequences.

Sarada Devi wanted to break the wall between India and other countries of the world. To her, there was no basic difference between the people of the East and the West. Indian culture largely believes in the Upanishadic saying: "every person in this universe is related to one another." But this was only a theory and not generally practised. Sarada Devi was very much conscious and proud of the heritage of her motherland and she assumed responsibility for spreading this culture throughout the population. To her everyone was "His son."

Being one with the divinity, Sarada Devi embraced all the foreign disciples and followers of Swami Vivekananda who came to India. Among them were Miss Josephine McLeod, Mrs Sara Ole Bull and Sister Nivedita, then known as Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble. She not only received them warmly but also sat and ate with them. In those days this daring act was unthinkable in the highly conservative society, especially for a widow. These foreign ladies felt at home and at ease, as Sarada Devi embraced them addressing them as "my daughters."

Her respect for other religions was as deep as her love and respect for all people. She always shared other's faiths and beliefs and was deeply concerned with man's relationship with his own species. She said in simple words that no one is a stranger and love for all is the basis of religion in India. She was a pioneer in the field of promoting an international outlook. Sarada Devi showed the world that Indians not only take from others, they also extend their hands to give. Swami Vivekananda said that "give and take" should be the basis of all human relations.

Sister Nivedita came to India to educate girls. She also learned a lot from Sarada Devi, and acquired the qualities of motherhood, tolerance, patience, service to mankind and love for all human beings.

The primary and most important condition for universal love is the interdependence of countries, which Sarada Devi initiated from her own small room. She never came out of her house to preach, but her actions and interactions with foreigners sowed the seeds of globalisation in India. Sarada Devi welcomed all persons belonging to diverse races and nationalities. Swami Tapasyananda says, "Human experience vouches for the fact that the mother's love is unconditioned by any consideration of merit or demerit, excellence or lack of it in respect of another related as offspring. The capacity to do so is the uniqueness of the mother's heart."

After learning about Sarada Devi, Susan Walters, a member of the *Vedanta* Society of St. Louis wrote, "It (India) is the only country in the world that has produced and continues to produce men and women who are not only of great spiritual stature, but are also broad in outlook as they are deep in spirituality." (Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, December 1990, p. 302)

India believes that the whole universe is one house and everyone is a member of that family, bound together with one string. Sarada Devi put this theory into practice. In Sarada Devi the world found a unique figure of motherhood whose wide heart held all humanity in its maternal embrace. The Holy Mother stands out as an exceptional instance of an all-loving universal mother. She said, "The whole world is yours. You must learn to make it your own." □

## Living a Spiritual Life in Our World of Science

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### Science and spirituality

We live in a world where many encounters take place between "science" and "spirituality," in the form of confrontation or conciliation, as exalting one at the cost of the other or finding a harmony. This essay seeks to stress the positive aspect of this encounter and suggest how thoughtful spiritual aspirants could live and work in a world where science and its applications have become dominant.

In this context we take the term "science" to connote a rational quest for truth and knowledge, based on experiment, verification and practical demonstration - an objective approach founded mainly on external and quantitative data. "Spiritual" is taken to refer to another quest, also for truth and knowledge, but on a plane which goes beyond the merely material and the finite, which is vast and unlimited, the dimension of quality and values. It is basically a subjective approach though also subject to reason, verification and practical testing, through means mainly internal and qualitative. Both of them are to be evaluated by their demonstrable effects on the lives of the persons concerned and on mankind.

The quest of such a spiritual seeker will be: how to lead a life based on spiritual truths and values in a world dominated by science and technology on the one hand, and by the tension of mounting material needs and greed, hatred and fear, violence and terror, in a world distracted and dehumanized.

It is needless to say that the theme is a very vast and intricate one, and we can here only touch upon a few aspects of it and launch the reader on his own explorations.

## Two dimensions of human existence

There are no two absolutely separate and independent entities such as "worldly life" and "spiritual life." Life is one. Man and human life are integral wholes though manifesting at various levels - gross and subtle, potential and transcendent. Existence is one, though it is an indefinable mixture and interplay of the limited and the unlimited, the one and the many, the real and the apparent, the known and the unknown.

We have our gross world, limited and changing, grasped by our senses; and also a subtle world which includes the mind and is known through its effects on the gross. Both are "material," dependent, and are subject to various other forces. That which is unchanging, unlimited, non-dependent, and not affected by matter or material forces, but manifests in and operates through them, is the Spirit. Man has a body of gross matter and mind of subtle matter, but he is their operator and master. Deeper and vaster than his outer, limited personality is the inner real person, his real self, the Spirit. His outer dimensions keep on changing, with a beginning and an end; but his inmost core, the spiritual dimension is unchanging, whole, timeless, free and independent.

His personality which is dominated by his body and senses and the primitive urges of lust, greed, hatred, fear, selfishness and ignorance, and which is subject to disease, aging, death, bondage and suffering, constitutes his lower nature. Imperishableness, knowledge, purity, freedom, joy, selflessness, love and compassion characterize his higher nature. It is not reasonable to speak of human nature only in terms of his weaknesses, errors and the ugly side of his lower or brute level. He can and does function on the higher plane also, manifesting his higher or divine nature, with all its strength, enlightenment, beauty and nobility.

A spiritual seeker is one who, being aware of both these aspects of his "nature," strives through appropriate thought, action and way of life, to assert the "divine," the "spiritual." That is his quest.

### **Life as the manifestation of the Spirit**

The Spirit (for which the terms the Self or the Divine may be used synonymously in this essay) which constitutes his higher nature, is beyond time and space, is the one reality and existence which pervades everything, which one ultimately encounters beyond the smallest particles of matter that could be measured or conceived, and beyond the immeasurable cosmos of the astronomer. It is the ultimate basis of all life, energy and intelligence. It is the ground and goal of the great values: Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Perfection. It is the true source of real freedom, peace and fulfillment. Either through his own direct experience, or through an unshakable faith in the life and teachings of some spiritual luminaries, the seeker becomes fully convinced that this Divine Spirit is the one enduring reality underlying and pervading all creation and creatures, their inalienable essence and the one worthy and indispensable goal and purpose of his life; all else is but passing, unsubstantial and not worthy of being the end or goal of life. This outlook strongly permeates and influences his thoughts, feelings and actions, nay his life itself.

### **Involvement through detachment**

Only to the extent the world and its constituents serve as a means to the attainment of, or to express, the Divine, does he accept and value them and utilize them; even so he does not become dependent on, or attached to them. Their gain or loss does not affect him. All these, by their very nature, come and go. So

why be needlessly exercised or excited over them, why long and labour for them strenuously?

His ideal is somehow to realize that spiritual core and dimension of himself and all that exists, which is the one Existence beyond our worldly life and death, the one light of pure consciousness of which our intelligence and phenomenal consciousness are but pale reflections and refractions, and the one abiding Bliss beyond all our pleasures and pains. For the sake of his spiritual goal, he may, for the time being, even "attach" himself voluntarily to anything, person or course of action but would promptly detach himself from them the moment they no longer serve the Divine purpose or become obstacles to it. Call him an "opportunist" if you like; he is a blessed opportunist who seizes every opportunity for the attainment of the Divine but shares the resulting joy and blessings with all those who are ready to receive them.

Being unattached does not mean that he remains unmoved like a stock or stone, bereft of interests and feelings. Like any human, he also eats and sleeps, walks and talks, works and plays, takes up a profession and makes a good living, holds office or serves in the ranks, even takes up arms if inevitable, and is a responsible, responsive and worthy member of his family or society. All of these he does, perhaps with greater excellence than many, but only to the extent, and as long as they help, and not hinder, his main purpose, the Divine quest. If his spiritual quest demands, he does not also hesitate to resort to fasts or vigils, silence or solitude, poverty or hardships, renunciation of property, possessions, family, home, office, and of even his native country and society itself. But whatever he does, he does with great determination, with enthusiasm and with only goodwill and blessings in his heart.

To him his family and friends are as fellow-travelers who share the same railway compartment for the time being but part ways as soon as their destination is reached. During the journey he treats them all with great friendliness, courtesy and regard, extending a helping hand wherever needed, as if they were all his own. But when parting comes, he accepts that, also, as a matter of course, and gets busy again with his own primary pursuit. Similar is his outlook when his near and dear ones depart: the Lord brings and He takes away; blessed is He either way! He looks upon his home and his own body not as his "own" but as abodes of, and instruments of service for, the Divine. As such he takes good care of them as far as possible, utilizing proven scientific knowledge and techniques for the purpose, but is ever ready to vacate them when they prove uninhabitable or hindrances to his higher quest.

### **Harmony of head and heart**

The creed of a true spiritual aspirant may be summed up as: "The cosmos is my home, Truth is my goal and its quest is both, religion and science for me." In this empirical world where he has to do or say something, he does so in a very rational, efficient and practical way. He is keen to avoid wastage or redundancy of any kind. For the fulfillment of his legitimate worldly needs and duties he fully utilizes his own intelligence, talents and efforts, taking the help of science as far as practicable. Where pursuit of knowledge is concerned, he is imbued with the true spirit of science and its disciplines - inquiry, experiment, verification and error-elimination. He is ever open to newer and vaster facets of truth and knowledge, however startling and unsettling they may be. All his life he is a "learner" and never makes strident or dogmatic assertions. Without a proof that fully

convinces both his head and heart, he does not either easily accept or reject any proposition, idea or phenomenon.

However, his spiritual realization or faith prevents him from being an agnostic. He is convinced that the Spirit, which is the true Existence and the light of all-pervading Consciousness, provides the key and answer to seemingly insoluble enigmas, paradoxes and puzzling questions of life, which conventional science either cannot answer or ignores as irrelevant or beyond its legitimate scope. Besides, while science is amoral and is not concerned with the moral character of its seeker, spirituality very much needs the rigorous discipline of moral purity also. As such, the spiritual seeker can pursue only that knowledge and those courses of action which are not aimed at selfish or partisan interests, self-aggrandizement or harming others; he pursues only those which ennoble him and promote universal oneness and good.

Even those disciplines and practices which are regarded as purely "spiritual," are carried out in the framework of intelligent understanding, deep reflection, full conviction and for a worthy and noble end. His prayers and meditations, worship and philanthropy are for the purpose of self-purification, illumination and liberation from limitations and bondage. For the acquisition of worldly assets or the cure of ailments he resorts to intelligent and diligent effort, science and technology. He looks to the Divine only for grace, purity, light and love. He has no attraction for "miracles" or "miraculous powers." For him, miracles are but phenomena which we are unable to comprehend or explain with our present level of knowledge. A miracle today may become a commonplace occurrence tomorrow. Life itself and all creation, and man himself in particular, are miracles. Whatever and whoever can dispel our ignorance, selfishness and bondage are really miraculous. That in the midst of so much darkness, death,

selfishness and hatred, there persist the lights of truth, life, love and kindness is a mighty miracle. That in spite of so much sorrow, suffering and bondage, the gateway to immortal joy and freedom is ever open, that we too can enter it and become divine, and that each one of us is potentially divine - what greater miracle can there be?

The actions of a person with such an integral vision proceed not only from a reflective and rational intellect but also according to the guidance and approval of a pure heart and clear conscience. The intellect serves as a check against errors; but it is the heart which is the arbiter of values, which translates ideas into living truths and motivates noble actions. In our empirical world of time and space, of day-to-day life and actions, he can be precise, punctual, prudent and very practical; but he can also become totally absorbed in his spiritual dimension with what seems to others as an utter unconcern, a reckless abandon, a self-satisfied solitude. He can be sharp as well as tender, as needed - all apparently paradoxical yet delightfully harmonious. He does not rush to react when adversities strikes. He knows when to act and when to remain quiet. Like a master mariner he takes advantage of favourable wind, adjusts the sails suitably when it is adverse, and vigorously pulls the oars when there is no wind - all the while steadily pressing on his craft to its destination. He has a basic faith, if not living experience, that the Divine underlies everything, and everything will eventually work out to that end, the Divine, which is both the ultimate motivating power and beckoning destiny.

### **Inner poise**

Consequently he can lead a relaxed and serene life even when being alert and active. He is caring, careful, yet carefree. Where most others would get agitated, shout or take some

precipitate action, he reacts with a calm patience. Knowing that "all this will pass," he is not overly excited or eager to counter unpleasant or painful situations, nor does he grab and hold on to pleasant and enjoyable situations. Where social evils, injustice or disasters occur, he is very much concerned and does his intelligent best to remedy the situation. But where it is clear that nothing could be done, he does not go on vainly weeping and wailing or complaining and cursing. Be it an incurable cancer or the threat of an imminent nuclear holocaust, he does all that is possible for him to do, either by himself or in concert with others, and is ready for any degree of sane self-sacrifice; but, if all these fail, he will not on that account sink down, crushed, thinking that all is for ever lost. For he is convinced that the inner core or dimension of himself and everything, the divine Spirit, is imperishable and indestructible while all that is of the world is bound to change or go sooner or later. He does his real best and then remains at rest and in peace.

An energetic and enthusiastic American young man, eagerly looking for a job, was being interviewed for the post of a railway pointsman. The grilling began: "Now, young man, two express trains are coming at full speed from opposite directions on the same track. What are you goin to do?" "I shall change the tracks for one of them," was the prompt answer. "But the point has jammed!" "I shall hoist the signal arm up." "The keys for the signal are missing!" "I shall show the red flag." "Some one has misplaced the flag!" "Sir I always wear a bright red jersey underneath my shirt, and in such an emergency I'll immediately strip off the shirt and stand right on the track!" "But, young man, it i night!" "In that case, I shall call my sister!" The interviewers were mystified. "What for would you call you sister?" "Just to say: 'Come on Sis, and see the darnedest crash ever!!'"

When nothing else can be done and death or destruction is inevitable, the true spiritual seeker can remain a calm witness even of that, be it his own body disintegrating or the world coming tumbling down. No, not impotent fatalism or callousness is this; it is a supremely wise detachment, an intense awareness that while all that is worldly is perishable, deeper and vaster than that is the Spirit which is imperishable, the ever-present existence, and eternal peace, and which is the real and ultimate ground and goal of man and the universe, of the atom and the cosmos. When everything considered "nearest and dearest" is gone, he can still retreat or rise to the level of his Divine Self and rest there serenely.

Siva, the great God of Hindu mythology, the legend relates, was sitting rapt in his usual great meditation. Suddenly he was disturbed by one of his followers who came running breathless to break some terrible news. Siva's divine spouse, his most beloved and devoted consort Sati, had gone to her father's place, on her own, to take part in a grand sacrificial ceremony, though Siva himself had been deliberately kept out of it. There, to her dismay, she found her own father running down her husband in most insulting and abusive terms, right in her presence. Unable to bear the humiliation, she had immolated herself. "Lord! Sati has immolated herself!" the messenger blurted out. Siva did not jump up in all-consuming rage or sorrow. He wanted confirmation of the news before he took any step. "Sati has immolated herself - really?" "Yes Lord. It is, alas, true!" "In that case," Siva stated, with a serenity which the messenger was not prepared for, "I can now continue my meditation absolutely undisturbed!" - and quietly became reabsorbed. This was the same Siva who, out of his divine compassion for the world, had earlier, equally calmly, drank up the deadly poison which was about to destroy all creation. Siva could remain unmoved by any kind of

disaster since he was immovably established in his infinite, immortal dimension, the Divine Self, the true spiritual dimension of all.

### **Way of a medical practitioner**

In whatever station of life he is placed, the true spiritual seeker has his own way of functioning, combining the rational empirical approach of science and the ennobling values and integrating power of the spiritual dimension. Suppose he is a medical doctor. Side by side with his professional competence and continual efforts to upgrade his knowledge, he will also attend to his patients with great patience, care and regard. He will not needlessly resort to drugs or surgery; but stressing the preventive side, he will try to educate the patient to improve his health by natural and safe means and proper life-habits, as far as possible. He will not subject himself also to needless pressure and strain, and resort to questionable means of getting relief in order to win public acclaim or make a fast buck. He will try to work at an optimum level so that while giving his best possible attention and care to the patients, he can still remain calm, relaxed and alert. This way he does real justice to his profession and the patients even if, thereby, their number becomes less than what his ambitions would go in for.

When success in treatment and the patients' adoration come in abundantly, he will remain humble and detached, realizing that in curing and saving lives it is not merely his own skill and efforts but also other factors, known and unknown, that have made it possible. When failure and censure come, in spite of having done his professional and personal best, then also he will not be upset. He will strive to make use of his profession as a means for self-education and improvement, self-purification and reverent service, and as a way of worshipping the Divine,

the Divine that dwells in the hearts of all, himself as well as his patients and his staff. This need not involve the neglect of any of his legitimate needs. In the name of excellence or service, he will not over-reach himself, exert himself too much and end up distracted and frustrated. His medical ministration will be flavoured by an inner detachment, humility and reverence and by outer dignity, cheerfulness and enthusiasm.

### **Way of a housewife**

If the seeker happens to be a housewife, she will cheerfully manage the household, cook, serve and take care of her husband and children in a thoughtful and efficient way, avoiding all wastage - using the minimum materials, equipment, time and energy. Intelligently and skillfully she will make use of modern scientific knowledge and proven traditional wisdom regarding nutrition, health and hygiene, and maintenance of the home. She will go about her tasks with inner serenity, and her graceful manners will make all concerned, including herself, happy. She will serve the members of her family and guests with simple yet nutritious and tasty dishes, with a loving heart and generous hand, but would never overfeed them in the name of hospitality or "mothering." She would not eagerly expect compliments nor sulk when they do not materialize. She will look upon her home as an abode of the Divine and the members of the family as gifts of the Divine, will take care of them devotedly, as an important part of her over-all spiritual life and practice. She will think and feel that the Divine is the ever-present, inner and outer witness of all her actions and thoughts, and as such try to make them worthy of divine approval. Maintaining a clean and tidy home and being pure in her life and conduct, she will by her own purity, selflessness and dignity prove to be a potent force for the spiritual orientation and character-building of her husband and children.

Finishing her really necessary tasks efficiently and expeditiously, she will save as much of her time, energy and thoughts as possible, and utilize them after making due allowance for rest and relaxation, for her personal spiritual advancement and also for helping her family members in their educational, cultural and spiritual progress.

### **Way of a businessman**

If the spiritual seeker is an industrialist or business executive, he will try to adopt the most appropriate technology and techniques, not only from technical and commercial, but also ecological and human viewpoints. By meticulous planning and prudent utilization of resources - natural and human - he will endeavour to make the undertaking both profitable and pleasurable, and that also not only for himself or the company but also for the staff and workers, and specially for the consumers - for the optimum benefit of all concerned. In the process, if more effort and sacrifices are needed, he will be the foremost to undertake them, convinced that that is the most fruitful and royal way to success, prosperity and industrial peace. This will be his solid service to the nation and his worship of the Divine.

Maintaining his premises in a tidy and aesthetic way, as if it were a holy temple, he will also ensure that the items produced are quality products, dependable. His pricing will be fair and he would avoid extravagant advertisement gimmicks and perquisites, for himself or other company high-ups. Resisting the temptation for thoughtless expansion and greedy booking of orders, beyond the capacity of the company, he will invariably honour quality and time-schedules contracted for, after due deliberation. In this way he will combine science and spirituality in his profession.

## **Practical Vedanta**

Thus, for a true spiritual seeker, science is not something to be ignored, shunned or be afraid of; science would be a natural part of his quest for the Spirit, which stands for the one, whole integrating Truth. As he is concerned with truth and life in their fullest dimension, conflicts and confusions, which may beset partisan advocates, will not arise in his case. His thought, outlook and life, embrace science and spirituality in their true sense. Shining examples of this may be found in Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda of modern times. Remarkable insights, inspiration and nourishment may be discovered in and through their magnificent idea and ideal of "*Vijnana*" or living Truth (which is also, by a happy coincidence, the Sanskrit term used by modern Indian languages for "science") and "*Practical Vedanta*," life of Truth. Utilizing reason and science appropriately as a flight of stairs, the seeker ascends to the roof, the Spirit, only to discover that both the roof and the stairs, as also the climber, are essentially of the same substance. That essential substance is the one all-pervading Existence, pure and radiant Light of Consciousness, the beginningless Beginning and the endless End of all matter, energy, life and thought; subtler than the smallest conceivable nuclear particle of modern physics, and vaster than the mind-boggling cosmos of the astronomer.

In the authentic spiritual luminary, one may perhaps discover the legendary or ancient "alchemist" come true, one who has discovered the "elixir of immortality," which is imperishable Existence, as also the secret of transmuting "base metal" into precious "gold" - the brute into an angel; the ignorant, selfish human into an enlightened, selfless and blessed divine being.

The spiritual seeker pursues the quest of Truth in a scientific way, methodically, rigorously correcting all possible errors, using his intellect habituated to deep reflection and

constant discrimination. But the Truth he pursues satisfies not only his intellect and reasoning but also his purified heart and vigilant conscience. His "science" is not just "amoral." It is based on the highest morality, transcends it and culminates in the "Truth," which conduces and works for the highest good of all creatures. Never would he think of using science for self-aggrandizement or for dominating and destroying others, be they men, animals or plants. His Truth is that which liberates, bestows fearlessness, and unbounded compassion and kindness, and provides motivation and energy for promoting the cause of universal freedom, peace and unity.

Thus both the "scientific" and the "spiritual" find a tangible, though indefinable integration in an authentic spiritual adept. Science becomes the blessed means and the Spirit the sublime end. Later, science again becomes the medium of expressing the Spirit, in the form of Sri Ramakrishna's "*Vijnana*," and Swami Vivekananda's "*Practical Vedanta*." True science matures into spirituality, and a truly spiritual man is essentially a "scientist."

An insatiable thirst and a consequent search for truth in all its dimensions, a constant testing and self-correction, deep reflection and meditation on the object as well as the subject, a readiness to accept newer and even radically new facets and dimensions of truth, absence of egoistic and dogmatic assertions and haughty condemnations of what one cannot understand as irrational or superstition, a spontaneous and reverent urge to promote the good of fellow-beings, an irresistible longing to become free and fearless at heart—these are some of the characteristics we may discover in one who is a scientist and a spiritual seeker in one. He adopts scientific means and attains spiritual ends; and this essay is primarily addressed to those who, in whatever manner, subscribe to such an ideal. □

## Breaking Through

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I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,  
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of  
darkness on darkness,  
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant  
panorama  
And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away -  
Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too  
long between stations  
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence  
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness  
deepen  
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;  
Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious  
of nothing-  
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without  
love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet  
faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the  
waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought;  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the  
dancing.  
Whisper of running streams, and winter lightening,

## Breaking Through

The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,  
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy  
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony  
Of death and rebirth.

(from East Coker Part III Collected Poems 1909-1962 by T. S. Eliot)

I first came across this passage in the front of a book entitled *Surviving Breakdown*, at a time of inner stress. It was one of the few readings which I could really engage with, at that time, and in the intervening years it has continued to speak to me. One of the themes of the book is that a so-called "breakdown" may be better described as a "breakthrough." Certainly, new meanings have continued to emerge as I've read, reread and discussed the passage with others. In fact, it now seems to sum up very clearly the struggle involved in trying to unfold a more spiritual element in daily life.

At first, I was rather put off by the up-front reference to God, who seemed at the time to be completely out of life's equation. The exhortation to "be still" was also far from my mind. True to my action-orientated education and life in the business world, problems were there to be analysed and tackled, searching diligently for solutions which then had to be enacted. This had little to do with being still. Yet here was the order to stop looking, moving, questioning, to sit and let the dark come upon you.

The three powerful metaphors of darkness speak strongly and in different ways. Sometimes in a theatre, between acts, the lights go down and people dressed in black scurry noiselessly around, shifting scenery. A movement of darkness on darkness, during which the hills and the trees, the distant panorama, are all being rolled away. As in the theatre so in life. The loss of much that has become familiar seems necessary at times to remove the self-constructed supports to which we have become attached and by which we are distracted, realising that they are no more

permanent than is stage scenery. The bold imposing facade also has to go, the strongly ego-based "false self," developed to decoy others (and oneself) into believing we're in control, that we know our way through life.

The analogy of the tube train speaks powerfully of the anxiety associated with the growing terror of nothing to think about. Tube trains run deep underground, the implication being that dark inner forces are emerging; this is no surface railway, out in the light. Then the reference to the anaesthetic. This seems finally to mellow the fear into a neutral consciousness, beyond struggle, loss and anxiety, perhaps moving towards a state of acceptance and readiness.

But then it's necessary to make a firm reiteration. I said to my soul be still, and wait without hope. The need to be reminded that this is a therapeutic stillness, a positive darkness. A caution not to rush in to re-engage with the usual anodynes. Above all, it seems, the exhortation to wait without thought. Get away from the belief that intellectual solutions can be devised, that all this can be reasoned out; for you are not ready for thought. The implication seems to be "maybe you will be later, but not now."

And then, a change of mood. So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness the dancing. Unfamiliar, hidden things; the whisper of running streams and winter lightening. Shy wild plants, echoes of laughter. Beneath and within the apparent darkness lies the essence, previously covered up by all the shams that passed for "real life," but which was really "unreal life." This essence was never lost but was requiring, pointing to the agony of death and rebirth, before it could become manifest.

Is this to over-dramatise the struggle for a more spiritual orientation in life? Maybe so. The words "breakdown" and "breakthrough" seem to indicate a one-off process of deconstruction and reconstruction, which I have not found to

represent reality. There may be times of greater turmoil and change, but I now equate the intuitions of this passage more with a "saw-tooth" pattern. "Two steps forward, one back" seems to be a more accurate representation of reality than the more cataclysmic "conversion" from one state to another.

Paradoxically, then, it seems that the acceptance of darkness may contribute much to the realization of "the light." The main theme of the poem "The Dark Night of the Soul", written by St. John of the Cross in the 16th century, has been seen as the necessity of encountering hardships and difficulties in detaching from the world, to reach the light of union with the Creator. Metaphorically, the journey takes place at night. This is also apparent in the great hymn "Lead, kindly light," written by Cardinal Newman (now beatified by the Roman Catholic church) "Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom"... "the night is dark and I am far from home" seem to imply that a certain state of "lost-ness" is inevitable at times (and maybe for long periods) in the spiritual journey.

The final words belong to Swami Vivekananda: "Light, bring light. Let light come unto everyone. ... bring light to the poor and bring more light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor. Bring light to the ignorant and more light to the educated, for the vanities of the educated of our time are tremendous! Thus bring light to all, and leave the rest to the Lord." □

## A Comparative Study of the Commentaries on the Brahma-Sutras (cont.)

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Ramanuja refutes Shankara's view of an attributeless, non-differentiated *Brahman*. *Brahman*, according to him, cannot be non-differentiated for want of proof, as all our experiences are only of qualified objects. It is the invariable characteristic found in an object and nowhere else that distinguishes it from others. So when *Brahman* is defined as "Existence, Knowledge, and Infinity" (*Taitt. Up.*, II. i), it means that these three are qualities of *Brahman* which distinguish It from others. The words "one only without a second" in *Ch. Up.*, VI. ii. I, do not mean that *Brahman* has no second even by way of quality, but from the context we find they mean that, besides *Brahman*, there was nothing else which could be the efficient cause of the world. That *Brahman* has auspicious qualities is known from texts like *Ch. Up.*, VI. ii. 2-3. Texts delineating the attributeless *Brahman* deny only evil qualities in It. *Brahman* has not only knowledge as Its essential nature, but is a knower also: "By what should the knower be known?" (*Brh. Up.*, II. iv. 14). It possesses other auspicious qualities also. Texts like *Brh. Up.*, II. iv. 14 and IV. iv. 19, do not negate the diversity established by *Ch. Up.*, VI. ii. 3 and other similar texts. They only deny plurality in so far as it contradicts the unity of the world which is an effect of *Brahman* and has It for its self (I. i. 1).

*Brahman* is eternal and so, uncreated. If it is also an effect, then the enunciation that by the knowledge of *Brahman* everything is known would not hold true (II. iii. 9).

In Sutras III. ii. 11-26, which according to him form one topic, the question discussed is whether *Brahman* is polluted by

imperfections due to Its having for Its body the sentient and insentient world, even as the soul is subject to the imperfections stated in Sutras 1-10, owing to its being embodied. Ramanuja says that *Brahman* is not polluted, not even from places such as earth, by being inside them, for the Scriptures everywhere describe It as being freed from imperfections and possessing all blessed qualities (11). At every step the Scripture denies imperfections in It by saying that It is immortal and therefore free from imperfections (*Brh. Up.*, III. vii. 3 et seqq.). The imperfections of the soul, which also has these two characteristics, are due not to its having a body, but to its Karma (past work), and so *Brahman*, which is not subject to Karma, is free from such imperfections (12). *Brahman*, though connected with forms, is in Its true nature formless, and as such is not subject to any Karma (14).

The differentiated form of *Brahman* is not unreal, for texts which describe It as such, are as authoritative as texts like "Existence, Knowledge, Infinity is *Brahman*" (15). This text only teaches that *Brahman* has knowledge for Its essential nature, but does not deny other attributes like omniscience in It (16). This twofold characteristic is ever there and *Brahman* is not polluted by being inside this diverse world, just as the sun reflected in different sheets of dirty water is not polluted thereby (18). The "Not this, not this" in *Brh. Up.*, II. iii. 6 does not deny the two forms mentioned in II. iii. 1, but denies that Its nature is confined only to these two forms. They do not exhaust Its qualities, for the text mentions further qualities after that (22). Though *Brahman* is unmanifest, yet this differentiated form is realized, just as Its being of the nature of intelligence is realized in perfect meditation (*Samadhi*) (23-25). For all these reasons *Brahman* is regarded as Infinite, i.e. as possessing infinite attributes, for thus holds good the twofold characteristic referred to in Sutra 22 (III. ii. 26).

*Brahman* is not only the efficient cause but also the material

cause of the world, for otherwise the enunciation that by the knowledge of one thing the knowledge of everything is gained will not hold good. The text "All this has its self in That" (*Ch. Up.*, VI. viii. 7) shows that *Brahman* has for Its body this world of sentient and insentient beings in all Its condition, i.e. both in the causal and effected states. When the souls and matter are in a subtle condition, and therefore designated as one with *Brahman*, then It is said to be in the causal state. *Brahman*, in this state, desires to be many and It evolves names and forms; so the world - the effected state - comes into existence. When *Brahman* undergoes this change from the causal to the effected state, imperfections and sufferings are limited to the souls, and all change to matter, i.e. Its body undergoes a change, while *Brahman* continues to be the Self and Inner Ruler and as such is not affected by the imperfections, etc., even as childhood, youth, etc. do not affect a person but are restricted to his body (I. iv. 23-27).

*Brahman* and the world, though of different natures, can yet be related as the cause and effect, for it is not absolutely necessary that the qualities of the cause which distinguish it from others should be found in the effect. Though we do find it in such cases as the clay and its effect, the pot, etc. yet we do not find it when worms are produced from honey. But then, the effect is not altogether different from the cause; for though there is difference in character, there is oneness of substance (II. i. 4, 6-7). The effect is non-different from the cause, for the cause is recognized in the effect also. *Ch. Up.*, VI i. 4 means that clay takes a new condition and a name, and thereby serves a practical purpose. The new mode of the substance clay gives rise to a new idea and name, while it remains clay. Similarly, when *Brahman* takes a new condition as the world, It remains the same in substance and there is only a difference of state and therefore the world and *Brahman* are non-different (14-15).

Threads, when they are arranged in a new set-up, produce a cloth and serve a purpose. The same vital breath functioning differently gives rise to different names. Thus the effect is seen to be non-different from the cause (19-20). Scriptures say that *Brahman* is without parts and yet creates this world of diversity and as only the Scriptures are the authority with respect to *Brahman*, we have to accept it. Ordinary experience is useless here (27). The difference in the essential nature of things gives rise to different qualities, so *Brahman* which is unique can have qualities beyond our experience (28).

Nimbarka too holds that *Brahman* is not created; for such a view would contradict the Scriptures, which say that It is eternal and birthless. Moreover, it would lead to *regressus ad infinitum* regarding the First Cause (II. iii. 9). It is the origin, etc. of the world (I. i. 2). Though *Brahman* resides in the same body as the soul and rules it in all its conditions, viz. waking, dream, and sleep, yet It is not soiled by its imperfections; for the Scriptures declare that in all conditions It is free from imperfections and possesses auspicious qualities (11-12). Moreover, texts directly say so, viz. the soul suffers while *Brahman* is at peace as a mere witness, though both reside in the same body (*Mund. Up.*, III. i. 1) (13). *Brahman* is formless, for it is beyond name and form, being their revealer, and being formless It is free from all imperfections due to such limitations (14). It manifests the world and yet is beyond darkness, i.e. is not affected by its imperfections, even as light reveals objects covered by darkness and yet is not affected by this darkness (15).

The Scriptures teach only that which is the subject-matter of any text and nothing more, and so no *Sruti* text is purportless (16). And as the *Sruti* and *Smṛti* say - as in *Ch. Up.*, VIII. i. 3 and 5 and *Gita*, XV. 18, respectively - that *Brahman* has the above twofold character, it must be accepted. Hence the comparison (of

*Brahman* and soul) to the sun and its reflections in sheets of water is appropriate: *Brahman* is not polluted by the imperfections of the world, though It is inside it, even as the sun is not polluted by being reflected in sheets of dirty water (III. ii. 18). In Sutras 22-24 Nimbarka follows Ramanuja and says that *Brh. Up.*, II. iii. 6, does not deny the world; it only states that the two forms described in *Brh. Up.*, II. iii. 1, are not the only attributes of *Brahman*, for the *Sruti* gives more of Its attributes later on.

*Brahman* is both the efficient and the material cause of the world, as otherwise the enunciation about the knowledge of all, from that of one thing, will not hold true. The Scriptures directly declare It as such, and also that It created Itself by undergoing modifications (I. iv. 23-26). *Brahman* and the world, though of different natures, can yet be related as cause and effect, for we do have such examples in the world, as when scorpions are produced from cow-dung, or hair and nails from a person. It is not necessary that the cause and the effect should be similar in all respects (II. i. 6-7).

At cosmic absorption, *Brahman* is not polluted by the qualities of the insentient world, for we see in the world that the cause is not affected by the qualities of the effect at absorption, e.g. when a pot is absorbed in clay, the clay does not become the pot, but it is in just the other way that absorption takes place (8-9). Though *Brahman*, being the cause, exists as the soul and is thus non-different from it, yet the former is the ruler and the other the ruled, for they are also different like the sea and its waves; and so the relation of ruler and the ruled can exist between them (13). The effect, the world, is non-different from the cause, *Brahman*, i.e. it is not absolutely different from *Brahman*. In Sutras 4-7 it has been shown that the world is of a different nature from *Brahman*, and Sutra 13 says that between the soul and *Brahman* there is difference; this Sutra also says that the soul and the world are

both non-different from *Brahman*, i.e. they cannot exist apart from *Brahman*. From this it follows that the relation between *Brahman* and the sentient and insentient world is one of difference and non-difference, and consequently the world is not unreal or illusory. The effect, the world, exists in *Brahman*, the cause, even before creation and is manifested at creation-like a cloth in a folded and unfolded condition, or as the various *Pranas* (vital forces) are absorbed in the chief *Prana*, when they are controlled, and when the control is relaxed, the various *Pranas* again manifest themselves; so is the world manifested from *Brahman*, in which it exists even before creation. Thus the world is non-different from It (14-20).

*Brahman* manifests Itself as this world by Its inherent powers, even as milk turns into curd without external aids. It creates this world by Its mere will, like the gods, creating by their mere volition. Though *Brahman* undergoes modification and produces this world, yet It remains immutable, since It possesses extraordinary powers. The *Sruti* says thus, and we have to accept it, for the *Sruti* is the sole authority with regard to *Brahman*. Since even the soul, whether endowed with supernatural powers or not, and the gods owing to their powers are seen to create without any change in themselves, where is the objection to Brahman's having such extraordinary powers (24-28)?

Madhva also holds that *Brahman* (i.e. Visnu) has no origin, for It is eternally existent. It is omniscient, Its powers are infinite, and they are not distinct from Its being, though they are spoken of as distinct for the sake of understanding (II. iii. 9). All contrary attributes like being neither big nor small, having qualities and being attributeless, are possible in *Brahman* owing to Its extraordinary powers (I. iii. 12). It is the origin, etc. of this universe. It is the supporter of matter and soul, both of which depend on It. It is incomprehensible and therefore said to be

indefinable (I. i. 5). It is without an equal and superexcellent, and hence It is said to be "one without a second," i.e. there is no one else equal to *Brahman*. Its various manifestations, in spite of difference of place and position, are not different as between themselves, or from *Brahman*, for It is of identical essence in all of them, and the *Sruti* at each step declares the identity (III. ii. n-13). *Brahman* is formless, for It rules *Prakrti* and is therefore beyond *Prakrti*, which evolves colour and form. Though It has no material colour and form, yet It has such colour and form as consist of Its spiritual essence, viz. Knowledge and Bliss. The *Sruti* and *Smrti* declare it (14-17). Though souls are similar to the Lord, yet they are not identical with Him. They are mere reflections of the Lord, just as we have reflections of the one sun in different sheets of water. They are therefore separate from Him, dependent on Him and of His likeness (18).

*Brahman* is not merely the creator and destroyer of the universe but also its preserver, for the *Sruti* denies the limitation of Its powers to creation and destruction only (Rg-Veda, X. 31. 8). It is unmanifest and is not made manifest even by intense devotion, but direct vision results through Its grace, and not from the soul's efforts (22-26). *Brahman* is not merely bliss but also blissful, for the *Sruti* declares It as such, even as the serpent is coils and has coils, or as the gem is lustre and lustrous. These attributes of bliss, etc. are not of the same kind as we find in this world, though the same terms are used for them (27-28).

In I. iv Madhva shows how the various words referring to the gods, ritualistic acts, etc. ultimately refer to the Lord, thereby showing the excellence of the Lord. In keeping with this trend he interprets Sutras 23-27. Unlike other commentators he does not find the topic of the material causality of the Lord discussed in them. He does not regard the Lord as the material cause also of the world; He is only its efficient cause.

In Sutras II. i. 4-6 Madhva discusses the authoritativeness of the *Sruti* and of *Smrtis* which do not contradict it, as distinguished from *Smrtis* rejected in Sutras 1-3. Thus he finds in them quite a different topic from what others find, viz. the possibility of the relation of cause and effect in spite of difference in characteristics between the two; for such a possibility does not concern him, inasmuch as his *Brahman* is not the material cause of the world.

Some texts like *Ch. Up.*, VI. ii. 1 declare that *Asat* or non-existence alone was there at the beginning, which shows that non-existence and not *Brahman* is the First Cause. Madhva says that this view is wrong, for it is mere negation. If that were the cause, then after cosmic absorption nothing would be left, which, however, is not a fact, for there are instances of things existing even then, and it is also corroborated by our experience in this world, where we find that a thing comes out of something, and when it is destroyed, something is left behind (7-9). Though the texts say that on realization the soul becomes one with *Brahman*, i.e. non-different from It, it cannot mean absolute identity, for there exist attributes in *Brahman* like independence and wisdom which distinguish It from the soul even in that state; therefore *Brahman* is the creator (13). The cause is none else but *Brahman*, i.e. It does not stand in need of anything independent of It for It possesses powers to create independently. If there were such means, the *Vedas* would have mentioned them. No means independent of *Brahman* existed, but means dependent on and owing then-existence to It existed (14-16).

Non-existence before creation does not mean that there was nothing whatsoever but that there was nothing that was manifest and independent (17). The acceptance of dependent means adds to the glory of the Lord. He creates with other things as means, of which He is the master. In the world also we see that

an agent creates something with means other than himself, e.g. a cloth from threads. But they are not independent of the Lord. The material with which He creates is imbued with His presence as the ruler, even as the body, vital forces, etc. are so imbued and guided by Him (18-20).

In Sutras 21-26 Madhva refutes the view that the soul is the creator. He thus finds an altogether different topic in these Sutras from other commentators. In Sutras 27-28 he says that the objections mentioned in Sutra 26 against the view that the soul is the creator do not apply in the case of *Brahman*, for the Scriptures declare that contradictions are possible in It, because in It alone exist such powers as make things impossible for the soul, possible for Him.

Vallabha also holds that *Brahman* has no origin, for It is eternal (II. iii. 9). It is the origin, etc. of the world (I. i. 2), and the Scriptures are the only authority with respect to It. In Sutra III. ii. n-21 the topic discussed is whether the attributes of the soul and the world that are sometimes affirmed of *Brahman* (*Ch. Up.*, III. xiv. 2) and sometimes denied of It (*Brh. Up.*, III. viii. 8) really belong to It or not. Sutras 16-18 give a *prima facie* view, saying that *Brahman* is pure intelligence alone and nothing more, and that the attributes of the soul and the world are metaphorically applied to It and not really found in It, for the *Sruti* denies such attributes in It by saying "Not this, not this."

Sutras 19-21 refute this view and say that both views are true, i.e. It has and has not the attributes of the soul and the world, for all contradictions are resolved in It. It is only thus that all scriptural statements can have a meaning. The negation of attributes in *Brahman* refers only to the material attributes, and not to supernatural attributes. *Ch. Up.*, VIII. i. 5, which denies such attributes, later mentions attributes of *Brahman*. *Brahman* has

all auspicious qualities, and is of a different category from the world (22).

*Brahman* is essentially unmanifest but through worship and service it is possible to see It. The *Sruti* and the *Smṛti* also declare It as having a form and possessing all auspicious qualities. The *Sruti* alone is authority with respect to *Brahman*, and from it we learn that through Its extraordinary powers *Brahman*, which is formless, also takes infinite forms at the desire of Its devotees. Both aspects are true. *Brahman* has and has not attributes, as a serpent has coils and is without them. The relation between *Brahman* and its attributes is like that between the orb and its lustre, i.e. they are both different and non-different (23, 24, 27, 28).

*Brahman* is both the efficient and the material cause of the world (I. iv. 23-27). *Brahman* and the world, though different in nature, can be related as cause and effect, for we see scorpions generated from cow-dung. The objection to an insentient world being produced from a sentient *Brahman* holds good only in respect of sentiency and not in respect of existence, which is common to both. While Shankara holds that Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss are found in the world as *Asti*, *Bhati*, and *Priya*, *Vallabha* holds that only existence is found, for according to him the other two qualities are not manifest or are withdrawn (II. i. 4-6). The mention of *Asat* as the cause is intended only to refute it, as *Ch. Up.*, VI. ii. 1 declares (7). *Brahman* is not polluted by the imperfections of the world in *Pralaya* (dissolution) even as the characteristics of a pot do not affect clay when the former is merged in the latter (8-9).

Sutra 13, he interprets like Shankara, i.e. in the effects there can be difference as between enjoyers and enjoyables, though both are non-different from the cause - *Brahman* (13). From *Ch. Up.*, VI. i. 4, it appears that the modification is due merely to

speech, and not in reality. In that case, of what is *Brahman* the cause? Therefore, we have to understand this text as showing only the non-difference of the effect, the world from the cause, *Brahman*, and not its unreality, for such a conclusion would contradict the enunciation (regarding the knowledge of everything through that of one thing) as also the subject-matter of the Scriptures (1).

The effect, the pot etc., is experienced only if it exists and is real, and not otherwise. The world exists and at all times, and hence its Brahmanness or *Brahmatva* (15-16). The non-existence of the effect before creation refers only to its unmanifest condition, meaning that it exists in a subtle condition, and not that it did not exist at all. It is like a cloth folded and unfolded, or like the *Pranas* controlled and uncontrolled. In the former case they exist absorbed in the chief *Prana* and in the latter case the different *Pranas* are manifested and function different (17, 19, 20). *Brahman* of Itself becomes this world, just as milk turns into curd, without any extraneous agency. Even as gods create by mere volition, so does *Brahman* create this world (24-25). If *Brahman* were its material cause, then either It would get exhausted in creation or we have to accept parts in It, which would contradict the Scriptures. Vallabha says that both are true since the *Sruti* says so, and it alone is authority with respect to *Brahman* and Its causality. In *Brahman*, which has extraordinary powers to accomplish everything, all contradictions get resolved (26,28).

### **The Soul - Its Nature**

Sankara says that the individual soul is eternal and uncreated. It is the one *Brahman* without a second that enters the intellect and appears as the soul (*Jiva*), but in reality they are identical, and so *Ait. Up.* I, i, is not contradicted. The creation of souls, spoken of in texts like *Brh. Up.* II. i. 20, is only in a secondary

sense, for texts like *Katha Up.* I. ii. 18, and *Brh. Up.* IV. iv. 25, deny such birth to the soul (II. iii. 17). Birth, death, etc. are spoken of the body and not of the soul (16). What originates is its connection with its adjuncts, gross and subtle - which is unreal. The soul is pure intelligence, which is never lost under any condition (18).

Sutras 19 - 32 deal with the size of the soul. Sutras 19 - 28 give the *prima facie* view that the soul is atomic. This view is refuted in Sutras 29 - 32, where it is stated that this atomicity is due to its connection with the adjuncts (*Upadhis*) - intellect, etc., and that this connection lasts so long as the soul exists in its relative aspect. Even in deep sleep this connection exists in a potential form and it is manifested on awakening, as virility does in youth. It is an agent, for the Scriptures declare it; but this agency lasts so long as its connection with the *Upadhis* lasts. In its real nature it is active, even as a carpenter is active with his tools in hand and inactive without them (33 - 40). This agency is ultimately dependent on the Lord, who makes the soul act according to its own past works (41 - 42).

It is a part of *Brahman* and also otherwise, i.e. identical with It. It is a part of *Brahman*, for the Scriptures declare a difference between them in texts like *Brh. Up.*, II. iv. 5 and IV. iv. 22. But this difference is only from the empirical standpoint: from the absolute standpoint they are identical (43). The soul is a mere reflection of *Brahman* in the *Upadhi*, the inner organ (mind), and *Brahman* is not affected by the sufferings of the soul, just as the sun is not affected by the trembling of its images in ruffled water. Nor do the experiences of one soul affect another even as the trembling of one image of the sun does not affect other images in different sheets of water (50). The soul realizes its identity with *Brahman* in perfect meditation. So the relation is one of identity and not one of difference and non-difference, which is supported

by the fact that the *Sruti* denies everything else besides *Brahman* (III. ii. 26 - 30).

Sutra 2 defines *Brahman* as the origin, etc. of this world of sentient and insentient beings, referring to *Taitt. Up.*, III. 1. From this we have apparently to understand that souls are created, but in II. iii. 17 the author denies such origin of souls. Thereby he contradicts his definition and also the enunciation that "by the knowledge of one thing everything else is known." So we have to reconcile this contradiction - which drives us to the conclusion that the soul as such, is an effect, atomic, an agent, and a part of *Brahman*, but in its real nature it is eternal and identical with *Brahman*. Shankara has taken this standpoint and interpreted consistently all the Sutras from II. iii. 16 to 50. The enunciation also is not contradicted thereby.

Bhaskara, too, holds that the soul is eternal and birthless and so is uncreated. Birth, death, etc. are spoken of the body and not of the soul. So *Brh. Up.*, II. i. 20 (Madhyam - dina), which describes souls as springing from *Brahman* like sparks from fire, means only differentiation due to *Upadhis*. The soul is a knower, because it is so seen from the Scriptures, and also because it is a part of *Brahman*. In its natural condition it is identical with *Brahman*; its other form is due to *Upadhis* (II. iii. 16 - 18). It is atomic in size, for the Scriptures declare it to be such (19, 22). It pervades the body by consciousness (25). Thus in the state of bondage it is atomic, but this is not its true nature; for it is declared as identical with *Brahman* in texts like, "That thou art." Its atomicity is due to its identification with *Upadhis*, which are limited, and this connection lasts so long as the soul sees diversity and transmigrates. Even in *susupti* it exists in a latent condition and is manifest on awakening, like virility in youth (29 - 31).

The soul is an agent, though this is due to its *Upadhis*, for if agency were its real nature, then there would always be activity

resulting in happiness and misery, and there would be no release for it. Moreover, in deep sleep the soul is inactive, and such a change of nature is not possible. Therefore, its agency is due to *Upadhis* but it is not for that reason unreal. So long as the soul is connected with its *Upadhis* this agency also is real in all aspects, even as a carpenter is an agent when busy with his instruments and not so without them (33, 40). Even this agency ultimately is from the Lord (41 - 42).

The soul is a part of *Brahman*, not in the physical sense as threads are parts of the cloth, but as sparks are parts of fire, or the *Akasha* (space) in a vessel is a part of the all-pervading *Akasha* or the different *Pranas* are parts of the chief *Prana* or the various mental states are parts of the mind. Thus it is non-different yet different from *Brahman*, the former being its true nature and the latter due to *Upadhis*. Difference is declared between them by the Scriptures in texts like *Brh. Up.*, IV. iv. 22, and also non-difference is taught in texts like *Svet. Up.*, IV. 3, and in texts like, "*Brahman* is fishermen, *Brahman* is slaves," etc. (43). The soul being atomic, its activity is limited to its body, and so there is no confusion of results. This holds true in its state of bondage, and in the state of release, when it is one with *Brahman*, the question of confusion of results does not arise at all (49). The view that souls are many and all-pervading is fallacious (50).

Ramanuja also holds that souls are not created. They are birthless and eternal. But this will not contradict the above-mentioned enunciation, for souls are effects of *Brahman*, but have existed in It from all eternity as a mode of *Brahman*. So also have the elements. At the time of creation the elements undergo a change in their essential nature, and therefore they are said to be originated, but the souls undergo no such change. There is only an expansion of their intelligence, making them fit to enjoy the fruit of their Karma, and so they are said to be uncreated. Hence

texts which speak of their creation mean only the expansion of their intelligence, like sparks emanating from a fire (II. iii. 17).

The soul is a knower both in bondage and release, for it is so declared in texts like *Ch. Up.*, VIII. xii. 4 - 5 (18). It is atomic in size. It pervades the body with its quality, intelligence. It is not knowledge, but has this for its quality; for knowledge is different from the knower, the soul, like earth from its quality, smell. Texts like *Brh. Up.*, IV. iii. 30 declare the difference between them. It is called knowledge, because it has that for its essential quality, and as this quality is always present, the designation is not objectionable. It exists even in deep sleep in a potential condition and is manifested on awakening, like virility in youth. It has this quality even in the state of release. *Brh. Up.*, II. iv. 12, does not deny its presence but only means that it has no knowledge of suffering, etc. which it experiences in the state of bondage (19 - 31).

The soul is an agent as otherwise Scriptural injunctions will be meaningless. Scriptures also declare it in texts like *Taitt. Up.*, II. 5. If *Prakriti* were the agent, it being common to all souls, there would be confusion of results, and *Samadhi* or realization of the kind "I am different from *Prakriti*" would be impossible. Therefore the soul is the agent and it acts at will, as a carpenter possessing instruments acts or is inactive at his will (33 - 40) - This agency also is ultimately from the Lord who directs it according to its previous efforts (41 - 42).

The soul is a part of *Brahman*, for the Scriptures declare both difference and non-difference between them. Though it is a part of *Brahman*, yet the latter is not of the same nature as the soul, but is always free from imperfections and possessed of auspicious qualities. The soul is a part in the sense that light is a part of the orb, or the body that of an embodied being. Though an attribute is a part of the substance and inheres in it, yet a difference in their

natures is not impossible. *Brahman* is of a different nature from the soul. Texts which declare non-difference are based on the fact that attributes are not experienced apart from the substance and have no separate existence. Though souls are of a similar nature, being part of *Brahman*, yet, being atomic and residing in separate bodies they are different, and hence injunctions which imply a difference have a meaning. For this very reason there is no confusion of results. This explanation would be impossible if the soul were *Brahman* under ignorance or limited by the *Upadhis*. The arguments put forward by the *Advaitins* are fallacious (43 - 50).

(To be continued)

Reprinted from the *Prabuddha Bharata*, March and April 1953

He who has realized the Personal God can also realize the Impersonal, if he so wills. But he often retains his 'I' in order to taste the love and bliss of God. He also has the knots of his heart sundered and has realized his real nature. He does not seek *nirvana*. He is no longer afraid of the world. He who wants *nirvana* laboriously works his way to the goal, ever anxiously protecting himself against the world. But is it not better to be afraid of nothing?

Swami Turiyananda

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## Leaves of an Ashrama: 38

### Absence of Geographical Cure

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A few years ago it was common to run across classified advertisements announcing the formation of communes, calling for adherents. One encountered such invitations in campus magazines, on bulletin boards of art galleries and cinemas, and in underground newspapers. Newsweek magazine's August 16, 1971, number reviewed a book about such "hard-scrabble utopias:" *Getting Back Together* by a reporter named Robert Houriet, which recounted the rise and fall of a half - dozen idealistic communes in America.

The search for a fellowship in which we believe people must be better, and we can thus be better also, is as old as man - or at least as Plato. St. Augustine, Rousseau, Samuel Butler, and countless others dealt with this subject. The Plymouth colony started with some such objective. Churches are practical expressions of people's wishes to link themselves together in the expectation of self-improvement. And monasteries even more so.

But no utopia in history has worked without fault. Houriet's reports of the examples of the visionary socialism which he observed are depressing. And we know how religious societies contend within themselves and bring out unworthy sides of their members. And even in monasticism - which on the whole demonstrates human association at its most noble - peoples' behavior sometimes seems less worthy than one would expect.

We who are associated with idealistic fellowships are often upset by the strains we are caught up in and tend to ask ourselves: "If one cannot find perfect people here, then where can they be

found?" But such a question reveals fallacious thinking. Others are never perfect - or at least, not until we ourselves become perfect!

Is there then no utility in such affiliations and sodalities? Do they lead only to deception? On the contrary. Group-living, with all its imperfections, has a very great value, if properly understood. It forces us to stop looking for solace outside, in others, in special environments, and to seek perfection in the only place where it is to be found - within ourselves. The negative features which one encounters in uplift groups, even seeming faults in guides and gurus, thus has a positive result; it forces one into that situation which Swami Brahmananda recommended when he said: "When you can feel and know that you are helpless and alone, that you have no other refuge but God, when you feel that you have nothing in life to look forward to, then only will devotion to God arise in you." This state is called purification of the mind.

The term "utopia" which Sir Thomas More used, to denote the magic kingdom he visualized, was the Greek word for nowhere. How right he was! But exposure to hoped-for utopias is useful in reducing our alternatives, in forcing us to accept what every sage has taught: that there is no geographical cure. □

We are all only puppets in the hands of God. When we understand this, all pride and ambition, all vanity and egotism will go. For that reason is the man blessed who has faith, because he has realized his puppet nature.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

## **Cultivation of Strength and Fearlessness (cont.)**

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**W**hen the cause of fear is not faced, one may even lose one's life for no real reason at all. Here is a story: A man who had boldly declared that he had no fear of ghosts accepted the challenge of his friends to take a marked pole and plant it in the lonely cremation ground at the dead of a dark winter night. The man valiantly went, covering himself with a warm wrapper, while his friends waited for his return. The friends waited and waited until it was morning. Then apprehensive of something ominous they went in a group to the cremation ground and found, to their great sorrow, that he was lying on the ground, cold, stiff, and dead. What had happened? The only cause they could discover - for there was no mark of injury on his body - was that he died out of fear. They saw that while he fixed the pole on the ground in darkness he had driven it through a corner of his wrapper. When after fixing the pole he hurriedly tried to move, he felt that someone perhaps was pulling him by his wrapper. Who could do it but a ghost? And he fell straight dead there, out of fear. This is how fear would kill us when we do not face the cause of fear. Therefore, with faith in our inherent strength, we should always face it and whatever it may bring, in a frontal manner, and courage will be ours, fearlessness will be ours.

### **Conclusion**

Life is a mighty challenge and everyone of us has the might to accept it fully. Let us not desecrate this temple of God, which is our body-mind, with those ugly things: fear and weakness. Let us make it aglow with strength and fearlessness.

The world is stricken with various weakness-born maladies and fears. Let the Vedantins stand up and declare: "Infinite strength is religion and God." The world requires to hear that. Let us practise and propagate religion as a strength-giving, fearlessness-generating power, and not as a bunch of dogmas. Then a new type of human being will begin to move in this world. Let us not shed a drop of tear if those unproven dogmas of religion, which cannot stand the test of truth, go by wagonloads. But let us weep if we do anything which weakens us, makes us afraid of anything. Instead of ruminating on weakness and fear, let us repeat: "*Abhiih, Abhiih*"; "*Om Shakti Om*"; "Be fearless, Be fearless;" "Divine strength, Divine strength." Let us meditate on the *Atman*, which is our essential nature, and we will become not strong, but strength itself, not fearless, but fearlessness itself. Superabundant will be our life. Sky-high will be our joy. And oceanic will be our love. Such is the message of *Vedanta*. □

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Pray to God constantly: "O Lord, grant that I may know my own nothingness and that Thou art all in all. Help me to realize that I am a mere instrument in Thy hands and that all is done by Thee." When a man comes to understand this, he is truly happy, because he feels secure. He knows all his actions are guided by God, who will never misdirect him.

*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

## **Programme for March - April 2012**

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

**Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm**

Tel: 01628 526464 - [www.vedantauk.com](http://www.vedantauk.com)

Mar	4	Raja Yoga 7	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar	11	Raja Yoga 8	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar	18	Raja Yoga 9	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar	25	Raja Yoga 10	Swami Shivarupananda
Apr	1	Raja Yoga 11	Swami Shivarupananda
Apr	8	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 3	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	15	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 4	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	22	Raja Yoga 12	Swami Shivarupananda
Apr	29	Day Retreat	

### **Vedanta Study Circle in Cheshire Area**

April 22 at 11:00 am

Swami Vivekananda - Strength Incarnate

Swami Dayatmananda

For information contact Mr Aswani (tel: 01625 527075)

between 9.30 pm - 10.30 pm

### **Day Retreat**

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda

at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 29 April

from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

*continued from the front cover*

*otherwise it gets stained. One should constantly live in the company of holy men. "The renunciation of "woman and gold" is for sannyasis. It is not for you. Now and then you should go into solitude and call on God with a yearning heart. Your renunciation should be mental. "Unless a devotee is of the heroic type he cannot pay attention to both God and the world. King Janaka lived a householder's life only after attaining perfection through austerity and prayer. He fenced with two swords, the one of Knowledge and the other of action."*

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, February 22, 1885*

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It is the patient upbuilding of character, the intense struggle to realize the truth, which alone will tell in the future of humanity.

*Swami Vivekananda.*



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