

Vedanta

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Acceptance

Swami Satyapriyananda

The Story of Fazal Ayaz

Aga Syed Ibrahim (Dara)



Divine Wisdom

MASTER (to the devotees): "The paramahansa is like a five-year-old child. He sees everything filled with Consciousness. At one time I was staying at Kamarpukur when Shivaram was four or five years old. One day he was trying to catch grasshoppers near the pond. The leaves were moving. To stop their rustling he said to the leaves: "Hush! Hush! I want to catch a grasshopper." Another day it was stormy. It rained hard. Shivaram was with me inside the house. There were flashes of lightning. He wanted to open the door and go out. I scolded him and stopped him, but still he peeped out now and then. When he saw the lightning he exclaimed, "There, uncle! They are striking matches again!"

"The paramahansa is like a child. He cannot distinguish between a stranger and a relative. He isn't particular about worldly relationships. One day Shivaram said to me, "Uncle, are you my father's brother or his brother-in-law?"

"The paramahansa is like a child. He doesn't keep any track of his whereabouts. He sees everything as Brahman. He is indifferent to his own movements. Shivaram went to Hriday's house to see the Durga Puja. He slipped out of the house and wandered away. A passer-by saw the child, who was then only four years old, and asked, "Where do you come from?" He couldn't say much. He only said the word "hut." He was speaking of the big hut in which the image of the Divine Mother was being

Shankaracharya: Life & Teachings (cont.)

In search of a Guru

S wami Vivekananda used to say that religion is the backbone of India. The most valued possession of Hindus is their belief in their spirituality and its traditions. It is the most precious gift that has been instilled into this nation. It is this innate faith in the divinity of their soul that leads many a Hindu to give up the world and devote his life for the realization of God. Thus in every age India has given birth to many saints and sages. One of the greatest of these saints, is Shankaracharya.

Shankaracharya was born in the 8th century A. D. His father died when he was hardly seven years old. We saw how the boy Shankara felt the urge to renounce the world and how he obtained his mother's permission.

Vedanta teaches that in order to realize God one needs the help and grace of a Guru. *Vedanta* firmly believes that realization of God is impossible without the help of a Guru. Of course, a Guru is not a human being; a Guru is merely a channel for God to manifest his grace.

Shankaracharya was an ardent believer in the necessity of a Guru. He composed a beautiful hymn called *Gurvastakam*, i. e. eight stanzas on the glory of the Guru. In it he says: "Even if a person is wealthy, handsome, virtuous, intelligent, powerful, an emperor and endowed with innumerable auspicious qualities, but still without devotion to the lotus feet of his Guru, all is in vain."

Shankaracharya was a strong believer in the Guru tradition. After a long search he reached the river Narmada, where he met the great Govindacharya. He made obeisance to

him and prayed to be taken as his disciple. Answering a question of who was he, Shankara is said to have replied, in the spirit of the *Advaita* philosophy he was destined to propagate soon, as follows: "I am neither fire, nor air, nor water - none of these, but the Supreme Spirit shining underneath all phenomena." How appropriate!

Govinda was quick to perceive the greatness in the boy and, bestowing his benediction upon him, initiated him. It is said Shankaracharya lived with his Guru for several years and thoroughly mastered many *Vedantic* scriptures. After some time Sri Govinda commanded Shankara to write commentaries on all the main *Vedantic* scriptures and propagate *Vedanta* throughout India.

We now find Shankara in Varanasi, surrounded by many disciples who came to him at various times. His time was occupied in training them and guiding and helping many in their spiritual journey.

Tradition has it that the first commentary he wrote was on *The Thousand Names of Vishnu*. Then followed the commentaries on the *Prasthanatraya* (the three foundational scriptures of *Vedanta*), i.e., the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta Sutras*. His commentary, specially, on the *Bhagavad Gita* is so profound and practical that even today it is studied for its help in dealing with day-to-day problems. His teachings contain so many deep psychological truths that they can throw light on the psychological field, and can help even in dealing with mental disturbances.

Encounter with an outcaste

Until recently India was riddled with many superstitions. Observance of caste is one such. Those who are born in an upper caste feel superior and look down on those of the lower castes.

One who takes to the life of a monk is supposed to look upon all people as manifestations of *Brahman* and rise above all narrow feelings of caste, colour and creed etc. Those who do not sincerely make an attempt to go beyond these restrictions are not worthy of being monks. Even today, after taking monastic vows, many easily fall into this trap. Shankaracharya, though such a great soul, had to learn this lesson the hard way. Sri Ramakrishna narrates this event in his inimitable style. "Shankaracharya was a *Brahmajnani* (a knower of *Brahman*), to be sure. But at the beginning he too had the feeling of differentiation. He didn't have absolute faith that everything in the world is *Brahman*. One day as he was coming out of the Ganges after his bath, he saw an untouchable, a butcher, carrying a load of meat. Inadvertently the butcher touched his body. Shankara shouted angrily, 'Hey there! How dare you touch me?' 'Revered sir,' said the butcher, 'I have not touched you, nor have you touched me. The Pure Self cannot be the body, nor the five elements, nor the twenty - four cosmic principles.' Then Shankara came to his senses."

Shankara's eyes were opened to the truth and the five verses of *Manisha Panchakam*, a hymn of wisdom, was the outcome of that experience. The outcaste was believed to be none other than Lord Shiva himself.

How hard it is to overcome the deep-rooted impressions of the long past. Even men of *Samadhi* can become victims of the unconscious. We can recall two incidents from the life of Swami Vivekananda.

During his wandering days Swami Vivekananda came across a low caste person smoking. The great Swami felt like smoking and asked for the pipe. When the man told him who he was Swami Vivekananda walked away. Only after going some distance he remembered that he was a monk and supposed to

rise above all caste prejudices, and then came back and shared the pipe with him.

Similarly when he was invited to watch a nautch girl's dance he refused, as it is against the monastic rule. But when he heard the soul-stirring song of divine equality from the dancer he at once came down and joyously witnessed her performance; for in the eyes of a saint nothing is secular, everything is sacred.

Bhaja Govindam

Bhaja Govindam is one of the most beautiful hymn composed by Shankaracharya. There is a story attached to the composition of this hymn. Acharya Shankara, it is said, was one day walking along a street in Varanasi, accompanied by his disciples. He heard the sound of grammatical rules being recited by an old man in the hope of becoming a scholar. Sri Shankaracharya was touched and moved with pity at the ignorance of the old man, who was wasting away the most precious time at that age for a mere intellectual accomplishment instead of working for release from the bondage of the world. The Hymn to Govinda was supposed to have been composed on this occasion. The song begins with the words "Worship Govinda, Worship Govinda, Worship Govinda. Oh fool! Rules of Grammar will not save you at the time of your death."

This great *Vedantic* truth is equally applicable for all times. One who, having obtained this rare human birth does not strive for spiritual progress, lives in vain.

(To be continued)

Swami Dayatmananda

Acceptance

Acceptance is a very commonly used word, though it is often uncommon in human behaviour. We use this word in the field of religion, and say that we accept all religions as true. What do we mean by "acceptance of all religions as true?"

Though it is regrettably true that many do not understand their own religion well enough to comment coherently on it, they do - it is a sad thing to say - try to judge the beliefs of other religions and religionists. There are persons who pass judgements which show a thorough lack of understanding of the tenets of the other religions; there are also persons who quote others as making such comments, themselves being afraid to make such statements; there are a few others who, in an attempt at trying to justify the tenets of the alien religion refer frequently to those incorrect statements made by the uninformed. There are those who will not budge an inch from the convictions of the religion in which they are born to and try to accept other religions only insofar as they preach what they themselves believe in, what in mathematics is termed as the intersection of two sets. Where the two religions do not agree, such people stick to their own beliefs and condemn the practices of those who do not conform to their convictions. That to them is acceptance of the other religion.

Says the believer of religion R1, read our scriptures S1 only and not the scriptures S2 of religion R2. Why, you may ask. S2 contains what is already found in S1, so why go in for the study of S2?, or S2 contains beliefs not sanctioned by S1, so then you should not be reading S2.

Acceptance is none of this. That is why even though asserting the ideal of acceptance in writings or speeches, many

tend to voice views unconsciously revealing non-acceptance. That is a contradiction to be sure: there is variance between what the lips utter and what the mind feels. That has to be checked. There is scope enough for criticising every religion by placing stress on certain of their beliefs. No religion is perfect, but then no religion is a mere fancy either. They were all ushered into existence by the will of God. Every religion has many facets which are full of splendour like a collection of gems. The man of acceptance tries to pick these gems and see how effectively he may utilize these for his own spiritual growth. The followers of many religions have often misinterpreted the sayings of their own masters in a way they understood them and have split themselves into various sects, sometimes even coming to blows. When we interpret the sayings of a master of some religious denomination, we must understand that it is merely our reading of it. Only the master understands what he means; he alone knows what other masters who were before him have spoken. One such proclaimed: "All jackals howl alike." But then the central truth of all religious experience though the same, its application varies according to the needs of the time. Therefore, religions appear to be in conflict and religionists fight each other forgetting that they all basically follow the same thought.

Then there are religionists who believe that the test of their religion's truth lies in the number of its followers. Religion is not for the masses as a group; it is for each individual. It is the experience of one's real nature, of a Power, external in the beginning and internal finally, that can save one from the bondage one imagines to be in. Understood so, each and every religion has in it the requisite potency to take one to freedom. Normally, we do not understand this strength inherent in every religion, for we do not stop for a moment to realize that many have had spiritual experiences through every form of religious practice. Another

reason for this lack of understanding is that we have not reached the goal of human life through the religion into which we are born. Had we, then we could also have experimented with other religious methods and seen that they all take one to that very goal. Such an experiment was conducted by Sri Ramakrishna after he realized the Divine Mother in the image of Bhavatarini, at Dakshineswar, and the result of his discovery was: "As many faiths, so many paths." What stood in the way of one's reaching the goal was to be given up. No religion ever preached that one could have both this world and God. The world has to be given up and the mind given to God alone; the world may be accepted later in a renewed way, as a manifestation of God. What is required is to renounce the worldview we have at present and cover the world with God as the *Isa Upanisad* says.

All religions lay stress on the cultivation of purity of mind, the giving up of "me and mine" and all the desires lurking in the mind which are meant to satisfy this "me and mine." The pure mind is like a lake which is not ruffled by waves. Clear of scum, the lake permits its bottom to be viewed, on which one finds many a jewel. When ruffled by waves or when the surface is covered with thick scum, the bottom of the mind-lake is no longer visible. A pure mind free from distractions is essential for spiritual pursuit and that is what the beginner keeps struggling for, for what seems to be an eternity. The pure mind, the pure intellect and the pure *Atman* are the same. Once the mind becomes pure and the intellect discriminative, nothing prevents the mind from being attached to one's true nature. The discriminating mind knows truly what is real and what is unreal, what is to be accepted and what is to be given up.

When one understands that all religions take their followers to the same goal, then there is no attempt to compare one's religion with those of others to establish the supremacy of

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one's own religion. Rather one becomes very broad and wishes that everyone progresses in the path chosen by him or her. My religion is good for me and that does not necessarily mean that it would be good for you, because constitutionally you and I are different. Such is the liberality in religion one expresses. One also accepts every practitioner of religion as a fellow traveller on the religious path. □

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Why do we want to know? To satisfy something in ourselves. The end of all knowledge is satisfaction and this satisfaction is always one. There are three kinds of knowing, - first instinctive knowledge, then reasoning, and then inspiration. The lower animals have instinct; much of our knowledge also is instinctive. Then man begins to reason, and as long as he reasons, the ego must be there. From reasoning he can pass on to inspiration, when all knowledge will come to him - not through the process of reasoning, but by direct illumination. All slavery comes to an end when man realizes the Truth.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Study of Great Lives

Before we decide to do anything we must, of course, know why we are doing it. This seems too obvious to need a mention. But if we observe closely we shall see that most of our actions are done unconsciously. Most of the time we are unaware why we are doing the things we do. Many things have become just mechanical with us. Some others we do because everybody seems to be doing them. A few things we do simply because we like them, that's all. Only when we are confronted with situations we do not relish or are afraid to face, we pause and ask "why." If this why-questioning is made into a habit, we would be surprised to find that many of our thoughts and actions are not only unnecessary and useless, but often harmful to us in the long run.

So when we are told to study the lives of great men and women, it seems prudent that we first ask "why." If we are satisfied with the answer to this question, we can go ahead with our study. If the answer fails to impress us, the study would not be worth the time and energy we spend on it.

But, first of all, what do we mean by "great lives?" We have great people in every walk of life. We have great leaders, great politicians, great scientists, great explorers, great doctors, great kings and queens, great engineers, great mathematicians, great sportsmen, great actors... the list is endless. To be a great politician one must, of course, study the lives of great politicians of the past and learn how they flourished and achieved success. An aspiring scientist has much to benefit from the lives of the great scientists of yore whose dedication and vision have been primarily responsible for the grand march of science down the centuries.

Lives of great actors would teach perhaps more than the concepts and instructions that lie buried in the manuals of acting.

The lives of saints, it is needless to say, also fall into the category of "great lives." But you would mark one important difference. While in all other cases it is necessary to qualify the term by the adjective "great" - you have, for instance, to speak of great actors to distinguish them from the ordinary, common run of actors - when you speak of saints, the adjunct "great" is superfluous. Every saint is great. There are no ordinary saints. Greatness, one may say, is inseparable from sainthood. And it is the study of the lives of saints that we shall now concentrate on.

Let us ask the question "why?" "Why should we undertake this study?" The answer is, we should take up this study for at least three reasons: education, inspiration and purification.

Education

Every pilgrim on the spiritual path needs education. He must have a clear idea of what his goal is. He must also know the path in a general way. His spiritual teacher - Guru - is the best person to enlighten him in these matters. There are also the scriptures to guide him. In olden days the young disciples lived with their Guru and so had the advantage of receiving his help and guidance at every step. Today this is not possible for many. Doubts and questions crop up every now and then in the aspirant's mind, and spiritual directors may not always be readily available or easily accessible. Here the scriptures have a significant role to play. But many times we wouldn't know which scripture should be referred to in a particular difficulty. Moreover, the scriptures usually point out only the general principles, and we may have to work out their logical extensions and decide how to make them applicable in our own life. This is not always easy.

A study of the lives of saints overcomes all these difficulties. How the abstract principles of spirituality can be made operative in practical life becomes clear from a saint's life. His life is his greatest teaching. How he reacted to the different situations in life, how he dealt with the kind of problems that any of us may face any time, how he ordered and disciplined his life and overcame difficulties - all this and much more is learnt from the study. The purpose of learning this is, of course, to practise it. The characteristics of a saint, of an illumined soul, become the virtues to be cultivated by the unillumined. When this practice culminates in perfection, the virtues you assiduously sought to inculcate become your own characteristics. This is the reason why the scriptures describe the characteristics of an illumined soul.

Take the life of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. She gave no lectures. She wrote no books. Outwardly her life seems to be so ordinary, so commonplace. Yet, the world has perhaps not seen a more extraordinary person. Her life teaches us more than a library of books on philosophy can do. We are captivated by her simplicity, her extraordinary purity of body and mind, her dedication to the Ideal, her all-embracing love and self-surrender to the divine at every stage of her life; as a daughter in the village of Jayrambati; as a wife and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar; as the elder sister and guardian of her three brothers and their families; and as the Mother of all her devotee-children. The nagging and constantly bickering relatives that surrounded her almost throughout her later life present a familiar picture to many and one is at once able to identify oneself with her life. Indeed, if an aspirant moulds his life on even a few lessons he gets from the Mother's life, he need do nothing more.

This is true of the life of every saint. A saintly life educates us about what spiritual life means, where it leads to, and how it

has to be practised. It is an education that reveals to us both the way and the Goal.

Inspiration

A saint's life not only educates but also inspires. Inspiration is power and is as necessary in spiritual life as fuel is for an automobile. You may know the way but if your car's petrol tank is empty, the car won't take you anywhere. This applies to spiritual life as well. Knowledge about the spiritual path and goal is good and necessary, but in the absence of a driving force prodding the aspirant to move forward this knowledge becomes only a useless burden. It is inspiration that generates this force and acts as the fuel for one's spiritual journey.

Truly spiritual people are rare, although people who profess to be spiritual are a legion. Whether he likes it or not, a sincere seeker of spirituality has to live in the midst of people who are overtly or covertly worldly. By "worldly" is not necessarily meant people who are bad or wicked. Even good people may be worldly. By "worldly" we mean people for whom the world is either the only reality or is infinitely more real than the spirit. And so the world draws their whole being towards it. They may be seen to struggle for spirituality, but their attempts are usually half-hearted and not spontaneous. On the other hand, by "spiritual" we mean people for whom the spirit is either the only reality or is more real than - or at least, to begin with, as real as - the external world. Such people may be in the world, but the world is not in them. Understood in this light, we have to admit that worldly people far outnumber the spiritual.

When a beginner in spiritual life is surrounded by people who are worldly, their presence influences him in a very subtle way. His attachment to the world, instead of getting reduced, becomes more and more strong, albeit unconsciously. He may do

his spiritual practices, but they lose for him their reality and authenticity. Spiritual life becomes unreal for him. His initial enthusiasm and zeal wear away, and he may either continue his *sadhana* mechanically, out of the sense of duty, or may give it up altogether. Here comes the all-important role the lives of saints play. Seeing their lives at close quarters, the aspirant finds that it is worth struggling in spiritual life. Hope dawns in his heart. He discovers the reality of spiritual life in the lives of saints, and feels assured that he too, if he struggles intensely and sincerely, will discover the light within. If the aspirant is not fortunate enough to see such lives with his own eyes, the next best thing he can do is to hear or read about them. Their authentic lives, anchored in spirit, fill the true seeker with hope, faith and inspiration.

Inspiration plays a much greater role in our lives than many of us are aware of. Except for the purely mechanical acts of life, for every other activity we need inspiration. Much of the violence, juvenile delinquency, sex and drug abuse, and other crimes rampant today are direct or indirect results of "inspiration" derived from crime/fiction films and TV. Inspiration to lead a spiritual life comes from living in the company of spiritual personalities and deriving elevating ideas from spiritual literature. Only he who is inspired himself can inspire others. Saints and mystics are huge reservoirs of inspiration. Even after their physical passing, their inspiration lives on and nourishes the seekers of coming generations. A proper study of a saint's life cannot but inspire the student. An intelligent spiritual seeker can derive inspiration even from the lives of outstanding men and women who have reached pinnacles of excellence in other fields of activity like art, science and business. He learns from these lives the importance of patience, perseverance, and consecration of one's whole life for attaining the ideal - and applies it to his own chosen field: spirituality.

Purification

The amount of inspiration you derive is directly proportional to the amount of purification you have attained. The basic struggle in spiritual life is the struggle for purity. Our true Self, which is pure and stainless by nature, has become covered by impurities of various kinds. The goal of all spiritual disciplines is really to wash away all the dirt covering the inner Self. Once the dirt is eliminated, the Self shines forth spontaneously. Among all the disciplines normally employed for this purpose, none produces results as quickly as the company of holy men and women. The *Bhagavata* says: "It is not that holy waters are not purifying. It is not also that divine images made of stone or mud are not sacred. The purification they effect is, however, attainable only in the course of a very long time, but holy men produce it at sight."

A point needs to be clarified. In a discussion on the "study" of saints' lives, we are speaking about the "company" of saints. This may sound out of place, because we normally associate the concept of company with physical proximity. But this need not always be the case. Even people living together may be miles apart mentally and hence not in each other's "company." On the other hand, a person who is physically far away may be very near to us mentally and we may be enjoying his "company" every moment. A child may remain in the mother's mind even if he is far away physically. What is more, he may continue to live in her mind even if he dies. Space and time are no barriers to a soul seeking the company of another. The study of the lives of saints and mystics really means being in their company. The physical world we encounter is very real to us. We must know that in no way less real is the mental world, the world of ideas. It is in this inner world that we seek to live in the company of the holy ones.

It is wrong to imagine that the illumined ones of the past are dead and gone, leaving behind only a record of their lives and teachings. No, many of the saints and sages live on subtler planes, praying for all of us and for the good of the world.

They help sincere seekers of spirituality in various ways. The more we seek the company of saints and the more we fill ourselves with noble and elevating ideas, the more strength we derive in our struggle to reach the ideal. This inner strength comes from the purifying influence of the saints' lives and teachings.

We have seen that a study of the lives of saints gives us education, provides inspiration and becomes a source of purification. It educates us about the way and the goal of spiritual life; it inspires us to struggle to reach the goal; and it purifies us and makes us fit to travel on the spiritual path. Would everyone experience these results no matter how the study is undertaken? No. Much depends on the method of study and on the student himself. There are a few difficulties which may crop up in some cases.

Possible hurdles on the way

The first difficulty arises when the student has little knowledge about his own self. Without at least a general understanding about one's goal in life, one's aspirations, qualities, desires and weaknesses, the student cannot relate himself properly to the saint's life he is studying. And unless such a relation is established, he cannot derive much benefit. His study remains just at the academic level without leaving any lasting impression on his life. Establishing a rapport with the saint's life really means connecting our life with his - and if this connection is genuine and based on a true understanding of oneself, power flows into the student's life and brings about vital transformations, or at least a tangible intensification of his

spiritual quest. When the student attempts to relate himself without proper self-knowledge, he falls into the second danger: the urge to imitate.

No life can really be duplicated. Every one of us is a unique individual. What makes people imitate others blindly is ignorance of their own uniqueness. Most people are conscious or unconscious hero-worshippers. We tend to imitate whoever we admire and love. No man, said Samuel Johnson, was ever great by imitation. Emerson went so far as to label imitation as suicide. It is indeed a psychological suicide. One suppresses, almost crushes, the natural growth of one's personality, and attempts to mask it by the borrowed personality of one's "hero." The result is often pathetic and almost always self-destructive.

When we eat food a portion of it is assimilated within our system and the unwanted part is thrown out. What is assimilated nourishes us and helps growth. If the unwanted portion is obstructed from its way out, it creates trouble within. Same is the case with our study. The lessons we get from a saint's life must be assimilated; that is to say, they must become a part of our system. The portion which is not needed must be kept out, else it would create trouble. To know what must be retained and what not, requires knowledge of one's own needs and capacity to assimilate. What must result is a natural flowering of one's life, and not a contrived attempt at imitating external mannerisms and behaviour of the saint. Furthermore, not "everything" that the saint did can be, or need be, practised by the student.

Yet another difficulty is the separation created by time and other factors, between yourself and the subject of your study. To enter into a saint's life one must be able to override the time-gap, and the differences created by race, culture, society and religion to which the saint belongs. Only then will the true greatness of the saint be revealed. To judge a Western saint through Eastern

ideals and vice versa, and to study a medieval saint from the modern standpoint would yield little spiritual benefit. The essentials of sainthood do not change, but their external manifestations are usually coloured by the times, culture, religion and society in which the saint is born.

Saints and Mystics

Throughout our discussion above we have spoken about saints and made practically no reference to mystics. This was done intentionally, because in India the two cannot be separated. Religious knowledge is of two kinds: indirect and direct. "Indirect" knowledge comes through faith and scriptural study. "Direct" religious knowledge, on the other hand, comes from a direct transcendental experience of God or the Supreme Self. A mystic is one who is supposed to have had a direct experience of the transcendental truths of the spiritual world. When he experiences the Highest Truth - his identity with the Supreme Self and unity of all existence, according to the *Advaita* philosophy - he becomes what in India we call a "realized" soul or an "illumined" soul. Even before this climactic experience, the revelations of lower spiritual truths, which are also transcendental and supersensuous, are also forms of "realizations." One who has had even these spiritual experiences is called a mystic. In India such persons who have had a direct experience of the higher dimensions of Reality are recognized as saints. In the West, however, moral perfection is sufficient for sainthood. The saint need not have had any mystical experience. Moreover, such experience is not considered necessary for salvation. Salvation can be obtained merely through faith, sacraments, and obedience to the Commandments of the Lord. So saints and mystics can usually be distinguished in the Western context. In India, as we have seen, the two are identical.

One word more. We asked the question "why" at the beginning of this article and received the answer that we should take up this study for education, inspiration and purification. Suppose we ask the question "why" once again. Why do we need education, inspiration and purification? None of these is an end in itself. The ultimate purpose of this study - of all study, in fact - is that I must be myself. Sounds funny? It shouldn't. *Vedanta* says we have forgotten who we really are. Ignorance has veiled our real nature from us. We have, as it were, become separated from our true selves. This study should become a bridge connecting us to our real inner being. Every one of us is a potential saint and mystic. This study should unfold this potentiality and let the Child of Light, which every one of us really is, manifest himself.

"Take all the old messages," declares Swami Vivekananda, "supplement them with your own realizations, and become a Prophet unto others." Each one of these Teachers has been great; each has left something for us; they have been our Gods. We salute them, we are their servants; and, all the same, we salute ourselves; for if they have been Prophets and children of God, we also are the same. They reached their perfection, and we are going to attain ours now. Remember the words of Jesus: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" This very moment let every one of us make a staunch resolution: "I will become a Prophet, I will become a messenger of Light, I will become a child of God, nay, I will become a God!"□

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Leaves of an Ashrama 39: Spiritual Struggle as a Normalizing Process

Everyone values the idea of psychological normality, although precisely what that is has never been exactly settled. Philosophy, medicine, and the social sciences have long argued over the concept. At one level, being normal means being like others, as for example sharing the reactions, prejudices, and behavior patterns common to one's group; that is to say, being characteristic of the median of a large number. From this standpoint, being normal means being average.

But the word has another sense, and this is what interests the *Vedantist*. "Normal" can also mean "ideal," can refer to a prototype of perfection - as normal justice means perfect justice, or normal health means being well.

A wise man I know has always declared that madness can be defined most justly as ego grown large and out of control. Witness the meaningless brutality and violence of our age. A good case can be made for this point of view, since in mental illness the total concentration is on the self to the exclusion of all else. What goes on inside the disturbed person is all that matters in his world; anything not relating to that is alien. For him, consideration of others does not exist at all. We have all of us experienced that hot irrationality which accompanies moments of excessive concern with ourselves. This is the reason why mad people are so terrifying. Because they think of no one else, one never knows what they might do.

The saint is exactly the opposite. He thinks of himself very little or not at all. He is fully at the disposal of others; and as has so often been observed, he is to each what each wants him to be.

He is literally all things to all men, because there is in him no counter-structure of ego. Birds and beasts reacted to Sri Ramakrishna and St. Francis almost as if they were inanimate, because the usual component of the human being - the dangerous ego - was absent.

It seems to me that what we have here is a scheme that is useful to us as aspirants. A continuum runs from madness at one extreme, in which the ego is large and uncontrolled, to normality at the other extreme, where ego has been reduced and rendered manageable. We become fully normal when “we” are no more. Spiritual struggle may thus be viewed as a normalizing process.

In India I once saw an amusing sign over the door of a vegetarian restaurant. It read: “Be kind to animals by not eating them.” Surely a practical means of being kind! I think we should brand this advice, slightly altered, on our hearts: “Be kind to people by not forcing them to cater to the devouring needs of my ego.” Be kind to others, as the French say, by not deranging them.

“When the ego dies all troubles cease.” To which should be added: “For others as well as for me.” The answer to the madness and violence of today's world is the mystic's answer. He is the true social benefactor. For in working to uproot the maddening ego he contributes to our world some measure of normality, without which it must victimize itself utterly. □

If a pitcher has a hole in the bottom, water poured into it will flow out. No water can be kept in it. The holes in a spiritual aspirant are worldly cravings. The materials by which such holes can be repaired and kept closed are: hearing the truth of God, meditating on him, chanting his name, reading sacred books, ritual worship, prayer, and so on.

Swami Premananda

The Process of Perfection

In speaking of life's true purpose and of the way of fulfilling that purpose Sri Ramakrishna employs an apt illustration. He says: "A new-comer to a city should first secure a comfortable room for his rest at night, and after keeping his luggage there, he may freely go about the city for sight-seeing. Otherwise he may have to suffer much in the darkness of night to get a place for rest. Similarly, after securing his eternal resting place in God, a new-comer in this world can fearlessly move about doing his daily work. Otherwise when the dark and dreadful night of death comes over him, he will have to encounter great difficulties and sufferings."

We who set about on the voyage of life have, no doubt, many tasks to perform, and many roles to play. We no doubt manage to do something in some way, but in regard to most of us the verdict of the voice of conscience sitting in judgment over our achievement is: failure writ large. A graphic description of this feature of human life is found in the Sayings of Paramahansa Deva.

"A man is rewarded according to his thoughts and motives. The Lord is like *Kalpataru*, the wish-yielding tree of heaven. Everyone gets from Him whatever he seeks. A poor man's son, having received education, and become a judge of the High Court by hard work is apt to think, 'Now I am happy. I have reached the highest rung of the ladder. It is all right now.' To him the Lord says, 'Do thou remain so.' But when the judge of the High Court retires on pension and reviews his past, then he understands that he has wasted his life, and exclaims, 'Alas! What

real work have I done in this life!' To him the Lord also says, 'Alas! What hast thou done!'"

In the running race of life quite a large number of men get listed in the *also run* column. They achieve no distinction and are awarded no prizes, for their performance is below par.

Men interest themselves in plans and projects in the economic and other fields. But in the vital field of life and living no plans are thought of, no projects are formulated. Men take things as they come, without any intelligent anticipation, any adequate preparation, any worthwhile initiative, and naturally any work done in such circumstances is ill-executed.

The greatest task of man on earth is to seek his Maker and get to know Him, and it is just the one thing about which most men do practically nothing. People enjoy the delights of the garden, but rarely care to seek and know the owner of the garden. They are satisfied with witnessing the magic show which is unreal, and do not strive to know the magician who alone is real.

The case of a man of true worth is different. Such a man does not get lost in the mad rush of life. He pauses, cogitates, reflects, and then steers his course wisely, without being a slave of the senses, or a dupe of the passions. He fixes his goal and resolutely pursues it without being deflected by temptations and lures.

Man's foremost duty is to his soul. If he lets the soul be dwarfed and starved out, any other distinction he achieves is of no use or value.

Soul-culture is no easy task. It calls for the exercise of the highest talent, the most indomitable will, the most unclouded imagination. It is man's noblest endeavour, his steepest ascent. The help of a safe guide, of one who has oneself traversed the path and knows the danger-points on the way, is an indispensable

factor in the successful negotiating of the venture. It is easy to argue that unaided effort has a joy of its own, that a project wholly self-executed has a halo around it, that since all men are equal there is no reason why one should lean on another, however eminent or advanced that another may be. Such an argument cuts no ice. While the truth-seeker's personality and his possession of the needed qualifications are factors of great relevance, the help of a Guru is a thing of paramount importance, and is like rudder and sail to a boat; a vigilant navigator never neglects these.

Indeed the entire process of self-culture ceaselessly centres round and round the Guru. First there is the search for the Guru. There is the dedication, the submission to the Guru. Next follows service to the Guru, as long as he is physically present on earth. The contact does not terminate even there. It continues by way of the worship and adoration of the (physically no more) Guru. The fulfillment of this series occurs in the propagation of the Guru's message and in the execution of his mission.

Millions of men grope on the highways and byways of life, engaged in some effort or other, towards some end or other; the effort is halfhearted, the end is ill-defined, and the entire affair is so unreal, so shadowy. Only the spiritual seeker who has launched his vessel on the stormy sea with a grimness of purpose which no storm can abate, is engaged in a worthwhile task. He is the person destined to reach the distant shores of perfection. He is the hero, the knight-errant on a mighty quest.

If the moth seeks the light, the spiritual aspirant seeks the Guru. This very seeking has a mystic intensity in it. The beauty of the seeking lies in the fact that it is not a one-way affair. The Guru as much seeks the disciple as the disciple the Guru. Again, this search, if it is honest, genuine and earnest, never ends in a failure. The searching aspirant does meet the waiting Guru - as surely as the lotus bud meets its morning sun. The meeting of the

two is brought about by divine agency, as it were, and is full of rhythm and romantic charm. It results in the opening of the flood-gates of enlightenment on the Guru's part, and in the rise of the disciple to his fullest stature of soul. Therefore the discovery of each other by the Guru and the disciple is life's biggest event in the case of either. The seeking and the finding are complementary parts of a grand phenomenon. The faith involved in the one is matched by the compassion and grace imbedded in the other. As the summer-parched fields look up longingly and pant for the rains, so does the disciple's soul yearn for the sight of the Guru, the descent of whose grace is as ponderous as the cooling downpour in the monsoon season.

How exactly the existence of the eminent individual who is subsequently spotted as the Guru first becomes known to the disciple, differs from case to case. The "first information report," so to say, may be a reference to the Guru by the expounder of a sublime passage in poetic literature or by some one illustrating a philosophic concept of high abstruseness. A bereavement may, in the case of another, provide the occasion to be directed by a sympathizer to the future Guru. A casual look (at the prospective Guru) may suddenly impress a person so much, without any ostensible cause for the time being, that he is powerfully drawn to him, and keeps on coming. Another may approach him in order to convert him to a pet fad of his own, but may soon find the roles reversed, i.e., himself getting converted. In exceptional instances pre-visions of the future Guru are also had. Thus it may be seen that the ways of the human spirit being several and various, one seeker lands upon his Guru one way, while another searcher traces him up another way.

As the ocean willingly receives and absorbs the river which seeks its hospitality, so does the Guru welcome and accepts the eager disciple. He gives the distressed seeker an assurance of

redemptive treatment, a promise of being helped up to the saving experience. He does not demand of the seeker any blind acceptance. He lets the disciple test him and question his assertions, laugh at his creed and mock at his conclusions. He does not get offended at the seeker's initial irreverence to his own confirmed beliefs. For he is sure of his ground, and knows that the young disciple who now doubts and disbelieves will soon quiet down to conviction and certitude. When the seeker takes refuge at the feet of a true Guru, he is like a patient who has surrendered to an expert physician; he will not be discharged until he is completely cured.

The relationship between Guru and disciple does not consist merely of a little questioning on the part of the latter and a short elucidation on the part of the former. It is much more fundamental than any oral process. Speaking and explaining by means of words are not in any way the essence of the thing. Indeed the greatest of Gurus, Dakshinamurti, is the Silent Teacher. The Guru-disciple action and reaction operate on more basic levels than those of exchange of words and superficial communication of thoughts. The Guru is more than father, more than mother. His influence on the personality of the disciple is total and entire, not partial and piecemeal.

Guru-seva, service to the Teacher, is highly efficacious. It is not the physical part of the service done - attending to the Guru's personal needs, bringing firewood for use in his hermitage, tending his herd of cows etc. - that endows it with efficacy, but the attitude. Without the attitude and the right spirit, it is mere drudgery and coolie work and brings no benefit. The little quantity of *prithuka* (flattened rice got from fried and pestled paddy) which Kuchela brought to Krishna was not worth half a penny, but how much Krishna prized it because of Kuchela's affection which lay behind that poor gift! Guru-seva is the

external manifestation of the total dedication of self, which the disciple has effected. The service done by the disciple's hands is the visible symbol of the faith which fills his heart. The hundred ways in which the mother attends to the endless little needs of the child are only the extension of the abiding and overflowing maternal affection in her being.

Sri Ramakrishna's training of his disciples was as wonderful as any other aspect of excellence and uniqueness. He was a real master in filling gaps, in rounding off angularities, and in perfecting character. If one got into his hands one could not help becoming shorn of any deficiency. Sarada Prasanna, who later became Swami Trigunathita, came into contact with the Master quite early in life. The boy was good and of a pious temperament, but the aristocratic instinct was strong in him. For instance, he had a wrong attitude to labour and employment, feeling that only menials could and should stoop to doing certain types of work. The Master was quick to notice this trait in Sarada and out of his grace wished to help the boy outgrow it. On a hot day Sarada was at Dakshineswar on one of those visits to the Saint which so fascinated him. Some friends of his were also there, Sri Ramakrishna suddenly required Sarada to bring water and wash his feet. To be asked to do this piece of work (appropriate, as Sarada felt then, only to a low servant) and that too when friends were standing near - this was too much for the proud and self-conscious Sarada. He felt humiliated, and the blood rose to his face. Quite embarrassed was he, but found no way of escape. The Master, if he was soft and gentle, could also be stern and exacting. He definitely asked the boy again to do the washing. And Sarada did it. But on that day was shattered for ever the small tinge of aristocratic pride that had been in him, and the right spirit of service took possession of him.

So the performance of Guru-seva must not be looked upon as any big help rendered to the Guru who would otherwise be mightily inconvenienced; it is a part of the *sadhana* prescribed for assiduous practice by the serious disciple and aspirant. When the pupil is made to serve the Guru, it is not a task imposed on him, it is a rare privilege conferred.

The physical disappearance, through death, of the Guru must no doubt be a matter of bitter anguish to the disciple, but it does not signify any lasting severance of personal ties. The material plane is not the only region of reality. It is perhaps the least real and the most shadowy of the states of existence. Therefore so far as the disciple is concerned, the departed Guru lives on as vitally as of old. And the disciple's service of him goes on as abundantly as before. To the lay people such a service may appear to be the work of an unhinged brain, but they do not know that it is their own short sight that is responsible for such an impression forming in their minds.

Readers of the biography of Sri Ramakrishna must be familiar with Jatadhari, the wandering sadhu who carried with him a metal image of Ramlala, the child Rama, which he caressed and played with. To the rest of the world the metal image was but a lifeless block which a mad sadhu doted on. But to Sri Ramakrishna it was really the Darling of Ayodhya, and he was able to establish as sweet, intimate and realistic a relationship with that Rama as Jatadhari had established. He who reads the story of Ramlala and is unmoved by it and dismisses it as wild imaginings from start to finish is indeed a person to be pitied.

There is another happening in the life of the Paramahansa, viz., the matter-of-fact, even physically felt, revelation of the child Krishna to Gopaler-Ma. And when at the instance of the Master this old woman, who was privileged to see and handle and fondle and feed the living Gopala child, narrated her experiences to the

youthful, robust, willed, rationalist-to-the-core Narendra (the future Vivekananda) and asked him if her vision was a mere figment of the imagination or was a literal, grim fact of facts, Narendra (who was a doubter and a master-challenger, but was also capable of high introspection and right penetration) assured the unlettered lady that her vision of Gopala was quite true, true to the very letter.

Those who have made a study of Swami Ramakrishnananda's life will have been struck by the intense personal devotion to the Master, of which he was an embodiment even long after Sri Ramakrishna had passed away, and by his astonishingly peculiar ways of fanning the Master's picture on hot days, of his offering of *naivedyam* exactly in the manner in which one serves food to a living person, etc. The Swami's daily Guru-puja was no with less of a detailed personal ministrations to a respected senior patriarch of the household, than his Guru-seva had been at Dakshineswar, Syampukur and Cossipore.

The enlightened disciple is not, however, all satisfied with maintaining a direct "contact" with his Guru even after the latter's passing away and revelling in his company even after, in the world's eye, he has ceased to be. He finds immense pleasure in making available to all the people the ambrosia of his Master's elevating message, and the blessedness of venerating the Master's image.

The spiritually ripe man is never selfish. He does not rest content with receiving and enjoying the Master's grace himself, but wishes to make it flow down to others as well. The gates of the Master's mansion (of which he is now heir and occupant) he opens wide so that all may enter. This altruistic service is done by him in several ways of propaganda and preaching. Bringing out literary publications narrating the life and explaining the teachings of the Master, founding institutions to shelter those who

long to imbibe and get soaked in spirit-culture, opening shrines and temples to keep devotion aflame, establishing an Order devoted to the propagation of the Guru's ideals, and rearing a line of disciples to secure the continuity of the Master's life-purpose. These are some of the lines in which the Guru's personality and message may be perpetuated.

What a noble life it is which is lived in the aforesaid manner; in searching for and spotting the Guru, in whole-souled dedication to him; in being ignited at his roaring furnace; in serving him while he lives and adoring him after his passing away; in extensively broadcasting his gems of thought and in drawing more and more men to the asylum of his spirit! Such are indeed the stages in the process of the perfection of personality.

Of the place and function of the Guru, Swami Vivekananda has said: "The real Guru is the one through whom we have our spiritual descent. He is the channel through which the spiritual current flows to us, the link which joins us to the whole spiritual world. Too much faith in personality has a tendency to produce weakness and idolatry, but intense love for the Guru makes rapid growth possible, he connects us with the internal Guru. Adore your Guru if there be real truth in him; that Guru-bhakti (devotion to the teacher) will quickly lead you to the highest." □

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

Nimbarka accepts the view that the soul is eternal, atomic in size and a knower, and interprets Sutras 18 - 28 like Ramanuja. But Sutras 29 - 32 he interprets differently. The soul, though atomic, is called all-pervading because of its all-pervading quality, knowledge, which is its essence, and this quality is always present, though sometimes latent and sometimes manifest, as virility latent in childhood becomes manifest in youth. If the soul itself were all-pervading, its bondage and release would be either impossible or eternal (29 - 32). The soul is an agent, for thus only can Scriptural injunctions have meaning. The subsequent Sutras up to 42 he interprets more or less like Ramanuja.

The soul is a part of *Brahman*, for the Scriptures declare difference between them in texts like *Svet. Up.*, I. 9 and also non-difference in texts like, "That thou art" (*Ch. Up.*, VI. viii. 7), and "This Self is *Brahman*" (*Bri. Up.*, II. v. 19). But for this reason *Brahman* is not affected by the imperfections of souls, even as the sun is not affected by its parts, the rays, falling on filthy things. On account of their connection with different kinds of bodies, souls are different and injunctions regarding them have a meaning. Souls being atomic and limited to their respective bodies, there is no confusion regarding the results of their works. The view that the soul is all-pervading is fallacious (43 - 50).

Madhva interprets Sutras II. iii. 11 - 50 in a very different way though in conclusion he too holds the view that the soul is atomic, an agent, etc. Sutras II. iii. 14 - 16 discuss the order in which the elements are withdrawn at absorption (*Pralaya*). Sutra

17 raises the question whether *Brahman* also is withdrawn and declares that It is not withdrawn for Scriptures declare that It is eternal, etc. (17). The soul is eternal and the texts which refer to its birth, etc. are with respect to its *Upadhis*, the body, etc. (18 - 19). The soul is atomic and it pervades the body with its quality, intelligence (21 - 25). It is different from *Brahman* (28) but on account of similar qualities like knowledge, bliss, etc. in the soul and *Brahman*, the soul is said to be one with *Brahman* in texts like, "That thou art" and "I am *Brahman*," even as the world is said to be identical with *Brahman* in texts like "All this is *Brahman*" (*Ch. Up.*, III. xiv. 1) inasmuch as It possesses the qualities of the world (29).

All the qualities of the soul are latent in it, and are manifested through the Lord's grace on its attaining release, like virility in youth, otherwise some (the gods) would experience bliss eternally, others (the Asuras) misery, and still others (men) both (31 - 32). The soul is an agent. The Scriptures describe its activities, and it is also seen to adopt means to attain its ends. The Scriptures prescribe for it meditation. But its activity is controlled by God, and so it is not a free agent like God, who is all-powerful. The soul also feels it is not a free agent. As a carpenter is an agent by himself, but controlled by his master, even so is the soul an agent under the Lord's control, who directs it in accordance with its past actions and efforts (33 - 42). The soul is a part of the Lord, for the Scriptures declare it to be variously related to the Lord, as son, father, friend, etc. It is also declared to be otherwise, i.e. unrelated and quite different from the Lord. As it is thus declared to be different and non-different from the Lord, it is said to be a part of Him. Its being separate and non-separate from the Lord should be taken in a secondary sense and not literally (43). Though the souls and the manifestations (Incarnations) of the Lord are both His parts, yet the latter are essential parts, while

the souls are distinct parts, and so the Incarnations are of the same nature as the Lord and are all-powerful, while the souls are limited in power, though they resemble the Lord in an extremely small degree. The soul's activity and release, being connected with a body, depend on the Lord, but this is not the case with the manifestations of the Lord. Between ordinary souls and the Lord's manifestations there is a distinction, for souls are limited in power, etc. while the latter are not so. The ordinary souls (Jivas) are merely reflections of the Lord, while the others are manifestations of the Lord, and as such resemble Him in all aspects (46 - 50). Though souls are reflections of the Lord, yet among themselves they are different, because of the difference in their *adrsta* or the unseen result of their virtuous and sinful conduct (51).

Vallabha also holds that the soul is eternal and that birth, etc. refer to the body and not to the soul (II. iii. 16 - 17). The view that the soul is merely intelligence and therefore *Brahman* Itself, *Vallabha* takes as a *prima facie* view and refutes it. According to him also, the soul is a knower and has knowledge for its essential attribute. The soul cannot change its nature and become one with *Brahman*. They may say that the soul as such is illusory and therefore the question of its losing its nature cannot arise. But this would contradict texts like *Ch. Up.*, VI. iii. 2. The difference between the soul and *Brahman* is not illusory, for there is no proof to establish it. Nor can it be said that there is no *Brahman* different from the *Jiva*, since that would contradict texts like *Ch. Up.*, VIII. i. 5 and Sutra II. i. 22. The *Advaitin's* view is therefore untenable (18). The soul is atomic. *Vallabha* interprets Sutras 19 - 28 like Shankara, not as a *prima facie* view, however, but as a final view (Siddhanta). In texts like "That thou art," the soul is said to be *Brahman*, because the soul has the qualities of *Brahman* for its essence. The statement holds good in the state of release, when

the bliss aspect of the soul is manifest. It exists potentially, and is manifest in the state of release, like virility in youth. If this aspect also were manifest, it would be experienced by the soul, and there would be no bondage; and if it were never experienced as a quality, then there would be no release. The bliss aspect cannot be denied, for it would contradict texts like *Brh. Up.*, IV. iv. 6 (19 - 32).

The soul is an agent. Texts like *Brh. Up.*, II. i. 17 clearly show that this agency belongs to the soul, and the senses are its instruments. The view that this agency is due to its connection with the intellect should be rejected (33 - 35) - Though generally the agent and the enjoyer are different, they need not necessarily be so even as a carpenter may be an agent and construct a chariot and enjoy it by riding on it (40). The soul is a part of *Brahman*. One might say *Brahman* has no parts and so how could the soul be a part of *Brahman*. But the Scriptures declare it, and it has to be accepted, since there is no other means of knowing this. The *Sruti* and *Smṛti* declare that the soul is a part of *Brahman*. Though it is a part of *Brahman*, the latter is not affected by the soul's sufferings, just as fire heats other things but not itself. Though the soul is a part of *Brahman*, yet injunctions and prohibitions are applicable to it on account of its connection with bodies. The soul is a mere reflection or resemblance of *Brahman* inasmuch as its bliss aspect is not manifest (43 - 50).

The State of Release and the Means to It

All the commentators agree that meditation on the *Supreme Brahman* is the means to release, and that this meditation is to be repeated till the rise of knowledge (IV. i. i). Bhaskara, Ramanuja, and Nimbarka further state that the meditation is to be continued till death (12). Shankara, however, takes this Sutra as referring to meditations which are practised for attaining certain results by

way of prosperity. "With whatever thought he passes away from this world," etc., says at. Br. 10. 6. 3. 1. Such a thought, which fixes the course of life hereafter cannot be had at the moment of death without lifelong practice. Hence such meditations should be practised till death. But Bhaskara, Ramanuja, and Nimbarka connect the Sutra with the meditation on *Brahman*; for according to them even after the rise of knowledge one has to go after death by the path of the gods, at the end of which path one gets disembodied completely and attains *Brahman*, while Shankara holds that on death he becomes one with *Brahman*. Madhva says that meditation is to be practised till the close of life, i. e. till release. In this meditation on *Brahman*, according to Shankara, one is to identify oneself with *Brahman*. Bhaskara also prescribes the same process; for identity between the two is the real fact, and the difference is only due to *Upadhis*. This difference is destroyed by the meditation on identity, just as dross is removed from gold by contact with heat. According to Ramanuja one has to regard the *Supreme Brahman* as the Self of the soul even as the soul is the self of the body; for all souls constitute the body of the Lord. There is no difference between them in so far as the "I" is of the nature of *Brahman*, and there is difference between them even as there is difference between the soul and body. Nimbarka prescribes meditation on *Brahman* as the Self of the meditating person, i. e. as non-different from him; for the difference is experienced, while the non-difference is not experienced at present by all, and that is the cause of bondage. By such meditation the soul realizes its non-difference with *Brahman* and gets released. Madhva prescribes that *Brahman* is to be meditated upon as the Lord, while Vallabha says that those who follow the path of knowledge (Maryada Marga) meditate on It as their Self and become one with It.

All the commentators agree that on realization or rise of knowledge all works except those that have begun to take effect in that life (*Prarabdha Karma*) are destroyed. The *Prarabdha Karmas* are exhausted by being worked out, when this body falls off and one attains perfection, becoming one with *Brahman*, as declared by *Ch. Up.*, VI. xiv. 2 (IV. i. 15, 19). Ramanuja and Nimbarka, however, think that the *Prarabdha Karma* may not get exhausted in the life in which knowledge has been gained, and that the man of realization may have to go through several more lives to exhaust them.

Sankara makes a twofold distinction among those who have attained knowledge, viz. those who have attained knowledge of the *Nirguna* (Supreme) *Brahman* and those who have attained knowledge of the *Saguna* (Conditioned) *Brahman*. The organs of a knower of the Supreme or *Nirguna Brahman* do not depart, but get merged in It at death. Though the *Madhyandina* recession of *Brh. Up.*, IV. iv. 6 reads, "From him the *Pranas* do not depart," yet it is made clear by the *Kanva* recession of *Brh. Up.*, III. ii. 11 that the *Pranas* do not depart from the body, but get merged in him only. In other words, there is no going by the path of the gods for such a knower. He becomes one with *Brahman* at death. His organs also get merged in *Brahman* and attain absolute non-distinction, according to the *Prasna Up.*, VI. 5, without any chance of cropping up again. *Mund. Up.*, III. ii. 7 describes the end from a relative standpoint, according to which the body disintegrates and goes, back to the cause, the elements (IV. ii. 12 - 16). On release the soul does not attain anything new, but manifests its true nature (*Ch. Up.*, VIII. iii. 4 and xii. 3), which was covered by ignorance (IV. iv. 1). The relation of the released soul with *Brahman* is that of identity as it is given by texts like *Ch. Up.*, VI. viii. 7 and *Brh. Up.*, I. iv. 10 and IV. iv. 6 (4). In the state of release the soul exists, according to Jaimini, as possessing the

attributes of *Brahman*, while Audulomi thinks it exists as Pure Intelligence. According to Badarayarta, however, both are true; the former from the relative aspect and the latter from the transcendental aspect, even as *Brahman* is so viewed from the two standpoints as *Saguna* and *Nirguna* (5 - 7).

The soul of a knower of *Saguna Brahman* goes by the path of the gods to *Brahmaloka* (the region of *Brahma*), i.e. it attains the Conditioned *Brahman* - which is the view of Badari and is also endorsed by Badarayana. On the dissolution of *Brahmaloka* "the soul along with the ruler of that world attains the *Supreme Brahman* (IV. iii. 7 - 11). The view upheld by Jaimini, viz. that the soul attains the *Supreme Brahman* cannot be supported, for with respect to It there can be no going or attaining, for the realization of the *Supreme Brahman* consists in nothing but the destruction of ignorance (12 - 14). Those alone who have worshipped the *Saguna Brahman* without a symbol attain *Brahmaloka* (15). The soul which has attained *Brahmaloka* effects its desires by mere volition (IV. iv. 8). It can exist with or without a body according to its liking (10 - 14). It attains all the lordly powers except the power of creation, etc. (17). There is no return to this mundane existence from *Brahmaloka* (22).

Ramanuja does not make a twofold distinction among the knowers of *Brahman* as Shankara does. According to him the *Pranas* (organs) of a knower of *Brahman* do not depart from him (the soul) at death while his soul does depart from the body. This is made clear in the Madhyandina recession of *Brh. Up.*, IV. iv. 6, which reads, "From him the *Pranas* do not depart" while the Kanva text reads, "His *Pranas* do not depart." So the soul of the knower of *Brahman* departs from the body and goes by the path of the gods. *Brh. Up.*, IV. iv. 7 refers not to absolute immortality by the destruction of the embodied state, but to the destruction of past sins and the non-clinging of those committed after the rise

of knowledge, and the reaching of *Brahman* in the text means only intuitive knowledge of *Brahman*, and not actual attainment of *Brahman*. The embodied state (*Samsara*) lasts till the end of the path of the gods, when it completely casts off its embodiment and attains *Brahman* (IV. ii. 7, 12, 13). The worshippers of the Conditioned *Brahman* (*Hiranyagarbha*) and the Supreme *Brahman* go by the path of the gods, but not those who worship *Brahman* in symbols (IV. iii. 15).

The soul on release manifests its own nature (*Ch. Up.*, VIII. xii. 3) and does not attain anything new. This true nature which is freedom from sin is obscured in the state of bondage by Karma (past works) (IV. ii. 1). In the released state the soul experiences that it is non-different from the Supreme *Brahman* which is its Self and that it is the body, and hence a mode, of that *Brahman* (4). The released soul is not only mere intelligence but also has qualities like freedom from sin, etc. for they are not contradictory; and since the *Sruti* mentions both, they are equally true of the soul (7). The released soul effects its desire by mere will (8). It can exist with or without a body according to its sweet will (12). The released soul acquires equality with *Brahman* as regards its qualities but it does not obtain the power of creating, etc. (17).

(To be continued)

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The Story of Fazal Ayaz

The following story of a robber chief who got spiritual awakening during the course of his dangerous profession and ultimately became a great sage, though not very inspiring to all, would yet be of psychological interest to many.

Fazal Ayaz was the leader of a band of daring robbers who plundered travellers and caravans in the thick forests of Mar and Barut. He used to put on the dress of a fakir and live in that disguise by the side of the road in a little tent and whenever a caravan passed over it he would summon his comrades and loot it at some convenient spot.

He must have bent towards the spiritual life from the beginning for even as a robber he always carried a rosary in one hand and the sword in the other. He never missed his prayers on Fridays and would attend the mosque regularly. He made it compulsory on every robber of his gang, and those that did not attend were buoyed and punished. This shows his strong bent towards religion and also the hold he had upon the robbers. In fact his sovereignty over them was complete and unquestionable. He was feared, obeyed, and loved at the same time. He was a brave man of strong will and quick decision. He was born to be loved and obeyed. He had as much sway over the hearts of his followers as upon the trackless sandy desert and the thick forests where he lived and roamed at will. His life reminds one of the merry band of old Robin Hood of England, better still of the Corriars Conrad with the differences that what Conrad did in water Fazal tried on land, and while Conrad loved Medora, Fazal's love was for God, though in the beginning he was not

conscious of it. Here I will quote the inspired lines of the poet that describe the character of such passionate types. Every line of it applies to Fazal.

Who dared question aught that he decides?
That man of loneliness and mystery,
Scarce seen to smile, and seldom heard to sing;
Still sways their souls with commanding art
That dazzles, leads yet chills the vulgar heart
What is that spell, that thus the lawless train
Confess and envy yet oppose in vain?
What should it be that thus their faith can bind?
The power of thought, the magic of the Mind!
Slight are the outward signs of inner thought
Within, within 'tis there the spirit wrought!
Love shows all changes - hate, ambition, guile,
Betray no further than the bitter smile.
The lips least curl the lightest paleness thrown
Along the gov'ned aspect speak alone
Of deeper passions....
Yet was not (he) thus by nature sent
To lead the guilty - guilt's worst punishment.
His soul was changed, before his deed has driven
Him forth to war with man and forfeit heaven.
Such indeed was, Fazal the fierce Arab robber, whose name was
a terror to all pilgrims and travellers. Yet to quote the poet further
None are all evil - quickening round his heart
One softer feeling would not yet depart
Oft could he sneer at others as beguiled
By passions worthy of a fool or child
Yet 'gainst that passion vainly still he strove
And even in him it asks the name of Love.

Yes it was Love - unchangeable, unchanged
Felt but for One from whom he never Ranged.

The story of his awakening is simple.

Once a caravan was passing by the road. Fazal Ayaz was sitting in his little tent by the side of it in the garb of a sage. The merchant of the caravan had detected some suspicious movements in the thicket and fearing an attack from the robbers thought it better to deposit all the cash with this spiritual man and thus save his money. So he came with it to Fazal and requested him to keep it safe with him for some time. Fazal pointed to a corner of the tent and asked him to leave it there. Hardly had the caravan proceeded a little distance when the robbers fell upon it and ultimately bolted off with the merchandise. When they had all gone the merchant retraced his steps and went to the tent to take back his money when to his surprise he saw the tent filled with the robbers and the fakir, who seemed to be their leader, was dividing the booty among them! Realizing that he himself had placed all his money in the hands of the robber chief he was about to take to his heels when Fazal called him. He approached him trembling with fear. Fazal asked him, "Why did you come?" The merchant answered, "To take back my money." Fazal pointed out the bag to him and said, "There is your money please take it away. No body has touched it."

After the merchant left the place the robbers asked Fazal, "Why did you give him the money? You knew that we could not get much out of the caravan and it would have compensated for the meagre booty?" Fazal replied, "The merchant relied upon my Fakir's dress and it is my duty to uphold the prestige of the dress I put on." It was a strange answer from the mouth of a robber chief, and stranger still they saw him get up and pray to God to give the strength to act up to the standard of the conduct befitting

his holy dress. After this incident he began to spend much time in prayers and also observed fasts. But he did not yet give up his profession.

After some time the robbers attacked another caravan. The merchant of the caravan told the robbers that he wished to speak to their chief. They replied, "He is at this time near the river some distance off and not with us." The merchant said that he was ready to go to him if they would show the way. The robbers said, "At this time he is engaged in prayers." "But it is not prayer time yet!" argued the merchant. They replied, "He prays in extra time also." The merchant was surprised at it. He would stop to take his meal and will be free then. He insisted. The robbers had to tell him that even that was not possible for he fasted all the day. "But it is not the month of Ramzan!" said the merchant. They replied, "He fasts on other days too," On hearing this the merchant's curiosity increased still more and he insisted on meeting him so much that they took him to Fazal in the end.

On seeing Fazal the merchant asked, "How is it that you pray and fast and side by side commit theft and robbery too?" Such questions were never put to Fazal. He felt ashamed and after some time said, "Have you read the Qworan?" "Yes Fazal," replied the merchant. "Didn't you come across the passage, 'There are people that act meritoriously and also commit sins?' I am one of them," he said. The merchant was struck by the unexpected and apt quotation.

It is clear that Fazal's life had already taken a turn towards God. His central being had fixed upon the Divine, and all that was left was the natural dropping off of the former habits and the mode of life like the withered leaves from a tree. The very next incident led to a more decisive step. As he was a strong man of action it took a form characteristic of such type in whom when some layer is suddenly broken and the truth is revealed the

response too follows instantaneously and takes a passionate, active, and vigorous expression.

After some days the robbers attacked a caravan during the night. One of the occupants spoke aloud, the words of the Quoran, "Has not the time come for you to wake up from slumber even after such a long preparation?" These words had a sudden effect upon Fazal. They penetrated into him and he too answered from the depths of his heart, "Yes, the time has come. Thy words have taken hold of my heart and have wounded it." He began to weep and feeling ashamed of himself ran away into the forest. When he came out on the road again he met another caravan passing and he heard people talking among themselves, "We should be careful of the robber Fazal who lives in these forests." Hearing this Fazal replied, "Brothers, I will give you a good piece of news. Fazal has ceased to be a robber and has become an honest man. At this moment he is running away from you."

He took the way to the town and wished to go straight to the king and confess all his crimes to him and face the punishment. Some people touched by his sincerity helped him to reach to him. The king saw him and spoke to him and seeing that he had truly repented pardoned all his crimes and sent him back with honour. Thus on waking up from his slumber he took to the spiritual life truly and passionately. The long pent-up fire of aspiration drove him on, and he bravely faced all the dangers and perils of the path without flinching a bit.

When he reached his own town he shouted at the door of the house in such a manner that his family members thought that there was something wrong with him. His son called out to him "Are you wounded, father?" He answered back, "Yes." They came out and asked in which part of the body the wound was. He pointed to the heart and said, "Here it is. It is bleeding for the love of God. And hence I am going to Mecca." His wife implored him

to take her also with him and said that she was ready for every sacrifice. After some hesitation he allowed her to follow him and left for Mecca immediately, renouncing the world for ever.

At Mecca he got the company of some good Sufis of the time. He lived with Master Abu Hanif for a long time. There he got his realization after which he began to deliver sermons and discourses himself, which were so inspiring that large crowds came to attend them.

In the early part of his life at Mecca his robber friends came to him and tried to persuade him to return. He spoke to them from the top of a roof and asked them to give up their profession. In the end he prayed, "May God lead you to the right path and may you in the end do His work." When they went away disappointed towards Khurasan he kept looking in that direction and prayed for their good for a long time.

He was a severe and an austere man of moral and religious nature. His character and straightforwardness can be seen from the talk he had with the Khalif.

The Arab literature is full of the stories of Haroon-ul-Rasheed and there are innumerable stories of his going out in disguise to meet people and travellers and to do meritorious acts. Once Haroon-ul-Rasheed said to his friend, "Today I wish to meet such a sage who can give peace to my heart." His friend thought of Sufeyan, and took him there.

On hearing that the Khalif has come to see him Sufeyan welcomed him and said, "It is an honour to me that the King comes to my poor abode. Had you informed me I myself would have come over to your place." Hearing this the Khalif said, this is not the sage whom I wish to meet to-night. Sufeyan fathoming the reason said, "Then I think the sage you need is Fazal Ayaz."

On arriving at the house of Fazal they heard him reciting the following verse of the Quoran. "The people who are not on

my path think that I will take them as those who are on the right path." Hearing this Haroon-ul-Rasheed said, "If the words I hear are well pondered over it would be more than sufficient advice for me to follow. They alighted and knocked at the door. Fazal asked, "who wants me?" The reply was, "Haroon-ul-Rasheed." Fazal said, "The king wants me! I have no business with the king. Kindly do not disturb me in the work on hand and draw me to other things." His friend replied, "You should honour the king." Fazal said, "Kindly do not come in my way." But on further insistence he allowed them to enter but blew out the lamp so that he may not see the face of the king. Haroon-ul-Rasheed had to take the hand of the sage in his hand in darkness. Fazal remarked, "What a soft hand! Such a hand should try to save itself from the hell fire." He got up and prayed for them. After finishing, the Khalif asked him to say some thing. Fazal replied, "Your father was the uncle of the Prophet. He requested the Prophet to make him the king. The Prophet replied, "Dear uncle, I think it is better to devote oneself to finding God rather than to reigning and serving people for a thousand years. I do not make you the ruler of the country but certainly I will give you the rule over your mind."

After saying this Fazal became quiet. Haroon-ul-Rasheed asked him to say something more. Fazal then delivered a short sermon asking the Khalif to look upon his subjects as his own family members and ended by saying, "Fear God and act with care and patience, remember the day of judgment when you will have to answer for all your acts. Today if a single old woman is suffering for want of food and does not get sleep you too will be held responsible at that time, and she will accuse you before God." Haroon-ul-Rasheed began to weep and his friend said, "Fazal, you have killed the king today." To which Fazal replied, "You Hamman, be silent!" You and the men of your type have

murdered the Khalif, not I." Haroon-ul-Rasheed felt humbled and said, "See, he considers you a Hamman and me a Firoun."¹

While leaving Fazal, Haroon asked him, to accept a purse of a thousand gold coins and said that they were well earned as he inherited them from his mother. Fazal was pained and said, "I see that there is no effect of my advice upon you. I wanted to draw you to liberation and you are drawing me to your wrong way, and in return want to burden me with money. Alas! I see that you have not understood me." When Khalif came out of the house he said, "Today I have met a great soul."

Fazal remained for thirty years in retirement. His sayings are of the following type: "The world is a mad house. Those who live in it are lunatics. They have fetters on their hands and feet."

"It is easy to enter the world and its affairs but hard to come out of it. Greater the love for God and the higher spheres, greater is ones renunciation."

"The only truly surrendered to God are those who have no cause of complaint."

Fazal did not like the company of men and preferred solitude. His ways were different from those of ordinary men. On the day of his son's death he felt gay and happy while he often wept and felt sad on days of rejoicing and festivities.

Fazal had two daughters; they remained unmarried upto the time of his death. When he was on his death bed his wife brought them to him and said, "Now you are going, tell me what I am to do with them." As Fazal had never kept any money with him nor accepted big gifts there was nothing with them even to provide for their maintenance, not to say of the marriage. Fazal was calm and collected and answered quietly, "When I am dead take them on the top of the yonder mountain and pray to God, "Oh God, as Thou wast pleased to take away Fazal from us and

¹ Firoun was a misguided, proud and faithless ruler whom Moses challenged.

call him to Thy own self take charge of these two children also in Thy own hands." After his death his wife acted accordingly. She took them on the mountain and prayed and lamented loudly, and it so happened that the king went riding there and hearing the lamentations of a woman came to the spot and heard her story. To the surprise of all he said that he would get her daughters married to his two sons. A palanquin was ordered for, and they were taken to the palace and after some time, married with great pomp.

The life of Fazal and other similar saints makes the spiritual fact clear to us that spirituality does not depend upon outer circumstances of a man's life, and it is interesting to see how the inner spirit struggles to come out, and with what patience and persistence it breaks through the hard layers of unyielding nature, and ultimately triumphs over all external resisting circumstances and manifests its inner truth. The character of its expression is however greatly influenced by these outer elements, but the inner spirit always remains the same, whatever be the profession, religion, or the country to which one may belong. □

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When the mind becomes absorbed, a shining light is first experienced in the mystic vision... With this vision, there comes a kind of higher and nobler joy, and the mind is reluctant to give up this joy and move onward. But if the aspirant goes further, the vision of the light will be concentrated into the form of the Chosen Ideal and the mind becomes merged in his consciousness.

Swami Brahmananda

Programme for May - June 2012

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

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May	6	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 5	Swami Dayatmananda
May	13	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 6	Swami Dayatmananda
May	20	Raja Yoga 13	Swami Shivarupananda
May	27	Day Retreat	
June	3	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 7	Swami Dayatmananda
June	10	Raja Yoga 14	Swami Shivarupananda
June	17	Raja Yoga 15	Swami Shivarupananda
June	24	Raja Yoga 16	Swami Shivarupananda

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 27 May from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

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

Vedanta Study Circle in Cheshire Area

May 20 at 11:00 am

The Way of the Supreme Spirit - Swami Dayatmananda

June 10 at 11:00 am

All About the Gayatri Mantra - Swami Dayatmananda

For information contact Mr Aswani (tel: 01625 527075)

between 9.30 pm - 10.30 pm

continued from the front cover

worshipped. The stranger asked him further, "Whom are you living with?" He only said the word "brother."

"Sometimes the paramahansa behaves like a madman. When I experienced that divine madness I used to worship my own sexual organ as the Siva - phallus. But I can't do that now. A few days after the dedication of the temple at Dakshineswar, a madman came there who was really a sage endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman. He had a bamboo twig in one hand and a potted mango - plant in the other, and was wearing torn shoes. He didn't follow any social conventions. After bathing in the Ganges he didn't perform any religious rites. He ate something that he carried in a corner of his wearing - cloth. Then he entered the Kali temple and chanted hymns to the Deity. The temple trembled.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, July 3, 1884

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If you know you have bad impressions, there is no cause for worry. Begin to correct them from today onward. Whatever is done is done. Don't look back. Create a set of new impressions. After a few days you will find that the old bad impressions are being replaced by good ones.

Swami Turiyananda



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