

Vedanta

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How Illumined Souls Live In This World

Swami Yatiswarananda

The Inner Voice

Gerald Heard



Divine Wisdom

Teachings of Swami Akhandananda

It is said in the Isavasya-Upanishad, 'Those that do not struggle after self-realization destroy themselves. It is better for one to die in an attempt to know the Self.'

What is the Self? First, the Self has to be heard, then It has to be thought upon and lastly, It has to be meditated upon.

Yajnavalkya explains this to Maitreyi, his wife: 'The Self is the dearest of all. Everything is dear because of the Self. The husband is not dear because of the husband, but because of the Self. The wife is not dear because of the wife, but because of the Self.' And so on.

This Self alone IS. Nothing else exists. Everything is for the Self and goes back to the Self. The divine soul is sleeping in everyone. It is to be roused. Everyone is always trying to express that Self—this struggling is Sadhana.

Whatever you are doing is Sadhana—only sometimes it is done consciously, at other times unconsciously. When that Self is realized, you will feel Its presence everywhere. This is Siddhi (Perfection). The goal is to reach this state. Everybody must get back this realization, because that is our real nature. Never think 'I cannot do this, I am weak'. Whenever you are in dejection always remember what the Lord has declared in the Gita:

'Do not be under the spell of unmanliness; it does not befit you. Shake off this mean faint-heartedness and get-up, O Hero'

Is it so easy to realize the Self? Incarnations (Avatars) of God are God Himself, yet they themselves have to struggle so much, not to speak of others.

There is no other way. Call upon God with all your heart. Go on telling Him, 'Show Thyself to me.'

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Editorial

Lead Us From the Unreal To the Real

Prayer is a constitutional necessity of man. So long as man is in bondage he has endless desires and every desire is a prayer. Only a liberated person is beyond all desires (*akama-hatah*). Even though man may have a million desires the essence of every desire is : 'May I become God, may I become the Infinite'. In Sanskrit the name for God is *sat-chit-ananda* i.e., Absolute Being, Absolute consciousness, and Absolute Bliss. In other words man desires to become God.

We are all advised to have self-control, to remain calm, collected and serene. Many of us are also spiritual aspirants trying to practise concentration and meditation. But alas, our minds are so restless! Even after so many years of spiritual practice we are unable to remain calm. Why? The answer is restlessness; it is the state of all persons who are in bondage.

Why is the mind so restless? Because of countless desires. Why do we have so many desires? The simple answer is because we have forgotten our true nature. Every religion tells us that we are divine. We have fallen into the trap of *Maya*, ignorance. *Maya* makes us forget our real nature, but not totally. Though we are not conscious, our spiritual nature (God) haunts us; it is simply impossible for us to forget our nature.

Swami Ashokananda puts it so beautifully:

We cannot really, totally forget God; we cannot totally forget our own real Self. You know the Vedantic theory is that our present state is due to the forgetfulness of our spiritual nature. But our forgetfulness of God has never been total; and it is because of this that we cling to existence. God, or our own Self, is infinite being; therefore we cling to life, as that is what being means to us; we hate death. We are infinite; therefore we want to be liked by everyone; we want to feel at home with everyone, at one with everyone.

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We are Souls not the miserable bodies and minds. The human soul is eternal and immortal, perfect and infinite. This longing to remember and regain our true nature will be haunting us until we reach the goal, until we realise we are the Self. It is this longing which expresses in the form of innumerable desires. This teleological urge will not go away until we reach the goal. This unconscious longing and how to remember our forgotten divinity is the theme of every scripture, specially the Upanishads. All nature is crying through all the atoms for one thing--its perfect freedom.

It is this longing of every human being that is so beautifully expressed in the form of prayer in one of the great Upanishads

OM asato ma sad gamaya

Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya

Mrityorma amritam gamaya

Om! From ignorance, lead me to Truth;

From darkness, lead me to Light;

From death, lead me to Immortality.

(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.3.28)

From ignorance, lead me to Truth

We read in the Bhagavad-Gita:

This Self is never born, nor does it die. It is not that having been it again ceases to be. Even as a man casts out worn-out clothes, and puts on others which are new, so the embodied self casts out worn-out bodies, and enters into others which are new.

"This Self weapons cut not, fire burns not, water wets not, wind dries not. This Self cannot be cut, nor burnt, nor wetted, nor dried; changeless, all-pervading, unmoving, unmoved, the Self is eternal.

We are ignorant of our true nature and ignorance is misery, ignorance is suffering, ignorance is death. We cannot be satisfied even if we own the whole world, because the world is

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finite. Every object in this world is fleeting, ephemeral and brings misery in its wake.

As Swami Vivekananda puts : *The infinite human soul can never be satisfied but by the Infinite itself. . . . Infinite desire can only be satisfied by infinite knowledge--nothing short of that. ..Happiness comes with a crown of misery on its head.*

This is the nature of all objects in this world; it is a world of death, unreality. So the prayer wells up; lead me from the unreal to the Real.

What is it that keeps us in Maya? What is it that prevents us from getting out of this inscrutable Maya? Our evil actions, *Karma*.

Therefore the prayer also means, 'Lead me from evil actions to righteous actions. Lead me away from those actions that drag me into *Maya* and inspire me with those actions which gradually help me break the bondage of *Maya*. Sri Ramakrishna advises us to overcome *Avidya Maya* through *Vidya Maya*, to overcome the unripe ego through ripe ego.

From darkness, lead me to Light

Darkness means ignorance and light means knowledge. According to *Advaita Vedanta* we do not become Divine. We are already Divine, nothing but Divine; we are *sat-chit ananda*, *Absolute Existence*, *Absolute Knowledge*, *Absolute Bliss*.. Only we have forgotten our real nature. So we do not need to become the *Atman*. We just need to refresh our memory, remember our real nature. God's grace does not make us Divine; grace just removes the veil hiding our Divine nature. All spiritual practices are meant to remove this veil of *Maya*, veil of ignorance.

From death, lead me to Immortality

Death here means ignorance, misery and suffering. Death means limitation. All our struggles in life are to get rid of this

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limitation and become free. What we call happiness is really a struggle to get out of limitation, to become free. We eat when we are hungry and drink when thirsty, sleep when tired. Eating, drinking etc do not give us happiness but merely free us from the limitation imposed upon our happiness. Happiness is our real nature. Every object in this world only acts as a remover of limitations.

Freedom, O Freedom! Freedom, O Freedom!" is the song of the soul. Freedom is the ultimate goal of life. What is called biological evolution is another name for attaining more freedom from physical limitations. Moral evolution is the attempt to transcend the limitations of individuality. Spiritual evolution is to know that the whole world is *One*, and to realise that I am that *One*. When I know 'I am the *One*' there will be no more desires. Then I go beyond all misery. This Absolute freedom is from all limitations, is Bliss.

So this prayer of the Upanishad is the only prayer of every being in this world. The whole world is evolving towards this goal of realising its forgotten Divinity.

Presenting the '*Paper on Hinduism*' at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 Swami Vivekananda cries out:

"...Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again."

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"Children of immortal bliss" --what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name--heirs of immortal bliss--Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the word they use for it is therefore, Mukti--freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery.

Let us pray that the Divine Lord may give us right understanding and lead us from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light and from misery to Bliss.

One cannot understand Siva unless one sees the Himalayas. The Himalayas are the image of Siva. Siva, Siva-Sankara! Siva, Siva-Sankara! How beautiful is Siva! The Master showed me the living Siva. He took me to the temple of Kali at Dakshineswar and said, 'Lo! there lying down is the living Siva.' Oh, what a sight I saw that day! What joy and bliss the Master poured into my heart!

Later Swamiji showed me the living Siva in every creature—Jive Jive Siva—in all that are helpless, poor, suffering, unfed, unclad. All these are the veritable forms of Narayana—God in human form. Swamiji's way of looking at them was quite different from that of others.

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Intellectual Knowledge And Spiritual Illumination

Illumined souls are those whose consciousness has been lighted up by the self-effulgent light of Truth, the Supreme Divine Reality, called variously as God, Brahman, Jehovah, Allah. We must, however, carefully distinguish between mere theoretical knowledge and the knowledge which follows actual experience. Book-learning is often mistaken for the highest knowledge, but intellectual knowledge about the ultimate Reality is totally different from its direct realization. There is a world of difference between the man of realization and the mere intellectual.

While the former is one who is 'Free from imperfections and doubts, with senses controlled, and engaged in the good of all beings', the latter may, as Sri Ramakrishna points out, be no better than the vulture which soars indeed high in the sky but has its gaze only on the charnel pit down below, intellectually he may be dabbling with the highest truths, but his heart may always be set on petty, selfish gains.

Hindu teachers always draw a distinction between the two kinds of knowledge – the *Para Vidya* and the *Apara Vidya*, the higher and the lower. The lower is the theoretical knowledge of the scriptures and related subjects like phonetics, prosody, grammar etc.. The higher is that knowledge by which the Supreme Spirit is known or realized.

There is a great risk of being lost in this lower knowledge which certainly holds a great attraction for our superficially inquisitive minds. We would do well to realise its severe limitation. This truth is pointed out by Sri Ramakrishna in a homely parable :

A Pundit was once crossing the Ganges in a boat. Fond of displaying his erudition, he was asking a fellow-passenger, 'Do you

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know the Vedanta?' 'No, revered Sir,' was the reply. 'The Samkhya and the Yoga? 'No, revered Sir.' The fellow-passenger was ignorant of all philosophies. As the Pundit was talking in this strain, there arose a great storm and the boat was about to sink, when in his turn, the passenger asked, 'Sir, can you swim?' 'No' replied the Pundit. 'I don't know the Vedanta, Samkhya or Yoga' said the passenger but 'I know how to swim.'

If one does not know how to cross the waters of *Maya* or *Samsara*, no amount of scriptural erudition would be of any avail.

When M., the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, met Sri Ramakrishna soon after their first acquaintance, the Master, among other things, inquired about M.'s wife : Tell me, what kind of person is your wife. Has she spiritual attributes, or is she under the power of *Avidya*?' M. replied, 'She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant.' M. was a highly educated man, the Head-master of a high school, and so described his wife as ignorant. But sharp came the Master's admonition, 'And you are a man of knowledge!' M.'s ego was then badly shocked, but later on he learnt that to know God is knowledge, and not to know Him is ignorance.

The *Chandogya Upanishad* relates an episode which drives home the same point: Narada – who later became one of the greatest illumined souls of all time – approached the sage Sanatkumara, as a student and asked for instruction. The teacher inquired, 'What have you already studied?' Narada replied that he had mastered all the branches of learning--art, science, music, philosophy and the sacred scriptures. 'But' said he, 'I have gained no peace. I have studied all this, but I have not known the Self. I have heard that he who knows the Self overcomes grief. Grief is ever my lot. Help me, I pray you, to overcome it.' And, the essence of the teacher's instruction in reply was:

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The Infinite alone is bliss. There is no bliss in the finite. Realise the Infinite.

Narada did realise the Infinite and thus became illumined. His heart was filled with love for all distressed beings. He became a teacher of the highest knowledge and devotion, and helped many to rise above all grief by realising the Divine Bliss.

Thus, it is the knowers of Truth that are the 'Illumined souls', even as Christ has said: Ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free.

The Active And Quiet Types Of Illumined Souls

Among the illumined souls, there is the active type and also the quiet type. About them, Sri Ramakrishna tells us:

There are two classes of Paramahamsas. Those belonging to the first, care for their own good alone. They feel satisfied if they themselves attain the goal. But there are others who even after attaining the knowledge of Brahman, remain on this plane so that they may teach spiritual truths to others. These perfected souls describe to others the various spiritual disciplines by which they have realized God. They do this only to teach others and to help them in spiritual life. Some eat mangoes secretly and remove all trace of them by wiping their mouths with a towel. But some share the fruit with others. They are sages, who, even after attaining knowledge, work to help others and also to enjoy the Bliss of God in the company of devotees.

He also relates the parable of the three friends who once saw a place enclosed by a wall. The wall was very high and they were all eager to know what was on the other side. One of them climbed to the top of the wall. What he saw on looking inside made him speechless with wonder. He only cried, 'Ah, Ah!', and jumped in. The others, too, did the same. Now, who could tell what was inside?

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Fortunately all illumined souls are not like that. Some can and do come back to tell us of the mysteries beyond, and help us also to experience them. They are our greatest teachers. But, in our gratitude and admiration for them, we must not fail to appreciate also the greatness of the quiet or contemplative type of enlightened souls. Let us not be thoughtless enough to call the latter selfish. By living and realising the spiritual ideal, they make it a blessing for us. Their powerful spiritual thoughts purify the mental atmosphere and fertilize the soil necessary for the growth of spiritual men and women. Their active spiritual vibrations ever support us in our spiritual endeavours and struggles. The power of silent spiritual thought and realisation is too great to be underestimated.

In all great religions we find both the active or practical type and the silent or contemplative type of mystic. There were many ascetics in the Hindu and Buddhist faiths, the desert-fathers and pillar-saints in Christianity, and in Islam the Sufi saints who withdrew from social life and dedicated themselves exclusively to a life of contemplation. They are like some of the wonderful desert flowers, which without being seen by any human eye disappear completely but leave their lovely fragrance in the air.

Lao Tse And Confucius

Thus, among the great sages of China, we have Lao Tse, the quiet mystic, and Confucius the active humanist who was very deeply interested in social stability. While very little is known of Lao Tse, there are many biographical works about Confucius.

Lao Tse's greatest interest was the realisation of the transcendent and immanent Spirit – the Tao :

*'There is a Being wondrous and complete,
Before heaven and earth, It was.
How calm It is How Spiritual.*

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*Even if one has but a little knowledge,
one can walk in the way of the Great Supreme.
Get into harmony with the Tao-the Great Spirit in things – and you will
be unconsciously impelled to right action.*’, was his teaching.

He presents the ideal of illumination and the illumined man when he says :

*Banish (mere worldly) wisdom,
Discard (mere theoretical) knowledge,
Reveal thy Simple Self,
Embrace thy Original Nature,
Check thy selfishness,
Curtail thy desires.*

He further adds :

*The wise one does not know many things,
He who knows many things is not wise.
The sage does not accumulate (for himself)
And grows richer himself;
He gives to other people, And has greater abundance.
The Tao of Heaven Blesses, but does not harm.
The way of the Sage
Accomplishes, but does not contend.*

The wise one too, blesses like the Tao, for he is a channel through which the Tao acts.

As distinct from Lao Tse, Confucius held that, To find the central clue to our moral being which unites us to the universal order, that indeed is the highest human achievement.

He too became illumined in his own way. At the age of seventy, he declared :

At fifteen I began to be seriously interested in study. At thirty I had formed my character. At fifty I knew the will of heaven. At sixty nothing that I heard disturbed me. At seventy I could let my thoughts wander without trespassing the moral law.

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The stability of the Chinese society is greatly due to the teachings of Confucius. But Lao Tse, too, left his great contribution to Chinese and world Spiritual culture. Only one like him, devoted to quietude, contemplation and illumination could write the book of Tao.

For the all-round welfare of the world, we need both the Lao Tse and Confucius types--the contemplative and active types of illumined soul.

Just as in the case of Taoism and Confucianism, all the world religions have the ideal of perfection and of the perfect man.

The Buddha And The Ideal Of Perfection In Buddhism

Buddhism declares that

He who has removed from himself all sinfulness, who is free from impurity, who is self-restrained, who is an accomplished master of knowledge, who has fulfilled the duties of holiness, such may justly call himself a first-class person. Who is deep in wisdom and intelligence, who with skill can discern the right and wrong, who has attained the highest goal, him I deem a first-class person.

Buddha himself never spoke of God. To him, Truth was the transcendental reality beyond the one and the many, beyond God, the Creator, the souls and the universe. This realisation gave him a superhuman stability, transforming him from Gautama into the Buddha, the Enlightened one.

A thoughtless man, learning that the Buddha followed the golden rule of returning good for evil, came and abused him. The Buddha remained calm and silent, pitying the folly of the man. When the man finished his abuse, the Buddha asked him : 'Son, if a person declined to accept a gift made to him, to whom would it belong?' The man replied, 'In that case, it would belong to the man who offered it.' 'My son', the Buddha said, 'You have abused me, but I decline to accept your abuse,

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and request you to keep it yourself.' The man became silent and went away ashamed. But he came again and took refuge in the Buddha.

Kisa Gotami had but one son and he died. Drowned in grief, she took the dead child to all her neighbours asking them for medicine to cure the child. They naturally concluded that she was out of her mind. Someone, however, directed her to the Buddha. She went to him and beseeched: 'Master, give me the medicine that will cure my child.' He answered : 'Bring me a handful of mustard seed but it must be from a house where none has lost a child, husband, parent or friend.' Gotami went from door to door for the mustard seed. Pitying her, people readily offered her the mustard seed, but not a house was there where some dear one had not been carried away by death. At the end of this futile quest, knowledge dawned upon her. She realised that death was common to all and that she had been too selfish in her grief. And seeking the path that leads one to immortality out of the valley of death and desolation, she put away her selfish attachment to the child, returned to the Buddha, and took refuge in him.

It was in this gentle fashion that the Buddha brought home to her the inevitability of death. His compassion was so great that he would not be harsh even in preaching what is a universal truth. His heart was so full with love and sympathy for the suffering creatures that he declared on another occasion, May all the evils and sufferings of the world come to me. May the world be saved.

Christ And The Christian Ideal

Christianity declares that the perfect man is poor in spirit, meek, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, is merciful, pure in heart, and perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect.

Christ taught :

I am in my Father, ye in me, and I in you. I and my father are one. Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

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Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha – all devotees of Jesus—was sick and the sisters sent word to Christ. Christ knew that ‘the sickness was not unto death but ‘for the glory of the Lord, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby’. He went. ‘Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may awaken him out of his sleep.’ By that time, Lazarus was ‘dead’ and was put into the grave. The sisters met Christ and in great grief said, ‘Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.’ When Jesus saw Mary weeping as also the Jews who were with her, he also wept. Then, he called forth in a loud voice : ‘Lazarus, come forth’, and Lazarus came forth from the grave

We see here the tremendous sympathy of Jesus, as also his consciousness of the power within him born of divine perfection.

The Islamic Ideal And Mohammed

According to Islam piety does not consist in merely turning one’s face towards the east or west. He is pious who believes in God : who, for the love of God, disburses his wealth to kindred and to orphans and the needy, who observes prayer, who is patient under ills and hardships and in times of trouble, and who fears the Lord.

Mohammed had an abiding faith in God.

A Bedouin one day found him alone and was about to attack him. ‘Who is going to save you?’ he asked, Mohammed replied ‘God’. The sword dropped. Mohammed seized it, and brandishing it, asked in turn, ‘Who is going to save you?’ Came the desperate answer, ‘None, O Mohammed!’ At that Mohammed declared ‘Then learn from me of Divine Mercy.’

At another time Mohammed and a follower were in hiding. The enemies came near them. The follower said: ‘We two are alone.’ Mohammed replied, ‘Why, we are not two, we are three!’ On another occasion, he declared, ‘There is no private discourse among three persons

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but He (meaning God) is the fourth of them. He is with them, wheresoever they be.'

The Vedantic Ideal

Vedanta presents the highest type of the illumined soul. 'Verily', declares the *Mundaka Upanishad*, 'he becomes Brahman who realises Brahman. He overcomes evil and transcends grief. Being free from all knots of the heart, he attains to immortality'.

Reaching the highest state of superconsciousness, he transcends the phenomena which may totally disappear for him. By this experience, his entire attitude to and outlook on life are transformed. Even when he comes down to the plane of the external world, the transcendental experience persists. He remains but the witness of all phenomena.

Of such a one, the *Bhagavad Gita* says :

When a man has cast away all the desires of his heart and feels satisfied in the Self alone, then he is said to be one of steady wisdom. Having realised in the transcendental state, the Self dwelling equally in all, he hates none and is friendly and compassionate towards all. He is free from the feelings of 'I' and 'mine.' Even-minded in pain and pleasure, forbearing, ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm convictions, he has his mind and intellect fixed on the Divine.

No more need he strive to assert the reality of the Self; he has become totally established in it. He has also gone beyond all moral conflicts inevitable for the struggling aspirant. As Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Like an expert dancer, he can never take a false step', though he does not, or need not, struggle to follow set rules laboriously like the beginner. Having eliminated all evils through incessant moral and spiritual striving, in the state when he is somewhat conscious of the external world, only the good desires present in him just before his attainment of illumination remain. Really speaking, he has gone beyond distinctions of

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relative good and evil. But, as Professor Max Muller correctly observes:

This is never intended as freedom in the sense of licence, but as freedom that can neither lapse into sinful acts, nor claim any merit for good acts, being at rest and blessed in itself and Brahman.

With the attainment of the *summum bonum* of life, all selfish interest has ceased for him. If such illumined souls live, it is only to bring light to others and to promote their welfare; their life is but the fulfilment of some cosmic purpose. Whatever mode of life they follow, the contemplative type or the active, they always set the ideal of perfection for others who are still in darkness. Their very presence is a blessing to mankind. They promote the good of the world even through silence.

Among the Hindus one finds a variety of the supremely illumined from the most ancient times down to modern days.

Alexander, in the midst of his ruthless military campaigns in India, heard of a great Indian sage. Drunk with his victories, he sent a messenger to the sage with the ultimatum that if the sage would go to Alexander, he would be rewarded with splendid gifts; if not, his head would be cut off. But the sage only smiled at this grim message and replied : All the gifts and promises of Alexander are to me utterly useless. Should he cut off my head, he cannot destroy my soul. The soul will go away to its Master, leaving the body like a worn-out garment. Let him terrify those who wish for gold and wealth and who dread death. I have no need of any of Alexander's things and therefore will not go to him. But if he wants anything from me, let him come here.

Strong with the strength born of illumination, he was more than a match for the Conqueror.

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Sankara And Ramanuja

In his *Viveka Chudamani* or 'the Crest-Jewel of Discrimination', Sankaracharya (8th century) describes the man of illumination in these words :

Great souls, calm and magnanimous, do good to others as does the spring. Having themselves crossed the dreadful ocean of death, they help others to cross the same, without any selfish motive. It is the nature of the magnanimous to move of their own accord toward removing others' troubles.

Sankara himself was one such. Having attained the highest spiritual illumination he engaged himself in the active service of humanity going about the length and breadth of the vast Indian sub-continent even in those days of extremely difficult travel conditions. Spreading the Truth among the people, giving a higher turn to their spiritual ideas and ideals, composing a number of philosophical works of the highest wisdom and hymns of the deepest devotion, he held before the people the ideal of true spirituality.

Ramanujacharya (11th century) emphasized the path of devotion and service to the Lord in a spirit of self-surrender as the best means to salvation. Spiritual experience brought to his heart an unbounded compassion.

While initiating him into the Holy Name of the Lord, which would destroy all one's sins, Ramanuja's Guru strictly forbade him to disclose it to anyone else. If he disobeyed, he would go to hell. But Ramanuja's compassion made him feel that if the Holy Name could save those who repeated it, then he would give it to as many as possible and would enable them to save themselves by it. If this meant transgressing the Guru's instructions and going to hell, he would gladly do so. So, he climbed to the top of a temple tower, and joyously summoning one and all to him, he revealed to them the holy Mantra given by his Guru.

Pavahari Baba—The Silent Contemplative

Pavahari Baba (19th Century) was of the silent, contemplative type. Swami Vivekananda spoke of him as a man of wonderful humility and self-realisation.

'One day a thief came to steal from his Ashrama, but when he saw the saint, he became frightened and fled leaving the things he had collected in a bundle behind. The saint, however, picked it up and ran after the thief. Afraid of being caught, the thief ran harder and harder : but so did the Baba and ultimately caught up with him. Imagine the thief's surprise when the saint laid the bundle at his feet, and with folded hands and tearful eyes told him: 'O Lord, forgive me for intruding. Pray accept these things which belong to you and not to me.'

His spiritual realisation made him actually see the Lord in all beings.

When Vivekananda asked him why he did not come out of his seclusion in his cave to help the world, he replied :

Do you think that physical help is the only help possible? Is it not possible that one mind can help other minds, even without the activity of the body? At another time, in reply to a question as to why he, the perfected Yogi, was performing some rituals and worship meant only for beginners, he said :

Why do you take for granted that everybody makes karma only for his own good? Cannot one perform karma for others? Once, bitten by a cobra, he was given up for hours as dead. But he revived and when asked about it, he replied that the cobra was 'a messenger from the Beloved'.

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Sri Ramakrishna

In Sri Ramakrishna, we find a wonderful example of the attainment and manifestation of the highest spiritual consciousness in a variety of aspects. Whether indrawn or conscious of the external world, he would see the same Divine Spirit in all beings. Even in a fallen woman he saw the same Divine Mother. The highest manifestation he found in human beings. One day, when he was in an exalted mood, he proclaimed:

To speak of 'mercy' to creatures! No! It is not mercy, not mercy, but service to the God in man.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great Bengali play-wright and actor, was one of those whose life was totally transformed on coming into contact with Sri Ramakrishna. He was an out-and-out bohemian given to a variety of vices: but through the grace of the Master, he was lifted up from the depths of his moral degradation to the rare heights of devotion and complete self-surrender to God.

One day, under the influence of drink, he abused the Master in such shocking language that the other devotees were about to punish him, but the Master himself held them back. He kept quiet knowing that at heart Girish was tender and sincere. Meanwhile Girish himself did not feel any remorse until others made him understand what he had done. One of the devotees remarked to the Master: 'After all what Girish has is only poison, what else could he give you?' He was urged not to visit Girish anymore. But his characteristic reply was: 'Just hear his words. Get me a Coach. I shall go to Girish's house today!' And, heedless of the mid-day sun, he went to Girish's. There, finding him full of anguish and remorse, he comforted him saying: 'Girish, don't worry about it; people will be astonished at the marvellous change that will come over you.' And so it was.

Swami Yatiswarananda

The illumined souls are never moved by personal honour or insult; they shower their compassion and grace on all who need it even if they are the worst sinners.

Sri Sarada Devi

Sri Sarada Devi, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna, was the embodiment of purity. As a girl, she used to pray :

Even in the moon there are dark spots. May my mind be absolutely spotless.

After the Master's passing, by virtue of her own spiritual illumination, she became a great spiritual teacher bringing light and peace to many.

Her great Mother's heart knew no bounds. When someone protested against her blessing a young man gone astray, she said bluntly:

If my son rolls in dirt, even then he is my child. I shall wash him and take him in my lap.

A lady devotee once complained to her : 'Mother, you cannot see the defects of others.' The Mother replied:

'There is no lack of people to see the faults of others The world will not come to a standstill if I am otherwise.' Her last message, as it were, to all who have ears to hear was : If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. This whole world is your own.

Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda, the greatest of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, made it the mission of his life to instil into humanity, by word and deed, the ideal of the service of God in man. 'First, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods' was

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his message and motto. His mighty heart bleeding for the poor, the down-trodden and the suffering made him declare :

May I be born again and again and suffer a thousand miseries if only I am able to worship the only God in whom I believe, the Sum total of all souls, and above all my God the wicked, my God the afflicted, my God the poor of all races.

Speaking of the illumined man, himself being one such, he said:

He works only to do good, his lips speak only benediction to all, his hands do only good works, his mind can think only good thoughts, his presence is a blessing wherever he goes. He is himself a living blessing. Such a man will, by his very presence, change even the most wicked persons into saints. Even if he does not speak, his very presence will be a blessing to mankind.

These illumined souls belong to all humanity. They cut across all divisions of race, religion, sex or caste. Having attained to the Divine, they have become the Divine, and as such, one with the souls of all. During our moral and spiritual struggles, during our periods of doubts and darkness, let us remember them, and find new strength, hope and light. May they bless us all. May we follow in their footsteps and become, in our own humble way, blessings to ourselves and blessings to our fellow-beings.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, May 1953-54)

Chaitanyadeva came specially to preach the glory of God's name and he says: You have so many names and each one of Your names is filled with power. There is no prescribed time and place to repeat and remember Your name. You are so kind. Yet, oh Lord, I am so unfortunate that I have no love for any of Your names.

Swami Akhandananda

The Inner Voice

Gerald Heard

A man went out to a shrine to pray. Three demons saw him approaching and decided to waylay him. They were of different ages and of course, as all devils are liars, the youngest looked the oldest and the oldest the youngest. Thus, the oldest one, had then the right of precedence. And certainly, because of his disguise, he looked the most presentable.

"Where are you going?" he remarked to the man as he met him in the path. "Oh," said the man, just a little discomposed by meeting a stranger and being asked a personal question, "oh, I thought I'd just stroll out and have a look at a little shrine that's out in this direction. It's a pretty little place, I believe, and felt I needed a quiet walk in the country. Good for one's peace of mind, you know!" "You look all right; shouldn't have thought with your looks you needed rest, retirement. If you're feeling gloomy, it isn't solitude that will set you up. It's company you need. Why, I can see at a glance, you're the type of man who pines when left alone and is the life and soul of good company. Someone has been putting inferiority feelings into your mind telling you you're a failure, that people don't like you and all that. Just jealousy. Don't let it fool you, a fine handsome obviously popular person like you. Forgive the personality, but to tell the truth I not only took to you the moment I saw you but I got the feeling that you'd been hipped over something. Solitude's all right for mopes but not for he-men. Look, I'm just going along to a party, it's going to be fun. There's only one thing that isn't quite right. There are a lot of first-rate girls coming but we're a little short on the men. Won't you help us out?"

The man wavered. Perhaps after all, a party would prove more helpful than prayer, if he was really the sort of man who was a party success. But he couldn't help doubting that; in spite of the kind words and generous offer of this nice, well-set-up

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stranger. "You see," he said, "though no doubt I look all right, may be quite passable, the truth is I'm far from strong. My doctor has told me that late nights are quite wrong for me. Indeed it was he who told me that I ought to take this quiet walk every now and then. Thank you so much, I must be getting on."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." The handsome devil's face registered the most courteous consideration. "Of course I should have noticed. Forgive my selfishness. I was so keen on getting a few good-lookers together for our little dance. Of course good looks like yours so often deceive – the typical T.B. appearance. Of course you are right to take care. But are you sure a damp wood is the right thing for you and a long walk? Exertion is the consumptive's most insidious enemy. Rest is your ally. Come along with me. I know of a wonderful physician who's had amazing successes with cases such as yours. He's told me he's saved innumerable lives with just one simple motto regularly applied, 'Avoid Any Effort.' Come along." The demon took his arm. "You lean on me. I'm a close personal friend of this great specialist. I know if I turn up with you, though he's so busy he'll make time to see you."

But the man somehow didn't like the touch of his new friend. "Excuse me, perhaps later, but just now I think I'll think over your kind offer" and he disengaged himself. "All right," said the demon but his voice certainly didn't sound so, "all right, you croaking old hypochondriac, no wonder you're taking to God, the *Universal Discard*, who else would want your company!" The man turned his back and the demon vanished into the bushes. As he was the senior the others kept silent and only in silence the second obeyed when the failure remarked to him, "You next."

The man therefore found himself again confronted. "I didn't know this lonely road was so popular," he remarked to himself. And the second passer-by also came up to him. This second man wasn't, surely, as handsome as the first but he was if anything

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even more reassuring. He looked so sound, sensible, shrewd a person whose advice would always be valuable. And he seemed inclined to offer it. At least he was inclined to be of service. "Have you heard the news?" he asked straight away. "I thought not," he added as the man looked blank, "or, of course, you wouldn't be sauntering out into the country on a day like this." "A day like this?" the man queried. "Why of course after all this depression and slump, the market's at last got up like a man after a long and refreshing sleep. It's kicking off its bed covers and boy! who'd be anywhere today but down in the business quarter. There's nothing underhand or get-in-first-and-leave-you-out, today. Why, it's all brotherhood, all of us together. This is the common man's day. Business wants him with his patient savings. Capital is zooming. Put your money in now and by next year why you'll be able to be a social benefactor, build a church or what have you, and never feel the pinch of giving. That's what prosperity used to be and that's what it's going to be again if people, people like you and me, aren't escapists but come right in and all pull together."

"But," said the man, trying to avoid saying where he was going, "but I don't think I want to make more money. I haven't much but it's enough. You see I like a quiet life and my, my interests really aren't economic, they're rather psychological." The other didn't seem put off. On the contrary his interest seemed to grow. He actually looked concerned. "You've only got a little?" The man became a little more defensive, "Well, as I've said, I have enough but I'm not of course a rich man with money to throw away." The other said nothing for a moment but sighed, then adding, with a gentle smile, "Yes, I can see your interests are psychological. But did you never think that you are able to have your psychological interests because of your economic security? Would you, could you care? if I may be forgiven a very crude

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and inaccurate term ? could you care for the state of your soul if the cupboard was bare?" He paused and then went on, so quietly, patiently, "And we, whom no doubt you dismiss as crude dollar-diggers, ignorant of the rich deposits of the human spirit, I wonder if it ever crosses your mind how often we spend long, wakeful nights thinking not merely of the public welfare as a whole and how trade may be stimulated and enterprise rewarded, but just of the thing you've mentioned, psychology! Do you ever think how mysterious money is, how, if again I may use a strong phrase, how sacramental, how mystical money really is? Why, Credit is just the Faith that moves mountains. And Credit like Faith is dead if it hasn't works to back it. You must show that you believe, prove it. It's just because you little people, playing for security and thinking you have it, turn your backs on your responsibilities that you wake up one fine morning to find that you've let the day of opportunity pass and the very basis of your life has gone. Then you may whistle for your peace of mind and it will be cold comfort to know that your silliness and indifference has allowed scamps to bear the market and get away with your pennies. No, my dear Sir, do your duty today, and tomorrow, once again secure by your act of faith in your fellow men and your co-operation with their effort— an effort needing constant repetition – tomorrow be free to take your quiet walk in the country and enjoy your psychological enquiries."

"Well," said the man, "thank you so much for the tip. I'll get along tomorrow and see my broker. Just today I have an engagement I really oughtn't to break," "All right," No. 2 Demon echoed his leader's tone, "all right, and only have yourself, and no one else, to blame when you wake up some fine day broke!"

He strode off and the man once again set his face toward the shrine, only, at the next turn of the path, to find a third wayfarer. He seemed in more of a hurry than the other two and almost

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passed the man before, suddenly wheeling in his tracks, he asked him, "Excuse me, have you just come from the city?" To the man's "Yes" the stranger then added another question, "I wonder whether you mightn't help me. There's an election on, municipal, most people don't pay attention. It's one of the hardest tasks of a good citizen to get men interested in their home politics. Naturally it is a difficult game, and then people think they can wash their hands of it when they've said that it's dusty and of course, when things get damp, of course a bit muddy. But you've had to have first the dirt-track before you had the cement pavement, haven't you? And what's that got to do with you? Why it's simple as pecking at pie. People are so bored with our hard work they just won't attend on real points. They vote, believe me, I know, just by faces. Now you've got just the face we want. You remind people a bit of Washington and then, in another light, of Lincoln with just a dash every now and then of Teddy Roosevelt or a gleam of Jefferson. Come along, we can put you up. We'll do all the work for you. All you have to do is to be photographed enough times and televised. We'll write the scripts for you and you'll have nothing to say but the round good stuff . . ."

"But I don't want to touch politics. I don't think people are altered that way ... " "And so you're just going to stand back, sweep your robe aside and all the dirt of politics will vanish. Because you refuse to approve, you refuse to co-operate, the horrid thing will lose face, blush and hide itself and we'll all carry on in philosophic anarchy without anything so crude as a machine or any apparatus of getting consent from the people and keeping them content at least below revolution bursting point!"

"Well," the man tried to put in but was swept aside.

"And because you are too pure and high to go in, therefore of course politics being under the ban of your disapproval no one else will dare take the place you have put under your interdict.

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The lowest type will shun what your moral anathema has declared impermissible. A vacuum of complete purity will descend on all statesmanship, on all administration! No, you're not such a hypocrite to tell yourself such a story, such a cram! You know, that, because you won't take the offered place, won't let yourself be used (and use the opportunity to do the little good that so seldom comes your way), then scamps will come in. You are not preventing evil by refusing to use mixed means—on the contrary you are leaving the door open to those who will certainly spend all their time making a mess of things to their own advantage, and, my fine pharisaic friend, will make it hot for superfine secessionists like you as soon as they catch sight of you, mark my words! You're nothing but a conscienceless, dishonest escapist!" The man was shaken by the storm of moral denunciation.

"But I don't feel fit to rule."

"Well then you show yourself fit to be kicked around. It isn't democratic to desert your social duties. This is just moral treason and you'll deserve the capital punishment that it demands."

Again the man was shaken by the moral fervour of his challenger. "I'm awfully sorry," he said. "I do see your point. It hurts me a great deal. I don't honestly see my way. I haven't a clear answer to what you say and yet I can't see it's really right to do evil that good may come or even to act without knowing what the real consequences will be. You see, when you met me I was going to ask advice on these points .. ."

"Of whom? Haven't I answered your question?"

"Well I was going to ask someone else ? I was as it happens, if you must know, going to pray!" The face of the moral reformer went purple with passion. "Hell!" he exclaimed with really intense conviction and darted off down the path.

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The man felt quite giddy and a little sick. These three people, how very odd, how very apt, how very challenging: none of them had said anything that the man himself did not in part agree with and what they had said, he found he had no clear clinching convincing answers to. They had been so sensible, so cogent. He so weak and always protesting, excusing, ill-thought-out. He had started out to pray just because he was a bit uncertain and now he was twice as uncertain. He had thought he knew what he wanted to ask and now he didn't know even that, he didn't even feel sure that he ought to be asking anything, whether he oughtn't to be getting back and doing something, either having his psychophysical health looked into, or his financial situation, or the state of the city politics, hasn't he been escaping out here, repressing the real problems? Oh what a mess he was in! He couldn't even pray now; he couldn't do anything. He stopped, exhausted, feeling at the end of his tether— the path, too, had become overgrown — he was lost. Then a voice said out of the thicket, "My child, though you didn't know the answer you knew those who came to you to prevent your coming to me did not know it. Though when you started out you thought you knew what to ask, now you know your ignorance. Now you may stay still and I will speak to you, for at last you are really silent, really listening."

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Self-confidence, self-reverence are of primary importance. Then only comes spiritual attainment. The Master used to say, 'One's Chosen Deity is one's own Self. Self-worshipping is really what is needed.

Swami Akhandananda

Illuminating Dialogues From Indian Lore

Swetaketu: 'That Thou Art'

There once lived Swetaketu the grandson of Aruna. To him his father said: "Swetaketu, lead the life of a *Brahmacharin* (celibate student under a teacher); for there is none belonging to our family, who, not having studied the *Vedas*, is a *Brahmana*, a knower of Brahman, only by birth and name." Swetaketu followed his father's behest.

He went to his teacher's house when he was twelve years old and studied the *Vedas* till he was twenty-four. Then he returned to his father, serious, considering himself well-read, and arrogant.

Father: 'Swetaketu, since you are now so serious, think yourself well-read, and are so arrogant, have you, my dear, ever asked for that instruction by which one hears what cannot be heard, by which one perceives what cannot be perceived, by which one knows what cannot be known?'

Swetaketu: 'What is that instruction, venerable sir?'

Father: 'Just as, my dear, by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is clay; just as by one nugget of gold all that is made of gold is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is gold; and just as by one nail-parer all that is made of iron is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is iron, even so, my dear, is that instruction.'

Swetaketu: 'Surely that venerable teacher did not know that. For if he had known it, why should he not have told me? Therefore do you tell me about it.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. In the beginning this universe was Being (*Sat*) alone, one only without a second. Some say that in the beginning this was non-being (*asat*) alone, one only without a second; and from that non-being, being was born. But how,

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indeed, could it be thus? How could Being be born from non-being? No, it was Being alone that existed in the beginning, one only without a second. `Sat' projected from Itself, by Its own inscrutable power called *maya*, the three elements : fire, water, and earth. After making them gross through a particular method of combination, Pure Being entered into them as the living self, like the reflection of the sun entering into water or a mirror. These three elements are present in fire, the sun, the moon and all created objects. Therefore objects, when properly understood, disappear as such and there remains nothing but the three elements, which, in their turn, are the same as *Sat*.

As all things are only modifications of Pure Being, the Knowledge of Pure Being makes them all known. Thus by the knowledge of One all things become known. The subtlest parts of fire, (ingested in the form of fat), water and food (i.e., earth) develop into speech, the *prana* and the mind, respectively.

[In order to demonstrate the latter, he continued:] A person, my dear, consists of sixteen parts. Do not eat any food for fifteen days, but drink as much water as you like. Since the *prana* consists of water, it will not be cut off if you drink water.' Swetaketu did not eat for fifteen days.

Then he came to his father and said: 'What, sir, shall I recite?'

Father : 'The *Rik*, *Yajus* and *Saman* verses.'

Swetaketu: 'They do not occur to me.'

Father : 'Just as of a great blazing fire a single coal, the size of a firefly, may be left, which would not burn much more than that, even so, my dear, of your sixteen parts only one part is left; and therefore with that one part you do not remember the *Vedas*. Now go and eat and you will understand me? Swetaketu ate and approached his father.

Illuminating Dialogues From Indian Lore

Then whatever his father asked him, he showed that he knew it.

Father: 'Just as of a great lighted fire a single coal, the size of a firefly, if left, may be made to blaze up again by adding grass to it, and will thus burn much more, even so, my dear, of your sixteen parts only one part was left, and that, when strengthened by food, blazed up. With it you now remember the Vedas. Therefore the mind consists of food, the *prana* consists of water, and speech consists of fire.

Learn from me the true nature of sleep. When a person has entered into deep sleep, as it is called, then he becomes united with Pure Being (*Sat*) he has gone to his own Self. That is why they say he is in deep sleep (*svapiti*); it is because he has gone to his own.

Just as a bird tied by a string first flies in every direction, and then finding no rest anywhere, settles down at the place where it is bound, so also the mind (i.e., individual soul reflected in the mind), my dear, after flying in every direction and finding no rest anywhere, settles down in the *prana* (Pure Being); for the mind (individual soul) is fastened to the precinct (Pure Being).

Learn from me what hunger and thirst are. When a man is hungry, as they say, it is water that has carried away what was eaten. Therefore, just as they speak of a leader of cows, a leader of horses, a leader of men, so do they speak of water as the leader of food. So, know this body to have sprung forth from a cause, for it cannot be without a root.

And where could its root be except in food (earth)? And in the same way, as food too is an offshoot, seek for water as its root. And as water too is an offshoot, seek for fire as its root. And as fire too is an offshoot, seek for Being (*Sat*) as its root. Yes, all these creatures, my dear, have their root in Being, they dwell in Being, they finally rest in Being.

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`When a man is said to be thirsty, it is fire that has carried away what was drunk by him Therefore they speak of fire as the leader of water. So, know this body to have sprung forth from a cause, for it cannot be without a root. And where could its root be except in water? And in the same way as water is an offshoot, seek for fire as its root. And as fire too is an offshoot seek for Being as its root. All these creatures have their root in Being, they dwell in Being and finally rest in Being.

`Now, that which is the subtle essence in it, all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Swetaketu.'

Swetaketu: `Please, venerable Sir, give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. As bees make honey by collecting the juices of trees located at different places, and reduce them to one form, and as these juices have no discrimination so as to be able to say: "I am the juice of this tree", or "I am the juice of that tree" Even so, indeed, all these creatures, though they reach Pure Being, do not know that they have reached Pure Being. That which is the subtle essence in it, all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Swetaketu.'

Swetaketu: 'Please, venerable sir, give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. These rivers flow, the eastern towards the east and western towards the west. They arise from the sea and flow into the sea. Just as these rivers, while they are in the sea do not know: "I am this river" or "I am that river", even so all these creatures, even though they have come from Pure Being, do not know that they have come from Pure Being. That which is the subtle essence in it, all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Swetaketu.'

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Swetaketu: 'Please, venerable sir, give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. If someone were to strike at the root of this large tree here, it would bleed but live. If he were to strike at the middle, it would bleed but live.

If he were to strike at the top, it would bleed but live. Pervaded by the living self, that tree stands firm, drinking in again and again its nourishment and rejoicing. But if the life leaves one of its branches, that branch withers; if it leaves a second, that branch withers, if it leaves the whole tree, the whole tree withers. In exactly the same manner know this: This body dies, bereft of the living self, but the living self dies not. That which is the subtle essence in it, all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Swetaketu.'

Swetaketu: 'Please give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. Bring me a fruit of that banyan tree.'

Swetaketu: 'Here it is, venerable sir.'

Father: 'Break it'

Swetaketu: 'It is broken, sir.'

Father: 'What do you see there?'

Swetaketu: 'These seeds exceedingly small'.

Father: 'Break one of these, my son.'

Swetaketu: 'It is broken.'

Father: 'What do you see there?'

Swetaketu: 'Nothing at all.'

Father: 'That subtle essence which you do not perceive there, from that very essence this great banyan tree arises. Believe me. That which is the subtle essence, in it, all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Swetaketu.'

Swetaketu: 'Please give me further instruction.'

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Father: 'So be it, my dear. Place this salt in water and then come to me in the morning.' The son did as he was told.

Father: 'Bring me the salt which you placed in the water last night.' Looking for it, Swetaketu did not find it, for it was completely dissolved.

Father: Take a sip of water from the surface. How is it?'

Swetaketu: 'It is salt.'

Father: 'Take a sip from the middle. How is it?'

Swetaketu: 'It is salt.'

Father: 'Take a sip from the bottom. How is it?'

Swetaketu: 'It is salt.'

Father: 'Throw it away and come to me. Here also, my dear, in this body you do not perceive *Sat* (Being), but It is indeed there. Now that which is the subtle essence in it, all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Swetaketu.'

Swetaketu: 'Please give me further instruction.'

Father: 'So be it, my dear. The police bring a man whom they have seized by the hand and say : "He has taken something, he has committed a theft." When he denies it, they say: "Heat the axe for him." If he has committed the theft but denies it, then he makes himself a liar. Being falseminded, he covers himself with falsehood, grasps the heated axe and is burnt. Then he is killed. But if he did not commit the theft, then he makes himself what he really is. Being pure-minded, he covers himself with truth, grasps the heated axe, and is not burnt. He is released. As that truthful man is not burnt, so also he who has known *Sat* is not born again. Thus in That (*Sat*) all that exists has its self. That is the True. That is the Self. That thou art, Swetaketu.'

Then Swetaketu understood that *Sat* from his father, yea, he understood it.

(Source : *Chandogya Upanishad*, Chapter VI.)

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, February 1974)

Reminiscences Of The Holy Mother

Kumud Bandhu Sen

Shortly after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, accompanied by Swami Yogananda¹ and some devotees and disciples of the Master, went to Vrindaban on pilgrimage. She reached there some-time in the early part of September 1886 and stayed on for nearly a year. Eleven years later, sometime in the year 1898, the Mother was staying at her Calcutta residence, where Swami Yogananda also used to stay. I used to go to the Holy Mother quite often and meet also Swami Yogananda and other direct disciples and devotees of the Master in her Calcutta residence.

I was present on one occasion when Swami Yogananda was in conversation with Girish Chandra Ghosh², Master Mahashay³, and some others. Referring to the period of the Holy Mother's stay at Vrindaban, Swami Yogananda said 'No words of consolation could soothe the Holy Mother, who was overwhelmed with grief at the Master's passing away. We too keenly felt the pangs of separation from the Master. The Master appeared to the Mother in a vision and consoled her, saying, "Why are you weeping so much? Here I am. Where have I, after all, gone? Only from one room to another".'

Hearing this, Girish Ghosh remarked: 'Yes, God incarnates in this world and then goes back to His primal place. He is the Master of this universe and His descent and birth in a human form on earth is like changing from one place to another. The whole universe is His abode and the different worlds are as so many rooms in His mansion'.

Swami Yogananda : 'I interpret it in a different way. He is really infinite, eternal, and without form. He is impersonal as well as personal, formless as well as with form, as our Master used to say. God sports with the devotees and in His infinite mercy takes

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on the human form and subjects Himself, just like any other mortal, to the sorrows and sufferings of life. But, at the same time, the Avatara (Incarnation) is, in His actions and behaviour and in His exalted state of realization, far above all mortals. For, He is born with a special mission to ameliorate the condition of suffering humanity. He becomes a refuge and a source of strength to the helpless and the weak. He is the beaconlight of grace and mercy that guides devotees tossed about on the turbulent waters of the ocean of the world. This is one aspect of God. In another aspect, He is far beyond the range of human understanding. He is beyond form, beyond word and thought, beyond the universe, beyond light and darkness. He is beyond all the conceptions of the intellect and unfathomable by imagination. These two aspects are like the two rooms of His mansion. In His case these two do not refer to this world and the other after death. The Master's Divinity, through his eternal identification with the Godhead and through changing forms, in different times and climes, brought solace to the Mother.

'At Vrindaban the Holy Mother had many spiritual experiences. One day the lady companions found her absorbed in deep Samadhi. They uttered the name of the Lord in her ears and tried to bring her mind down. I then repeated the name of Sri Ramakrishna with all my might and strength of voice and then the Mother seemed to come down to the ordinary senseplane. During such periods of ecstasy, the Mother's manner of speech, her voice, her way of taking food, her mode of walking, and her general behaviour were exactly like those of the Master. We have heard that in deep meditation the worshipper and the worshipped become one.

The scriptures mention a spiritual state known as *tadatmya-bhava*, being at one with God. We have read in the Bhagavata how the Gopis, unable to bear the separation from

Reminiscences Of The Holy Mother

Krishna, became so deeply absorbed in thought of Him that they forgot for the moment their own individualities and behaved as if each of them were a Krishna by herself. In the same manner, the Mother too forgot her own separate existence and acted just like the Master, feeling her oneness with him. When I put to her some intricate questions about spiritual matters, shortly after her states of Samadhi, she replied in a God-intoxicated mood, very much like Sri Ramakrishna, that is, in the same manner characteristic of the Master, using even the same easy style of expression with metaphors and parables.

‘We all were surprised to see the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna unified with her. It was unique. We realized that the Master and the Mother were one in essence, though appearing in separate forms. Is it not said in the scriptures, "Lord, thou art man, thou art woman". The Master told me many times that there was no difference between his body and that of the Mother’.

Girish Ghosh: 'How long was Mother in that state?'

Swami Yogananda : 'Nearly two days passed in that superconscious state. A great transformation came over the Mother after that experience. Thenceforward she was seen to remain always immersed in bliss. All her sorrow and grief and her feeling of separation from the Master vanished. A serene, blissful mood took their place. She sometimes behaved like a simple, innocent girl of young age. Sometimes she would be eager to go to the various temples of Vrindaban to visit holy spots on the banks of the Jamuna associated with the divine sport of Krishna and the Gopis. She was then in such a blissful state of mind that at times her yearning for Krishna's presence and her utterance of His name with intense love reminded us of Radha. I have heard from Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma⁴ that the Mother at times frankly spoke of herself, expressing the view that she was

Kumud Bandhu Sen

Radha. She passed her time in constant meditation and would often go into ecstasy, remaining self-forgetful for hours together.

'We accompanied Mother to Hardwar. There her mood was quite different. Like an ordinary pilgrim she offered worship at all the temples on the banks of the Ganges. But at the sight of the Himalayas she stood speechless. She liked Vrindaban more and returned there soon.

'While at Vrindaban, by the grace of the Mother I could understand and appreciate the divine *leela* (disport) of Krishna'. As he said these concluding words, Swami Yogananda was smiling with great exultation at heart.

Golap-Ma now came and called us for going up to have *darshan* (seeing) of the Mother. I went up to the Mother's room with two other devotees. Girish Ghosh and Master Mahashay did not get up but were seen to be in a deep and serious mood. When I saluted the Holy Mother, she asked me tenderly how I was doing and whether I continued to meditate twice daily.

I told Mother, 'Yes. I do it mechanically; but I do not feel the joy of progress. When I come to you, Mother, I feel something wonderfully great which I am unable to express and I get complete peace of mind which I do not at the time of meditation and *Japa*'. Mother said softly, with a smile, 'My boy, the peace of mind you get when you come here is the result of your *Japa*—which makes you pure by cleansing your heart of all impurities. Repeat the name of God always and from the innermost core of your heart, and in all sincerity take refuge under the Master. Don't bother to know how your mind is reacting to things around. And don't waste time in calculating and worrying over whether or not you are progressing in the path of spirituality. That is not your look-out. It is vanity to judge progress for oneself. Rely on us; have faith in the grace of your Guru and *Ishta* (chosen deity for meditation). Your only duty is to repeat His Name earnestly and

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in all sincerity. You must have true faith in and devotion for the Master who is your only guide, help, and shelter. Don't forget this even for a moment'.

As I found many persons waiting outside for the Mother's darshan, I took leave of her for that day after making my pranam.

1 A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who acted as attendant and guardian to the Holy Mother for over twelve years.

2 The renowned actor-dramatist of Bengal and a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

3 Mahendranath Gupta (or 'M'), the illustrious recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

4 Two intimate lady companions of the Holy Mother, both of whom were disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, September 1953)

Meet the Babu (the rich man) first: he will tell you how many gardens and houses he has. Which is greater—the owner or his gardens?

Some people think initiation is enough, what to speak of initiation from a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa! Don't think that way. Always keep before your mind how much spiritual practice he underwent, and his disciples also. They are the ideals to follow.

What is spiritual practice (Sadhana)? Whatever you do is your *Sadhana*. When you go to some place, think you are on the way to get Him. When you eat, think you eat to live and live to get Him.

Swami Akhandananda

A Wonderful Meeting

Swamiji and Nag Mahashaya

We all have heard at least something about Swami Vivekananda. A few might have heard about Sri Durga Charan Nag, a wonderful householder devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. Nag Mahashaya as the latter was popularly known, hailed from East Bengal, now Bangladesh. He was greatly respected by both the monks and devotees of the Ramakrishna Order. Though he was a householder, his life was one of austerity and simplicity. Here is a conversation that took place between these two great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, at Belur Math. Nag Mahashaya had come to the Math that day with a disciple of Swamiji.

Swamiji : to Nag Mahashaya (saluting him): You are all right, I hope?

Nag Mahashaya : I have come today to visit you. Glory to Shankara! Glory to Shankara! I am blessed today verily with the sight of Shiva! Saying these words, Nag Mahashaya out of reverence stood with joined hands before him.

Swamiji : How is your health?

Nag Mahashaya : Why are you asking about this trifling body — this cage of flesh and bones? Verily I am blessed today to see you. Saying these words, Nag Mahashaya prostrated before Swamiji.

Swamiji (lifting him up) : Why are you doing that to me?

Nag Mahashaya : I see with my inner eye that today I am blessed with the vision of Shiva Himself. Glory to Ramakrishna!

Swamiji (addressing the disciple) : Do you see? How real *Bhakti* transforms human nature! Nag Mahashaya has lost himself in the Divine, his body-consciousness has vanished altogether. (To Swami Premananda) Get some *Prasada* (consecrated food) for Nag Mahashaya.

Swamiji and Nag Mahashaya

Nag Mahashaya : Prasada! (To Swamiji with folded hands)
Seeing you, all my earthly hunger has vanished to day.

The Brahmacharins and Sannyasins of the Math were studying the Upanishads.

Swamiji said to them : ' Today a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna has come amongst us. Let it be a holiday in honour of Nag Mahashaya's visit to the Math.' So all closed their books and sat in a circle round Nag Mahashaya; Swamiji also sat in front of him.

Swamiji (addressing all) : Do you see? Look at Nag Mahashaya; he is a householder, yet he has no knowledge of the mundane existence; he always lives lost in Divine consciousness. (To Nag Mahashaya) Please tell us and these Brahmacharins something about Sri Ramakrishna.

Nag Mahashaya (in reverence) : What do you say, sir? What shall I say? I have come to see you the hero, the helper in the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna. Now will people appreciate his message and teachings. Glory to Sri Ramakrishna!

Swamiji : It is you who have really appreciated and understood Sri Ramakrishna. We are only spent in useless wanderings.

Nag Mahashaya : What do you say, sir? You are the image of Sri Ramakrishna, the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Those who have eyes, let them see.

Swamiji : Is the starting of these *Maths* and *Ashramas*, etc., a step in the right direction?

Nag Mahashaya : I am an insignificant being, what do I understand? Whatever you do, I know for a certainty, will conduce to the well-being of the world—aye, of the world. Many out of reverence proceeded to take the dust of Nag Mahashaya's feet, which made him much agitated. Swamiji, addressing all,

A Wonderful Meeting

said, ' Don't act so as to cause pain to Nag Mahashaya; he feels uncomfortable.' Hearing this everybody desisted.

Swamiji : Do please come and stay at the Math. You will be an object-lesson to the boys here.

Nag Mahashaya : I once asked Sri Ramakrishna about that, to which he replied, 'Stay as a householder as you are doing.' Therefore I am continuing in that life. I see you all occasionally and feel myself blessed.

Swamiji : I will go to your place once.

Nag Mahashaya, mad with joy, said, 'Shall such a day dawn? My place will be made holy by your visit, like Varanasi. Shall I be so fortunate as that!'

Swamiji : Well, I have the desire. Now it depends on Mother to take me there.

Nag Mahashaya : Who will understand you? Unless the inner vision opens, nobody can understand you. Only Sri Ramakrishna understood you; all else have simply put faith in his words, but none has understood you really.

Swamiji : Now my one desire is to rouse the country — the sleeping Leviathan that has lost all faith in his power and makes no response. If I can wake it up to a sense of the Eternal Religion, then I shall know that Sri Ramakrishna's advent and our birth are fruitful. That is the one desire in my heart; *Mukti* and all else appear of no consequence to me. Please give me your blessings that I may succeed.

Nag Mahashaya : Sri Ramakrishna will bless! Who can turn the course of your will? Whatever you will, shall come to pass.

Swamiji : Well, nothing comes to pass without his will behind it.

Nag Mahashaya : Your will and his have become one. Whatever is your will is his. Glory to Sri Ramakrishna!

Swamiji and Nag Mahashaya

Swamiji : To work, one requires a strong body; since coming to this country, I am not doing well; in the West I was in very good health.

Nag Mahashaya : " Whenever one is born in a body," Sri Ramakrishna used to say, " one has to pay the house tax." Disease and sorrow are the tax. But your body is a box of gold coins, and very great care should be taken of it. But who will do it? Who will understand? Only Sri Ramakrishna understood. Glory to Sri Ramakrishna!

Swamiji : All at the Math take great care of me.

Nag Mahashaya : It will be to their good if they do it, whether they know it or not. If proper attention is not paid to your body, then the chances are that it will fall off.

Swamiji : Nag Mahashaya, I do not fully understand whether what I am doing is right or not. At particular times I feel a great inclination to work in a certain direction, and I work according to that. Whether it is for good or evil, I cannot understand.

Nag Mahashaya : Well, Sri Ramakrishna said, " The treasure is now locked." Therefore he does not let you know fully. The moment you know it, your play of human life will be at an end.

Swamiji was pondering something with steadfast gaze. Then Swami Premananda brought some Prasada for Nag Mahashaya who was ecstatic with joy.

Shortly after Nag Mahashaya found Swamiji slowly digging the ground with a spade near the pond, and held him by the hand saying, ' When we are present, why should you do that?' Swamiji leaving the spade walked about the garden talking the while, and began to narrate to a disciple:

"After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away we heard one day that Nag Mahashaya was lying in fast in his humble tiled lodgings in Calcutta. Myself, Swami Turiyananda and another went together and appeared at Nag Mahashaya's cottage. Seeing us he rose from

A Wonderful Meeting

his bed. We said, We shall have our *Bhiksha* (food) here today.' At once Nag Mahashaya brought rice, cooking pot and fuel, etc., from the bazar and began to cook. We thought that we would eat and make Nag Mahashaya also eat. Cooking over, he gave the food to us; we set apart something for him and then sat down to eat. After this, we requested him to take food; he at once broke the pot of rice and striking his forehead began to say : 'Shall I give food to the body in which God has not been realized?' Seeing this we were struck with amazement. Later on, after much persuasion we induced him to take some food and then returned."

Swamiji : Will Nag Mahashaya stay in the Math to night?

Disciple : No, he has some work; he must return today.

Swamiji : Then look for a boat. It is getting dark.

When the boat came, the disciple and Nag Mahashaya saluted Swamiji and started for Calcutta.'

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, January 1963)

All work is Sadhana. If ever you think that this work will not lead to Him, leave it at once. Sadhana is our attempt to get to Him through every action.

Always be cheerful, have a smiling face. Why fear? Why worry? Don't unnecessarily put on a grave face. Let not others think, 'Oh, he is thinking something very seriously.' Our Master used to tell us, 'I am pained when I see you with your chin resting on your palm.' He could not bear this sight.

There is no happiness here, no peace. How can there be? This is not our place—this narrowness, selfishness. We want freedom from all these. That is real happiness, that is real satisfaction. That is peace and bliss.

Swami Akhandananda

God is also Mother

(Continued from last issue)

Hans Torwesten

One could ask: If she loves us so much, why is she at the same time a seducer, why does she hold us in her Mayanet, why does she send us on false paths and why does she enjoy it so much, if we lose our way in her labyrinth? Are we not attempting forcibly to make *one* person out of two opposite principles? Can Mary be Circe at the same time, God the same as Satan, the loving mother at the same time a cruel stepmother or mother-in-law? Can we after all have trust in Shakti, if at the same time she smiles lovingly and at the next moment laughs out loud at us? We want orderly relationships, even in religion, we want to know exactly where we are. Can I pray to a God, who attacks me from behind, who always has two faces? Even though the dualism of God and Satan produces its own problems, it seems one can live better with it than with such an enigmatic wholeness.

That is true. One can live better with a harmless confessor than with a Zen master, who seems to be a *Koan* become flesh. Also Christianity knows only too well that it is not the task of religion to remove contradictions and that the real strength of religion is the diversity of symbols and paradox. Even every attempt to make an exclusively "loving God" out of the wrathful Father God Jehovah, a kind shepherd out of Jesus and a pale virgin out of Mary, has not been able to expel the irrational out of Christianity. Typically however it is almost always embodied in the angry and zealous Father God, whom Luther even feared more than the loving God and hid in the protective cloak of Christ's love, just as many Catholics crawl under the cloak of Mary to escape God's

Hans Torwesten

anger. The Yahwe who wrestled with Jacob and tried to kill Moses, is still alive today; it is still fearful to fall into the hands of the living God. Although one-sided reason wanted to make a purely reasonable thing and a “moral figure” of religion, a strong contrary movement began in Christianity, which, in the effort to restore the transcendental and irrational features of God, often made a real monster out of God.

The Shakti religion is not free of these features, into which we must go further, but it binds them with playful charm. When Ramakrishna said that praying to Shakti was no joke, he wanted to indicate her almost impenetrable koan-character: she is like a hard nut, which one has to crack. And one must submit to her wholeheartedly. Yet Ramakrishna often “joked” with her, he grasped the hands of her statue and danced, he caressed her and often spoke to her in a tone, in which one could hardly speak to the Father God. One can praise Jehovah, one can rejoice and sing and even dance in his honour, but I doubt whether one can dance and joke *with* him. In the Shakti religion even the force of the irrational has a smile on its face.

If we are however permitted to joke with the Mother, she may also do so with us. If we look at the matter completely from the outside and ask all our questions *before* we have entered the holy shrine of the Mother, we will often not find her “jokes” funny. As she embodies the totality of life, she has all the shades of life available – to our amusement or our annoyance. The joviality increases noticeably with increasing nearness to her. For the holy men even the stones thrown at them become glowing fragments of her great love. In India the idea of life as a game has covered

God is also Mother

and penetrated all cults, even the divine lover— whether Krishna or Rama – has something of the playful charm of the Mother.

Anyone who has advanced into her innermost being, no longer takes umbrage at her glittering Maya-dress, in which she walks up and down the road of life. On the contrary, we are grateful to her for this, because we can only grow through resistance, through wrestling with the Sphinx. The Mother loves a fight, she even loves it when we fight *Her*, She rises up before us and becomes a mountain, which we must overcome, she becomes a jungle, through which we must cut a path – and is however herself the path, which leads us to the summit and to the clearing, and is the clearing itself, which receives us after the long search.

Only the Shakti religion helps us to understand these connections – especially through the relativity character of Maya. In the final analysis the clearing is also Maya, insofar as it is only a contrast to the darkness of the jungle. The Mother covers the heights and the depths, we flee from Her into Herself, and she is always embracing: she embraces us as a seducer, she embraces us as a protective mother or also as the night of despair and clothes us in the divine light, which at first seems like darkness surrounding us.

Translated by John Phillips
(To be continued)

There will be no discourses in July and August

**Sri Krishna Puja
Sunday 17th August 2014
at Bourne End at 4:30 pm**

If you have a desire for sense-enjoyments, then there can be no spiritual attainments. If you are really after spiritual life, then bid farewell to desires. Discriminate: there is no real happiness in life, as misery follows happiness: life after life this oscillation between this pair of opposites is continuing. No more of this. Now start on the search for unalloyed happiness. Seek that happiness which is not adulterated. People are so accustomed to adulterated food that they have forgotten the taste of really good food. Further, they have lost the power to digest it. Nowadays, if someone gets adulterated food at a cheap price, he will not want pure food.

I did not touch money—not even during travels. That is why Swamiji loved me so much. While travelling in Gujarat, once some dacoits would have killed me, if I had had any money with me. Ah, what a state of dependence upon God it was, always thinking of Him! Money makes us forget God.

Swami Akhandananda

I do not want the happiness of Heaven. I want only You. O Lord, bring my desires to an end.'

'O Lord, how shall I ask You for a happy life? Whenever You have incarnated never have You tasted a happy life. You have lived a life of the greatest suffering.

'As Rama, the Prince of Ayodhya, You spent years in exile in the forest and again You lost Sita who was recovered only after much trouble.

'As Krishna, too, though a royal child, You were born in a prison, deprived of Your own mother's milk and brought up among cowherds. Your entire life was spent in war and in punishing the wicked. With no time for rest in Your personal life, You strove to establish peace on earth. Yet everyone holds You responsible for the Kurukshetra war, and You welcomed all the blame and curse. You never sat on a throne. You saw your kith and kin die before You and at last embraced death from a hunter's arrow shot by chance.

'As Buddha and Christ also, You have suffered much, with no place to lay Your head in.

Swami Akhandananda

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Wherever you have to live, stay there doing some useful and responsible work; then you will live in peace with others. Otherwise you will feel you are wasting your time, and others will think you are staying there for nothing. Now, take this key (of the cash box) and keep my accounts. Whenever I ask you, you will make payments. So you have got some work. Aren't you happy?

Swami Akhandananda



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