

Vedanta

379 SEPTEMBER- OCTOBER 2014

On Spiritual Practice

Swami Yatiswarananda

Sri Trilinga Swami

Swami Amareshananda



Divine Wisdom

Teachings of Swami Vijnanananda

As you think, so you become. As thoughts of love help in expanding the self, so do thoughts of anger and jealousy lead to its contraction. Unless one can restrain one's passion, anger; etc. it is impossible to get anywhere near God. If you want to control your passion, anger, etc., you have to meditate on the Master and the Holy Mother and you will then be free from all degrading thoughts.

You better leave debates and arguments alone. We have got a brain of very limited capacity; and for realizing God, all this hair-splitting is of no use. What you require is burning faith in Him. In order to be firmly established in that faith, you may raise one or two valid points, but nothing more. Our arguments are just like armchair discussions; they lead us nowhere. We argue about God and then go home and lie down in bed. That is not religion, and it does not contribute to peace of mind. .

Faith is the foundation of spiritual life. Too much of argumentation is of no avail . In order to be firmly established in that faith, you may raise one or two valid points, but nothing more. Unless you have faith, arguments and discussions will only cloud the issue and create confusion.

When, therefore, our entire existence depends on Him, why should we form an attachment for worldly things? Worldly attachments draw people away from God and scorch them in the wildfire of the world.

The Bible describes God in all His three forms, with attributes, without attributes, and as incarnate.

Let us make our minds pure, the rest will be easy; and we shall attain spiritual bliss comparable to nothing else in life.

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Editorial

Gayatri Mantra

OM BHUR-BHUVAH-SVAH TATSAVITUR-VARENYAM
BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHI DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYAT
*"We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe;
may He enlighten our minds."*

The Gayatri-Mantra, also known as the 'Savitri-Mantra', occurs in *Rig-Veda*, (III. 62. 10). It is considered to be the very essence of all the Vedas. Gayatri is the most ancient, sacred and most cherished of all mantras. It is looked upon as the 'Queen of all mantras'. Gayatri mantra is supposed to be repeated at the sacred three junctions of the day. Millions of Hindus old and young repeat it at least once in a day. It is an obligatory daily ritual performed by all the upper caste Hindus. Devotees repeat this mantra in order to purify themselves and also to have their desires fulfilled. For spiritual aspirants the repetition of Gayatri bestows God-realisation. For students it grants 'Medha' or spiritual intelligence.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had high regard for the Gayatri. Swami Vivekananda wanted every Hindu to be initiated into the Gayatri mantra. Sri Ramakrishna confirms that Gayatri mantra helps one make spiritual progress and leads one to the Supreme Brahman through samadhi.

He says:

'...For the Kaliyuga the path of devotion described by Narada is best. I tell people not to bother about the elaborate rituals of the sandhya as enjoined in the scriptures. I say that it will be enough for them to repeat the Gayatri alone.'

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'...The sandhya merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in samadhi. It is like the sound of a bell: t-a-m. The yogi, by following in the trail of the sound Om, gradually merges himself in the Supreme Brahman. A man is firmly established in spiritual life when he goes into samadhi on uttering OM' only once.'

Mantra

What is a mantra? A mantra is a mystic formula, consisting of a Prayer (the Jesus mantra for example) or any divine Name (Rama, Krishna, Buddha etc). It could be just a syllable, a letter, or usually a few short words. A long worded mantra is very rare – Gayatri mantra is one of them – it comprises of three lines having twenty-four letters. A mantra is used for meditation, japa and worship or for spiritual practice. It must be transmitted by a Guru or a spiritually evolved person to an equally qualified disciple.

Mantras are not human creations. They are divine revelations obtained by the Rishis (*mantra drashtas* i.e., seers of divine truths) in meditation. These mantras flashed in the depths of their hearts and enabled them to progress in spiritual life, to realise God, to have Self-knowledge. Hence anyone who follows in their foot-steps also will obtain the same result i.e., God-realisation.

According to Vedanta each soul is potentially divine. But we think we are not divine because of ignorance which results in wrong identity. If we can have right understanding we immediately realise that we are not human beings with a body-mind complex, but really divine. In truth we all desire to be divine. None of us wish

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death, ignorance or misery. Unconsciously, with every breath we are repeating the mantra '*Soham*' i.e., 'I am He'. (*Soham* reversed becomes '*Hamsah*', and from this the word *Paramahansa*)

Any Mantra becomes effective only if it is given through the Initiation ritual by one (a Guru) who himself has been practising it for a long time, having himself received it traditionally. Merely taking a mantra from a book (or Internet) by oneself is not enough. The disciple too must receive it with deep faith, and devotion, and practise with steadfastness untiringly until he reaches the goal i.e., Self-knowledge or God-realisation.

Sound Brahman (*Sabda Brahman*)

Hindu seers developed a special school of philosophy called the '*Sphota-Vada*', the theory of sound. The basic doctrine underlying this theory is that all this hard and tangible universe which we see in front of us is made up of different kinds of vibrations and energies. The things which appear so static, solid and real are not really so. Science tells us that all objects are nothing but transformations of molecules or energy and moving at the speed of light.

Even a century ago, matter was considered to be made up of solid material and indestructible atoms. Much has changed since then. With the scientific discoveries which have been made with regard to the nature of the atom our ideas about matter have changed completely and we now know the whole physical universe not as a mass of unyielding solid atoms but as a play of different kinds of energies.

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Now we know that even a speck of matter may be composed merely of energy and that matter and energy are inter-convertible. What it means is that physical matter is practically nothing but a play of different kinds of energies at different levels.

Furthermore the *Rishis* have discovered that the universe of thoughts and emotions have also the same material basis of vibrations and play of different kinds of energies.

Even subtler worlds like heaven (*swarga*) and hell (*naraka*) etc., are also but a play of different vibrations and energies. Further all these vibrations are inter-connected and can be traced to one primary, fundamental Reality called *Sabda Brahman*.

Are we sure that these are all derived from one ultimate source? There is only one way of knowing fully and that is through direct experience called *samadhi*.

All vibrations lie as the basis of all forms. Wherever we see an object, living or non-living, it is made up of vibrations and is the manifestation of particular vibrations.

All vibrations are energies, and all energies are the play of Prana. Hence whether it is plants, animals, men, gods or devils, all beings are but the manifestation of prana vibrating in different ways. If, by some means, we can make our minds to vibrate at the same level as particular gods or devils we can see them, they can see us, we can interact with each other. Mantras are special mystical formulas with whose help we can raise our consciousness to the same state of vibrations as gods etc. That is how we have *Darshan*, visions of different deities. This is the philosophy of mantras in short.

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Now let us see what Swami Vivekananda has to say on this subject:

'...Think of the universe as an ocean of ether, consisting of layer after layer of varying degrees of vibration under the action of Prana; In this universe there is one continuous substance on every plane of existence.

'...Physically this universe is one: there is no difference between the sun and you. There is no real difference between the table and me. Each form represents, as it were, one whirlpool in the infinite ocean of matter, of which not one is constant.

'...It is a constant change. Of the one huge mass of matter, one point is called a moon, another a sun, another a man, another the earth, another a plant, another a mineral. Not one is constant, but everything is changing, matter eternally concreting and disintegrating.

'...All this bringing of the mind into a higher state of vibration is included in one word in Yoga--Samadhi. If you can simply get to that subtle vibration, you will see and feel that the whole universe is composed of subtle vibrations. Thus, even in the universe of thought we find unity, and at last, when we get to the Self, we know that that Self can only be One'.

Thus the function of the mantras is to help us gradually raise our consciousness to the highest level of vibration possible for a purified mind. Thereafter the purified mind would be made to merge in the Unmoving Mover, Brahman.

(To be continued)

Swami Dayatmananda

On Spiritual Practice

Swami Yatiswarananda

(These Questions and Answers have been culled from memoirs of 'Swami Yatiswarananda' by Pravrajika Saradaprana of the Sarada Math, Dakshineswar.)

Q : Swamiji, should we plan for the future?

A: Yes, just as we plan a building. But don't be too rigid after planning. It may or may not materialise. Don't make a blueprint of your life. That does not mean you should not make a general plan. But afterwards leave everything to Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. Let them make you do what they like.

Q: What is *austerity*?

A: Self-discipline, sense-control and thinking of all men as Sri Ramakrishna and all women, including yourself, as Holy Mother. Merge all men and women in Them (Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother) and then, both of them in one Absolute *Saccidananda*. Think of yourself as *Atman* and others also as *Atman*. Have a number of weapons with you. Use a knife. If it does not work, then use stronger cutting instruments and cut all the desires.

Q: How to overcome desires?

A: With the sword of discrimination and sense-control. By sense-control is meant, keep the objects of enjoyment at a

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distance. The taste for enjoyment remains and that goes only after seeing the Supreme.

Desires and the senses are our constant enemies. Hence the absolute necessity of leading a disciplined and controlled life. So long as desire is permitted to hold sway over us, we shall not be able to follow any of the spiritual teachings given to us by the great ones. It is not possible to take up each individual hankering and rid ourselves of it. No, a general pitiless massacre is necessary.

Turn to the Divine and allow Him to light the Divine light in you. Then all darkness will vanish. Then He Himself appears on the battlefield and fights for us.

Our heart should consciously be made a cremation ground of all our attachments, impurities, desires and our petty personality, our ego. This eternal struggle is the only true worship of the Lord.

Q: If old desires rise again in the mind, what should we do?

A: Don't worry. There is a story of a man with a pet dog. The dog had been so much fondled in the beginning that it made a habit of jumping on to its master's body. Later at one time, the master felt detachment towards the dog, but the dog continued to come to the master, though it was not wanted. It did not know it was not wanted! Our mind is like that dog. It has been pampered so long that it is difficult to control it. But here, a part of the mind still wants desires. The other part doesn't want. That is the thing.

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Q: Swamiji, will I ever be able to meditate?

A: Yes, you will be. My considered opinion about your question on meditation is this: just now you need not bother about real meditation. Do *japa* and dwell on your chosen deity. In due course, *japa* will develop into meditation which means unbroken thought on the theme of meditation, like the unbroken current or flow of oil from one cup into another.

Through *japa*, the Divine Spirit will become more real than the world. And then real *dhyana* will become possible. Do the first thing first and the next step will come of itself.

Q: How to get concentration during *japa*?

A: When the spiritual ideal becomes strong, there will be no disturbances. Your mind wanders because you still have interest in external objects. If you have no interest in worldly affairs, if the spiritual ideal is strong, the mind won't wander.

Q: How to make the image of the chosen deity steady in the mind during *japa*?

A: Once when Sri Ramakrishna was taken to a studio for his photograph, he asked the photographer how the image got fixed on the plate. He was told that there was a chemical solution. When the plate was coated with it, the image got fixed. After that, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'If we have the coating of devotion on our mind, the image of the deity would be steady.' To the extent we love God, to that extent the image of the deity becomes steady in the mind. The *mantra* should be repeated with devotion. Because there is a lack of spiritual yearning, even after long practice, we do not get anything.

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Mantra repeated with devotion is very efficacious. We come to feel the Divine presence, physical ailments are reduced and the diseases of the mind are removed. What are the diseases of the mind? Doubts, dullness, restlessness, attachments, desires, etc. On a day when you do Japa well, you feel refreshed in body and expanded in mind.

Q: During meditation there are more disturbances and distractions than at other times. Why?

A: Because at other times, your interest in your activities (like teaching, reading etc.) push away all other thoughts.

There are three interests:

- 1) Your interest in regular activities like teaching, reading, etc.
- 2) Your interest in ordinary worldly affairs.
- 3) Your interest in the spiritual ideal.

The first, i.e., your interest in activities like teaching and reading etc., is strongest. Therefore when you do that, the mind is concentrated and other thoughts don't arise.

The second i.e., your interest in ordinary worldly affairs, though not strong, is yet stronger than the third i.e., your interest in the spiritual ideal. It is because of this that during japa and meditation, worldly thoughts disturb and distract the mind. The spiritual ideal is not strong, hence thoughts arise. Worldly things are so important to us, more real than God. That is why meditation is difficult. Steadfastness is important.

Q: Shall I think of my chosen deity as He is seen in the picture or as an image?

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A: Let the picture or an image be merely an aid in bringing to your mind the living, conscious and shining form of your chosen ideal.

Q: What is really meant by meditating on the meaning of mantras?

A: What is the meaning of the mantra? It is the name of God. You have a name. If I call you by name, your form also comes to my mind. Repeat the mantra and at the same time meditate on the chosen ideal with its meaning.

Some people look awful when they meditate. They look better when they get up! So have feeling and meditate. If you are sincere you are sure to progress. The mantra is charged with spiritual power. The truth of this will be directly revealed to you as you practice.

Q: Is a permanent impression produced on the minds of those college students for whom you hold classes?

A: On a few of them.

Q: In that case much of your effort is wasted!

A: It is only when much is wasted that you can do a little good. Much of the effort is bound to be a waste in order to improve a few. Each one takes what he can. Some can absorb only a little and they will take that. Some can absorb more. What can I do?

You expect much improvement, but the result is very little. Under such circumstances disappointments are bound to be there. Here also we must not think of the results but must go on giving.

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The path of service is beset with difficulty. Tagore has said, 'O Lord! Give strength to those who are serving, so that they can stand the suffering in the path of service.' You put forth your best efforts, but the person you wish to help can absorb only a little. You work hard and there is very little result. That might disappoint you. All you can do is to improve a few out of the lot.

I have an incubator. I keep eggs in it and give them proper conditions and nourishment for growth. Some come out to be crows; some come out to be cuckoos. What can I do? We can't change crows into cuckoos. We have to see their tendencies.

Q: Can't tendencies be overcome?

A: They can be overcome gradually. By good *karma*, bad tendencies can be overcome. In spite of the best efforts, of all those who come to the teacher for light and guidance, it is only a few who profit. This is due to *samskaras* and tendencies.

Q: You ask us to pray to the Lord when the mind is at a lower level. But at that time we don't feel like praying.

A: Force yourself to repeat His name again and again and the mind will rise. Pray to Thakur.

Q: I pray but prayer has no effect.

A (Very disapprovingly): Don't talk like that.

Q: Then why don't we have spiritual experiences?

A: You don't get them because you cannot stand them. It is difficult to stand spiritual experiences for a long time. Wait, wait; in due course you will get them.

On Spiritual Practice

See, even a one year old child wants to become a *Paramahansa* right away! Every spiritual experience requires a pushing away of *Maya* even if it be for a while, and getting in touch with Reality. It requires hard labour. Some people want us to give them spiritual moods, ecstasies and all that. But we only prescribe the hard method. We do not know any easy route.

Devotee: You say that I must see God in patients and serve them. But Thakur says that the manifestation of God is more in some and less in others.

A: Who denies that?

Q: At that time I feel that instead of serving patients let me rather do japa.

A: This is sheer madness. Try to see the Lord even in the lesser manifestations. Those who are advanced in spiritual life will have wonderful compassion towards others. Their attitude towards others would have undergone a wonderful change. By giving, we get expanded. Expansion brings joy.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, November 1999)

When we have control over our passions, we shall succeed; we shall ourselves then feel that we are advancing towards God. When the mind is completely under your control, it will have nothing to exist on except noble thoughts.

Swami Vijnanananda

Sri Trilinga Swami

Swami Amareshananda

'A real Paramahansa,' declared Sri Ramakrishna on meeting the famous Trilinga Swami for the first time at Kashi.

It is a customary practice, particularly among Hindus, to embark on a pilgrimage in the later stages of life, if circumstances allow. On January 27th 1868 Sri Mathura Nath Biswas, son-in-law of the late Rani Rasmani, accompanied by Sri Ramakrishna and others in a party totalling 125 people, started out on a pilgrimage to the most holy places of northern India.

The party first halted at Deoghar, one of the twelve most sacred abodes dedicated to the luminous form (*Jyotirlinga*) of Shiva, and offered worship there to the deity Vaidyanath Shiva. From Baidyanath the party went direct to Kashi. At Kashi, Mathur hired two big villas side by side on the Kedar Ghat, where he began to behave just like a prince-guards with silver maces used to escort him whenever he went out and servants held a silver umbrella over his head.

While staying at Kashi Sri Ramakrishna went in a palanquin every day to pay his obeisance to Vishwanath, the principal deity. Although he entered into ecstasy in all the temples, he especially experienced *samadhi* in the temple of Kedarnath.

Besides visiting temples, the Master went to see the eminent holy men of Kashi. Hriday always accompanied him. The Master also paid a few visits to the famous Trilinga Swami, one of the foremost of the Paramahansas. The Swami was observing a vow of silence and was staying at Manikarnika Ghat. At their first meeting the Swami placed his snuff box before the Master for his use, by way of giving him a cordial reception. Examining his physical features, the Master told Hriday that the Swami bears the signs of a true Paramahansa, and that he is a living image of Shiva himself.

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Sage Vasistha once described to Ramachandra the divine state of a great soul who knows the highest truth:

"Within he is devoid of all mental modifications. Without he wanders about at will like an ordinary ignorant soul. Only one who has attained the same state can recognise such an all-knowing and ever-free great soul."

(Mahapurush As We Knew Him, Swami Dhireshananda, 1997 Vedanta Press, Hollywood, CA).

On one of the days, the Master invited Trailinga Swami to the residence of Mathur and fed him with copious amounts of Rice-pudding, serving him with his own hand. It was also mentioned that Sri Ramakrishna by sign enquired of Trailinga Swami as to whether he believed that Ishwara was dual or non-dual? The Swami by sign indicated, "in Samadhi He is non-dual; otherwise in the plane of the sense world, where there is knowledge of diversity, the universe, etc., He is the many". (Ramakrishna the Great Master, Vol. II, 1983 edition, October; pages 311-312).

Besides Sri Ramakrishna, one of his disciples, Swami Akhandananda also met Sri Trailinga Swami at Kashi. After the passing away of the Master in August 1886, Swami Akhandananda left Baranagore Monastery and became a wandering monk. In 1887 he was in Varanasi. At Varanasi, the holy city and a seat of learning and culture, Gangadhar (Swami Akhandananda) spent many days joyfully visiting temples and saintly men. He met Trailinga Swami, a living embodiment of Shiva, near the cremation ghat of Manikarnika. The saint was sitting naked and silent in a place encircled with iron spikes and Gangadhar could not see how to enter. The saint by sign showed him the way and Gangadhar went in. He saluted him and received the saint's blessings.

(Ref: *Swami Akhandananda by Swami Annadananda, Advaita Ashrama (Calcutta) Edition, October 1993*).

Sri Trailinga Swami

The early years and initiation

Sri Trailinga Swami was born in 1607 during Mogul rule in the then prosperous village of Holia in Vijayanagaram state, now in Andhra Pradesh - Telugu-speaking country; hence the Swami was called Trailinga Swami when he had arrived at Kashi.

In the village lived a zamindar by the name of Narasimha, who was held in great esteem by the people for his courteous behaviour and upright conduct. His wife Vidyavati too was equally respected for her modesty, kindness and intelligence. The couple had no children during the ten years of their marriage. Thus, with the consent of Vidyavati, Narasimha Rao took a second wife in order to carry on the family lineage. Vidyavati began to devote much more time within the house to the daily worship of Shiva, the family's ancestral deity. However, within a year of Rao's second marriage, a male child was born to Vidyavati, and the couple believed that this was a sign of the favour of the Great God Shiva. Hence the child was called Shivaram by his mother and was named Trailingadhara by his father, in accordance with family tradition. Rao's second wife also gave birth to a male child, and the boy was called Sridhar.

From birth Shivaram was blessed with a calm nature, was undemanding (even if he was not fed for eight hours), and always looked to his mother for everything. He submitted fully to her will. One day when Vidyavati was deeply absorbed in meditation for quite some time, the child, who was playing by her side, fell asleep. When Vidyavati opened her eyes, she was astonished to behold that the entire sanctorum was flooded with luminous light rays which emanated from the Shivalinga and finally merged in the sleeping child.

Taking note of this unusual phenomenon, she sought out her husband, who consoled her, saying that it was not a bad

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omen and that the child was a precious gift from Shiva and confirmation that the Great God was pleased with her implicit faith and devotion to Him. An incident of a similar nature occurred during the birth of Sri Ramakrishna, when the nurse, after attending to Chandramanidevi, the mother of Sri Ramakrishna, could not locate the newborn where she kept him. The babe had rolled down towards a hollow fireplace and had smeared its body with ashes.

(From *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1924 edition*).

One unusual characteristic of Shivaram's personality was that since birth he showed no interest in being with children of his own age. If he happened to be among a group of children who were playing, he would feel distressed and leave them immediately. This tendency towards solitude continued not only in childhood but also when he became a youth.

In addition, his mother's God-centered life and her training prepared him for the life of a recluse. All her hard-earned merit was directed towards intensifying her son's spiritual awareness and his Divine visions, and she encouraged him to remain always in that awareness.

However, this unworldly behaviour of Shivaram made his father apprehensive as Shivaram was the eldest son and should marry as he had responsibilities in the world. So he requested that his son show an interest in normal life. But Vidyavati supported the path that Shivaram was treading and stood firmly by him and declared: "Shivaram will not lead a family life; he will be a mendicant. Let him realize God and be a beacon of light to others, and the whole family will thereby benefit. The other son is there to continue the family tradition."

Living to a ripe age, both Narasimha Rao and Vidyavati then passed away. Shivaram was forty years old and now free to renounce the world and follow his chosen path.

Sri Trilinga Swami

Neither the tears of his younger brother Sridhar nor the supplicants of relatives could shake Shivram's resolve. He handed over the entire family property to his brother and built a cottage close to the village cremation ground which was situated on the bank of a river. Here he began his spiritual practices in earnest and, now in middle age, his goal was to realize the Ultimate Reality. His only support was his mother's blessings, his own intense efforts and the grace of the family's deity Shiva.

The years went by but Shivram remained diligent in his efforts. Alone in the hut, there was no one to disturb him nor did he need to take care of anyone. As his inner unfoldment advanced, that auspicious moment arrived and the Divine intervened. A wandering monk of Punjab called Sri Bhagirat Saraswati appeared before Shivram to lead him towards the Supreme Goal.

Being extremely satisfied with Shivram's progress and as part of his Sadhana, Sri Saraswati invited Shivram to embark with him on a wandering journey to the four sacred shrines located in the four corners of the country.

Both set out on the task on an auspicious day. Visiting various shrines, where they offered their homage to the presiding deities, they finally arrived at the sacred pilgrimage centre of Pushkar, near Ajmir in Rajputana, where the presiding deity was Brahma.

Here, Bhagirat Saraswati finally initiated Shivram into the institution of Sannyasa, fully following the tradition at the time, and named him Ganapati Saraswati. Shivram was then 70 years old. Both remained at Pushkar for a further ten years, during which time the Guru taught Ganapati the techniques of Raja Yoga. Ganapati became a 'Siddha Yogi' (a perfected being). On seeing this, Bhagirat Saraswati finally left his mortal coil at Pushkar.

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Various wanderings

Visiting various places on the way and paying homage at various shrines, Ganapati reached Rameshwaram in the south of India in 1695. Wherever he visited miracles used to occur. Finally he reached Kashi. On seeing this larger-than-life figure (Ganapati had a well-built physique weighing over 140 kg although he seldom ate), attractive eyes, a calm and serene face, and a regal bearing – pilgrims developed an instant rapport with him. They felt secure in his presence, that he was a support to depend on at times of misfortune. The great Swami had taken a vow of (non-seeking); he had no position or possessions. For him there was no difference between the spiritual and the secular – everything was sacred, from a lump of clay to gold. As he had no abode he used to live on the ghats of the Ganga in Kashi and would shift from ghat to ghat to avoid the crowds.

Kashi was a favourite place for old people who wished to draw their last breath, whether they were zamindars, kings, wealthy merchants, pious devoted people, beggars, the destitute, thieves, robbers or ruffians. Everybody thronged to Viswanath for sustenance and final emancipation, and there was no distinction among classes – the educated, illiterate, pundits and priests, Brahmins and peasants, and zamindars and royal families alike held the same strong belief. Because of his miraculous powers, Trilinga Swami too became the centre of attraction for people with various incurable diseases. A mere glance from him, a pinch of sand, ashes from a pyre, or a few drops of Ganga water proved to be effective remedies for many sufferers.

After living quietly for a few years at Kashi, the Swami resumed his wandering life again. This time he went to Kedar-nath, Badrinanarayan, Gomukh, Nepal, Tibet and Manasarovar. His journey took around eight years. Even in the coldest regions Trilinga Swami remained naked.

Sri Trilinga Swami

While in Nepal, when he was absorbed in meditation in a deep forest, one day the Rana of Nepal entered the forest with a large retinue on a hunting expedition. On seeing a big tiger running swiftly into deep forest, the Rana shot at the tiger, but it escaped unhurt, disappearing fast into the thick jungle. The Rana followed the tiger and was astonished to find it sitting at the feet of a gigantic Yogi in deep meditation like a cat. After some time the Yogi opened his eyes and beckoned the Rana by sign and instructed him to give up all hatred, that the tiger will not harm him; every life is sacred. Bowing down to the Yogi, the Rana took his leave. The next day the Rana dispatched his prime minister with many presents for the great saint – diamonds, rubies, gold ornaments, silken garments and a sizeable quantity of gold mohars (coins). Trilinga Swami did not even glance at these presents, saying "these are of no use to me; use them to get milk to feed the destitute, babies, and the sick at the ghats in Kashi". (*Kundalini Yoga by Swami Shyamananda of the Divine Life Society*).

On his return journey descending over Manasarovar, Trilinga Swami went to the banks of the holy Narmada at Omkareshwar in central India. This too was the abode of one of the twelve luminous forms of Shiva (Dvadasha Jyotirlinga). Here he stayed for eight years and performed *tapasya* on Markandeya Shila, where Markandeya, the son of sage Mrukundu, had also performed *tapasya*. One night he was sitting on the bank of the Narmada when another *tapasvi* named Khaki Baba, who was staying in Markandeya Ashrama, arrived and was surprised to find that the water of the Narmada had turned into a milk flow and Trilinga Swami was taking in handfuls and drinking it. The moment the Swami touched the flow again it became a normal flow of water. Khaki Baba concluded that this was due to the supernatural powers of Trilinga Swami.

Swami Amareshananda

Once on a Narmada ghat a storm developed and a few fishing boats on the river were tossing when all of a sudden a storm blew in full speed and one of the boats was caught in the wind and disappeared. Pandit Ramnarayan Bhattacharya, who had gone to the river in the evening to float the oil lamps, noticed the pitch darkness and that both Trilinga Swami and one of the boats was missing. After some time had elapsed, to his surprise he saw Trilinga Swami swimming towards the bank pulling the missing boat – all on board were safe. When he enquired about this superhuman power, the Swami replied, "this power is hidden in every human and it has to be manifested by effort". Trilinga Swami finally returned to Kashi in the year 1844 when he was 237 years old. The passage of time had had no bearing on the Swami – he remained calm, of regal bearing, unmindful and blissful.

Supernatural feats

Trilinga Swami always remained completely nude. The Swami was unconscious of his nudeness but unfortunately 'the harassed police of Kashi' were quite conscious of it and came to regard him as a baffling problematic child. They unceremoniously committed him to jail, but general embarrassment ensued when the subtle body of Trilinga Swami was soon seen in its usual entirety on the flat prison roof. As his cell was still securely locked, no clue was offered to his mode of escape. The discouraged officers of the law once more performed their duty, but this time a guard was posted in front of the Swami's cell.

The great master was soon again observed in his nonchalant stroll over the roof. 'The goddess of Justice wears a blind-fold' – in the case of Trilinga, the outwitted police decided to follow her example.

Sri Trilinga Swami

With the indirect backing of the police, once a sceptic determined to expose Trilinga as a charlatan and placed before the Swami a good quantity of lime water used in white washing, telling him in mock reverence that "I have brought some buttermilk, please take it". The Swami unhesitatingly drank to the last drop the quarts of burning lime. In a few minutes the evil doer fell to the ground in agony, crying "Help, Swami, help, I am on fire! Forgive my wicked test". The great Yogi broke his habitual silence. "Scoffer," he said, "you did not realize when you offered me poison that my life is one with your own. Except for my knowledge that God is present in my stomach, as in every atom of creation, the lime would have killed me. Now that you know the divine meaning of boomerang, never again play tricks on anyone." The sinner, healed by Trilinga's words, slunk away.

The reversal of pain was not a result of the Master's will, but of the operation of the law of justice that 'upholds creation's farthest swinging of orb'. The functioning of divine law is instantaneous for men of God-realization like Trilinga; they have banished forever all thwarting cross-currents of ego. Faith in the automatic adjustments of righteousness (often paid in an unexpected coin as in the case of Trilinga and the would-be murderer) assuages our hasty indignation at human injustice. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19, Holy Bible).

On many occasions Trilinga Swami was seen to drink, with no ill effect, the most deadly poisons. Thousands have seen the Swami floating on the Ganges for days at a time. He would sit on top of the water or remain hidden for long periods under the waves. A common sight at the Manikarnika Ghat was the Swami's motionless body wholly exposed to the Indian sun in May.

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By these feats the great Yogi sought to teach men that human life need not depend on oxygen or other conditions. He proved that he lived by divine consciousness alone. Great saints who are awakened from the cosmic magic of dreams and have realized this world as an idea in the Divine mind can do as they wish with the body, knowing it to be only a manipulable form of condensed frozen energy. Physicists now understand that matter is nothing but congealed energy; illumined masters have attained victory in putting theory into practice in the field of matter control.

The lives of Trilinga and other great masters remind us of the words of Jesus-"And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name [the Christ consciousness] they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." (Mark 16:17-18, Holy Bible).

The Vedic scriptures declare that the physical world operates under one fundamental law of *maya*; the principle of relativity and duality of God, the Sole Life, is Absolute Unity. To appear as the separate and diverse manifestations of creation He wears a false or unreal veil. That illusory dualistic veil is *maya*.

To remove the veil of *maya* is to uncover the secret of creation. He who thus denudes the universe is the only true monotheist. The world illusion, *maya*, manifests in men as *avidya*, literally "not-knowledge", ignorance, delusion.

Maya or *avidya* can never be destroyed through intellectual conviction or analysis, but solely through attainment of the internal state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. The Old Testament prophets, seers of all lands and ages, spoke from that state of consciousness.

Sri Trailinga Swami

A yogi who through perfect meditation has merged his consciousness with the Creator perceives the cosmic essence as light (vibrations of light energy); to him there is no difference between the light rays composing water and the light rays composing land. Free from matter-consciousness, free from the three dimensions of space and the fourth dimension of time, a master transfers his body of light with equal ease over or through the light rays of water, fire and air.

The law of miracles is operable by any man who has realized that the essence of creation is light. A master is able to employ his divine knowledge of light phenomena to project instantly into perceptible manifestation the ubiquitous light atoms. The actual form of the projection (whatever it be: a tree, a medicine, a human body) is determined by the yogi's wish and by his power of will and visualization.

One morning a man suffering from a perpetual chronic disease saw Trailinga Swami amidst a crowd of devotees at Banaras Ghat. He managed to edge his way close to Trailinga and humbly touched the great Yogi's feet. He was astonished to find himself instantly cured from the painful disease.

About supernatural powers

Once a pandit offering *pranams* to Trailinga Swami enquired about supernatural feats and how one can acquire these powers? The Swami replied, "Ramnarayan, this power is hidden in humans. If one can manifest them, there is no supernaturalism. The truth is that man has fallen down from his natural state of being and hence it has become unnatural. Therefore you perceive these feats as unnatural and wonderful. When a man becomes adept in spiritual practice based on morality and only for the good of humanity as the goal, he is possessed of supernatural powers and may use them for the welfare of humanity

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alone. Such a person never takes a wrong step."

Sri Ramakrishna cites the example of an expert dancer who never takes a wrong step. In his life there are many incidents of the manifestation of such powers. When Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) started screening the devotees coming to the Master, he was warned at once by the Master to desist from such behaviour forthwith. Rakhal: "At the beginning I used to feel jealous of others when they visited the Master, but he graciously revealed to me that my guru is also the Guru of the Universe. Has he taken this birth only for a few of us?" (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Red Letter edition 2000, page 952).

When Hridayram, the Master's nephew and attendant, was once resolved to perform Sri Durga Puja at his ancestral home in Shihore (West Bengal), he received approval from Ramakrishna, who also gave him some detailed instructions and advice. Sri Ramakrishna also promised that he would be present in his subtle body during the Puja. Sri Ramakrishna carried out his promise and indeed appeared in Hriday's ancestral house in his luminous form, and as a result Hriday did acquire some power. (Ramakrishna the Great Master, Vol. I, pages 318-19).

When Sri Ramakrishna became completely bedridden at Cossipore garden house, the young devotees took up the cause of serving him by turn. In the garden house there were date trees and, as it was the right season, the young devotees were planning to tap a date palm and drink the juice. But they were not aware of a deadly snake living in that tree. At that time Sri Ramakrishna was so weak that he could not even turn on his side in bed unless he was helped.

Astonishingly, however, one afternoon when most of the devotees were resting, Sri Ramakrishna suddenly got up and went quickly to the date tree and drove away the serpent and returned to his bed. On enquiry by Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi,

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the Master replied that the boys were not aware of the snake and if they had carried out their plan they would have been bitten. The energy that the Master mustered to drive away the snake was of a supernormal nature. (*Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi by Swami Gambhirananda, 2001 edition, page 99; Ramakrishna Math, Chennai*).

The passing away of Trilinga Swami

Sri Govinda Bhatt, the manager of Trilinga Swami Math, has written a brief account of the great Yogi's last days and Mahasamadhi. The Swami had lived in the Panchaganga Ghat area in different places for about eighty years, including the house of Mangal Bhatt (he was a Maharashtrian priest and the grandfather of Govinda Bhatt). Trilinga Swami did not establish any math or any movement; the idea never crossed his mind. One day suddenly he called Mangal Bhatt and a few others and informed them of the ensuing end of his mortal life- "I am thinking of giving up today this body which has become old. Allow me to do so."

Mangal Bhatt and the others begged him to postpone the event for at least a month- "as it is our wish to have a life-sized statue of yours. We will call the sculptor today. We want some support to fall back on. That support is your stone statue." The Yogi agreed. The month came to a close and on the day before the sculpture was ready the devotees entreated the great Yogi to give them some instructions on how to proceed further with their spiritual practices. As per tradition, his body would be immersed in the Ganges, so they also prepared a sizeable sandalwood box to transport the body to the boat for immersion.

When the auspicious day arrived the Yogi left his mortal coil by the natural process of the opening of the Brahma Randra. The box containing the body was taken to the Ganges and as per

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tradition placed in a boat. It was taken from Asi Ghat to Varuna Ghat, and then to mid-stream, and the box was lowered at mid-stream in the Ganga. A huge crowd of one hundred thousand people had gathered on the bank to bid farewell to the saint as the sun began to set.

His belongings – a pair of wooden sandals, a large-sized Rudraksha-garland and a water pot-are currently kept in the Trailinga Swami Math, which was built later and is maintained by Govinda Bhatt.

General references:-

Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master, Vol. I, pages 311-312, 318-319.

Autobiography of a Yogi (3rd Indian Edition 2007), pages 284, 285, 286, 266, 267 & 271, 272, 287.

It is a matter of fact, the company of holy men makes the heart pure forever. It is said that the sage Durvasa once went to visit hell where condemned souls were suffering all sorts of tortures as punishment for their sins. As soon as the sage made his appearance there, they were relieved of their agonies and began to sing the glories of God. Hell seemed to have been transformed into heaven; the reason was that the sage's purity of life had such innate power in it as to deliver those tortured souls from their sins, and save them from the agonies of hell.

The greatest need is to concentrate on Him when we are dying. The best time for meditation is midnight. You can then achieve results very soon. Nature is in a quiet mood then and the concentration is easier. Every day you should regularly practise meditation. That helps you to concentrate your mind.

Swami Vijnanananda

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THE Hindu idea of God is based upon Vedic revelation, supplemented by its elucidation contained in the *Puranas*, the *Tantras* and the writings of the great philosopher-teachers. It is neither speculative nor dogmatic. It is not speculative in the sense that it derives its data from *Vedic* statements and that inferential processes have a place only in co-ordinating these Vedic passages and in drawing out their implications in the process of building up a consistent system. It cannot, however, be called dogmatic for this reason, as these Vedic revelations are the records of experiences which the *Rishis* had and which any one today also can have, provided he is willing to undergo the discipline needed for it. For example, here is the bold declaration of the sage Svetasvatara in the *Upanishad* known after him: "I have realized that Supreme Being luminous like the sun and transcending the darkness of ignorance. Only by knowing Him one passes beyond death. There is no other way for it". (Svt. III. 8)

Three distinct types of passages are found in the *Upanishads*, the portion of Vedic revelation which forms the basis of all Hindu thought. One of these types only indicates the Supreme Being as the implication of negative epithets. The second type uses positive epithets, describing Him as a supra-personal, non-attributive, transcendent entity. The third type describes Him as a person (an intelligent, responsive entity) related to the world, as its cause and controller, and possessing attributes indicative of all godly powers, beauty and moral excellences.

The import of these three types of passages can be properly assessed only if some typical quotations from the *Upanishads* are given. As an example of the negative description, there is the famous *Brihadaranyaka* passage: *This "Self (has been described) as "not this; not This". He is incomprehensible, for he is*

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never comprehended; He is indestructible, for He cannot be destroyed; He is unattached, for He does not attach Himself; He is unfettered, He does not suffer. He is not injured" (Brh., IV. iv. 22).

In the *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya* (III. ii. 17) Sankara quotes an Upanishad, now not extant, wherein Bhava, asked by Balaki, expounds *Brahman* as Silence. Questioned thrice by the disciple about Brahman, the teacher remained silent, and when the disciple persisted in questioning, he replied that he was answering by silence, but that the disciple could not understand the import of this teaching.

To crown all these there is the famous description of Brahman (spoken of as the Fourth) in the *Mandukyopanishad*: 'It is not that which is conscious of the outer world, nor that which is conscious of the inner world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of consciousness. It is not simple consciousness nor unconsciousness. It is unseen, indescribable, ungraspable, without any mark, unthinkable and immutable. It is the essence of unitary self-awareness. It is that into which the world is resolved. It is the Peaceful, the Benign, the 'Non-dual'. (*Mandukyopanishad* : 7)

These statements, though negative in form, make it sufficiently clear that what is meant is not a 'nihil' but a transcendent entity which tears the webs of subject-object, cause-effect, and space-time relationships. Any entity described in positive language will be taken as referring to a 'this', an object of thought or perception, as against a knowing subject. An objective Absolute can only be an extension in space and time, and hence no Absolute at all. So the Upanishads look in the direction of the knowing subject for the Headquarters of Reality, and in order to draw the aspirant's thought in that direction, uses the language of negation of all objective apprehension. But at the same time care is taken to prevent the misconception that it

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is a 'nihil' a '*Sunya*', as will be seen in the passages quoted above. It is done by interspersing certain highly abstract and technical expressions of a positive nature in the midst of these negations, such as 'the Witness', 'the Conscious', 'the Alone', 'the Attributeless', etc., besides the terms used in the *Mandukya Upanishad* quotation—Supreme Peace, the Benign and the Non-dual.

This is made still more clear in the second set of passages referred to before. These are positive in form and content. The Supreme Being is described as Intelligence and Bliss (*Vijnanam Anandam Brahma*), as Truth and Intelligence absolute (*Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma*), as Light of Light (*Jyotisham Jyoti*) and as Truth of Truth (*Satyasya Satyam*). In all these, a positive apprehension of the Supra-Personal Absolute is indicated, but this positiveness is not limited by substance-attribute or cause and effect relationship as in all objective apprehensions.

Next we get another kind of passage where the Absolute and the Unrelated is apprehended as God (*Savisesa* or *Saguna Brahman*) who projects and indwells the Universe, who can be worshipped and prayed to, and who protects devotees and bestows salvation on them. It is in fact the Personal God, both in His abstract and concrete conceptions. To quote some passages setting forth this conception, the *Chandogya Upanishad*, for example, says: 'Verily all this is Brahman, for from Him it comes forth, in Him it is dissolved, and, in Him it is sustained. Tranquil one should meditate on Him thus: 'He who consists of mind, whose body is life, whose form is light of consciousness, whose will is always true, whose soul is space, encompassing all worlds, all desires, all odours, all tastes, all the worlds, speechless and unconcerned'. (*Ch. Up.*, III. xiv. 3)

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In the *Brihadaranyaka* He is thus described: 'Verily, He, the great unborn self, is the Intelligence in the midst of vital energy. In the space within the heart lies He, the controller of all, the God and the ruler of all. He does not become greater by good works. He is the bridge that keeps the different worlds apart.

'Him the Brahmanas seek to know through the study of the Vedas, by sacrifice, by gifts and by austerities' (*Brh. Up.*, IV. iv. 22).

There is another famous *Brihadaranyaka* passage declaring Brahman as the soul of all and the 'all' as His body. It declares: 'He who dwells in the earth and is within it, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within. He is the Self, the inner Controller, the Immortal.

'He who dwells in all beings and is within them all, whom all beings do not know, whose body all beings are, who controls all beings from within—He is the Self, the Controller within, the Immortal, etc.' (*Br. Up.* III. vii)

While in these passages quoted, the Divine Being is represented more in terms of His world emanation aspect or as the immanent spirit, there are still other passages where His supreme lordship and His protective and saving grace are stressed. In the *Svetasvatara* He is spoken of as the Lord of matter, individual souls and the forces of Nature (*Pradhana-Kshetra-jna-Patirgunesah*). Further it is stated in the same text: 'Know Nature (*Maya*) to be the Mysterious Power, of which the Supreme Being is the wielder. This whole universe is filled with beings who form His parts' (*Svetasvatara*, IV. 10).

The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* is full of passages which speak in a similar strain of a Universal Father-Mother God, who creates, protects and bestows grace on all beings, but who, at

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the same time, is not different from the Absolute spoken of in the Upanishads in general. A striking example of such reconciliation is to be found in the following passage: "He is the soul of the Universe. He is immortal and His is the rulership. He is the all-knowing, the all-pervading, the protector of the universe, the eternal ruler. None else is there to rule over Him. He who at the beginning of creation projected Brahma (Universal Consciousness), who delivered the Vedas unto Him, who constitutes the supreme bridge of immortality, who is partless, free from actions, tranquil, faultless, taintless and resembles the fire that has consumed its fuel—seeking liberation I go for refuge to that effulgent one whose light turns the understanding towards the Atman". (*Svet.*, VI. 17)

To the utter confusion of many an external observer of Hindu culture, the later Hindu religious literature like the *Puranas* and the *Tantras* give a name and form to this Personal God (*Savisesa Brahman*) of the Upanishads either as Siva, Visnu or Sakti. The Personal God of the Upanishads has no form unless it be the whole manifested universe which is His emanation and which He in-fills. He is spirit without form, power without location, person without personality. He is the seat of all the highest excellences, but no particular body or form limits Him.

In the *Tantras*, *Puranas* and other later religious literature, this Universal Being is identified with a particular cult-God — be it Siva, Sakti, Visnu or any of the incarnations of these Gods, and invested with forms that are largely human but characterised also by features that are unearthly or super-human. In the scriptural texts pertaining to them, each in turn is taken and exalted to the position of the all-pervading creator and saviour with vivid descriptions which are reminiscent of the Upanishadic characterisation of the Supreme. But each Puranic Deity is also associated with a particular form,

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character, personality, emblem, heavenly location, paraphernalia and history of His own, and in these descriptions of the Supreme Being given in the Puranas, the cult features intermingle with the attributes of Savisesa Brahman of the Upanishads, the one formless spirit possessed of all the highest excellences and powers, and pervading all the manifested universe. It is difficult for a non-Hindu, or for the matter of that, even for a Hindu not brought up and trained, from early days, in the traditions of the cult, to enter into the devotional pattern of these cults.

Questions generally asked are: Are not these forms mere imaginations? Are not the Puranic narrations about their doings, abodes, associates and supernatural powers mere myths? Are not these Gods too anthropomorphic, reflecting human nature with all its limitations? Are these Deities in their setting and conception different in any way from the Gods and Goddesses of the Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Babylonian and other ancient but now extinct civilizations? Just as these gods and goddesses have sunk into oblivion and ceased to be objects of worship, is it not likely that the same will happen to the Deities of the Hindu pantheon also if the beliefs and modes of worship of the descendants of their present votaries change in course of time? What then is their ontological status?

The following considerations may be relevant for resolving this difficulty: the Supreme Being from whom all embodiments have come, can rightly be conceived as having an Archetypal Form, of which all other forms are but imperfect manifestations. Devotees, whose spiritual perceptions are awakened, get an apprehension of this Seed Form. But it is most likely that this apprehension is effected through the enlivening and enrichment of the symbolic form of the cult Deity that has been the traditional object of devotion for a person. These thought-forms and images of the Cult are more or less like the

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script and sound symbols of a language. Though in themselves they are not meaningful, they become so when ideas fill them with content. Even so are the deities of the Cults filled with spiritual content rendered *Chinmaya*—in Hindu devotional terminology—at the touch of the Divine Archetypal Form of the Savisesa or Saguna Brahman of the Upanishads. They are experienced by the votaries (*Upasakas*) as a living presence full of power and bliss, and they produce in the devotee that expansion and illumination of consciousness which result from Divine grace. To the votary, the Deity is the very Saguna Brahman, and he attains to that Saguna Brahman through the practice of devotion that the traditions of the Cult open to him.

Now these cult-Gods, be they Vishnu, Shiva or Sakti of the Hindus, the Jesus, Jehovah, Allah or Buddha of historical religions, or Deities of now extinct civilizations of the ancient world, are all alike the meaningful thought-forms created by the collective consciousness of the races that adore them, more or less on the lines of the languages they speak and write. So long as a cult-tradition continues and the Deities induce in their votaries responses that direct their attention to the Savisesa Brahman, the Supreme Being manifests Himself through them and blesses the devotees. But a culture may perish and along with it the devotional traditions associated with the Deities of that culture, as has happened with many cultures and peoples of the ancient world. In the absence of a living tradition, the cult and the Deities fail to produce devotional responses and fall into disuse and oblivion, no more attracting the attention of any except that of anthropologists and sociologists for purposes of research and speculation. In this respect cults based on so-called historical personalities are in no way different. They too live only in the responses of human consciousness and in the absence of it, become ineffective.

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So the answer to the question about the ontological status of Deities is that they are psychic realities, more enduring than physical realities, and to the extent they elicit genuine and whole-hearted devotional responses from their votaries, they are experienced as hypostatic with that Archetypal Form of the Divine with which the devotees identify them. The universal attributes of Upanishadic Brahman are therefore inextricably blended with cult-associations in the conceptions of the Deities like Visnu, Siva and Sakti, and devotees brought up in the traditions of those cults find no contradiction or strangeness in this intermingling.

From the above paragraphs it will be seen that the Hindu scriptures uphold a threefold conception of the Supreme Being (Brahman). First, Brahman is the transcendental Absolute (*Nirvishesha* or *Nirguna Brahman*), beyond substance-attribute, and cause and effect relations. He is to be indicated only through negative epithets so as to exclude all objectivity to Him and enable His apprehension as the pure Subject. Next He is the all-inclusive and all-pervading Absolute (*Savisesa* or *Saguna Brahman*), who is the cause and support of the world of duality, who is the repository of all auspicious attributes and who is the object of devotion and worship. And lastly this *Savisesha* Brahman becomes a purely Personal God in the different cults, combining His universal attributes with the mythical history, associations, character and paraphernalia of the cult-deity.

The inter-relation between these three conceptions has to be clarified if gross misunderstanding of the Hindu idea of God is to be avoided. It is often asked: Are there two Brahman—a higher Brahman (*Nirvishesha*) and a lower Brahman (*Savisesa*)? The answer is that the question is absurd, since

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Brahman is non-dual. There are two main schools of Vedantic thinkers—the *Visistadvaitins* and the *Advaitins* proper. To the former, Advaita or non-duality is only of *Ishvara* (God), who is the qualified object (*Visishta*), of whom the unlimited multitude of sentient beings and insentient matter form the “body”, they being dependent existences attributively and organically related to Him. It is therefore a doctrine of philosophical monotheism (as distinguished from the “tribal” monotheism of Semitic religions), in which the God of religion is also the Absolute of philosophy insofar as He is the Organistic Whole with all existent entities (soul and matter) integrated into His being as His body. The *Visistadvaitins* deny that the Upanishads speak of any other kind of Absolute than this—of a Nirvisesha Brahman as understood by the Advaitins, and give alternative interpretations, often far-fetched, for those passages that speak in negative language about a non-attributive and non-relational Absolute.

The Advaitins or Non-dualists on the other hand maintain that the Nirvisesha Brahman is the final teaching of the Upanishads and that Savisesa Brahman is only tentatively accepted as a half way halt to help the aspirants who have not evolved enough to grasp the doctrine of Nirvisesha Brahman. So long as man experiences himself as an ego, Nature is real to him, and he asks questions as to who created it and who directs it. A Personal God or Savisesa Brahman is the most easily understandable answer to this question. But that is not the final teaching. Through the practice of devotion to the Savisesa Brahman (God), consisting of the performance of one’s duties in a spirit of dedication to Him and of engaging oneself in loving and devout meditation on Him, the *Jiva* obtains Divine grace. Divine grace dispels ignorance which is responsible for the notion of a separate ego-centred consciousness, and for its

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corollary of a universe and God as its Creator and Controller. Freed from the limiting adjunct born of ignorance, the Jiva realizes its unity with the Universal Consciousness, whose mysterious power presents the relative world as an apparent manifestation without in any way affecting Its supreme transcendence. Brahman appears as Savisesa when, owing to ignorance, the individualized ego views Him as the cause of the universe. But He is really Nirvisesha, unrelated and untouched by the universe of change, as the latter is only apparently manifested on Him like the snake in the rope-snake illusion or water in a mirage experienced on the surface of a desert. To the ego in ignorance, to whom its own egoity is supremely real, the universe too is real, and he conceives Brahman as the creator, supporter and controller of it and as having attributes of power, lordship, saving grace, etc. But when ignorance is dissipated, the same Lord of the Universe is realized as the Nirvisesha Brahman. So there are no two Brahmans, one lower and the other higher, but only the Nirvisesha Brahman, the non-dual and transcendent substratum of all the changing phenomena which are unreal in relation to Him but real to the ego in ignorance. To the view of knowledge, Brahman is Nirvisesha, but to the view of ignorance He is Savisesa.

The two schools of Vedanta have always indulged in bitter controversy as to which of them is true to the Upanishads. The controversy is quite needless, if the two different standpoints mentioned above are accepted. The Advaita accepts the Visishtadvaitic position from the point of view of relativity (*vyavahara*), but the Visistadvaita rejects *in toto* the ultimate position of the Advaitins. The Advaita therefore is a better synthesis of the data obtained from the Upanishads regarding Brahman.

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Or another way of synthesis also can be adopted without lowering the status of the Visistadvaita to the level of relativity. The view of relativity is the experience of pure dualism in which God can be conceived only as the 'other', a Super-Nature, between whom and the creatures there is an unbridgeable gulf. The Advaitic realization, resulting from God's grace, displaces this view by the experience of the fundamental unity of the 'all', including God, universe and the ego in the transcendental Absolute (Nirvisesha Brahman) and God becomes no longer the 'other' but the real 'Self'. If the ego is restored to its sense of separateness after the Advaitic experience, it will have an entirely new vision, of God, the Universe and the individualized ego. In Sri Ramakrishna's words, the ego that emerges after Advaitic experience is the 'ego of knowledge', which apprehends the 'All' as Brahman, and Brahman in the 'All'. It is this mystical experience that is given a logical form in the Visistadvaita doctrine. Understood in this way there is no question of superiority or inferiority between the doctrines of Advaita and Visistadvaita. They become the obverse and reverse of the same coin of Vedanta.

Another question that deserves to be clarified is whether Hinduism is Pantheistic at the higher level and Polytheistic at the lower level. The question of Pantheism is mooted by Christian thinkers to exalt the essentially Christian doctrine that God is the only existence and that He created everything out of nothing by His Will. The absurdity of such a position is clear. If there is nothing beside God, it has to be accepted that the creator projected everything out of Himself. That is what Vedanta maintains, and there is no objection to naming this view Pantheism, provided it is understood that the 'All' is not to be equated with Nature. Nature is only an insignificant aspect of Him, and He, Ishvara, is unaffected by it. He is the Lord, and transcends it infinitely.

Swami Tapasyananda

Regarding the charge of Polytheism, what the critics do is to exaggerate certain tendencies among the uninstructed people and ignore the real facts before them. As there are several cults among the Hindus, with highly personalised conceptions of deities, there is a tendency among people to speak in terms of their several Gods, their heavens and their paraphernalia, just as one speaks of kings of different countries. Except among the most ignorant, every Hindu understands that just as matter and its transformations are the gross manifestations of Savisesa Brahman, the gods are His spiritual manifestations either as cosmic functionaries or as centres of grace and illumination for the redemption of Jivas in bondage. In the highly evolved cults of Visnu, Siva or Sakti, the cult-Deity is identified with the Savisesa Brahman as His Archetypal Form, as we have explained already, and the other gods are relegated as subsidiary manifestations of lesser spiritual glory. Wherever Vedantic influence has reached, primitive polytheism, as conceived by the anthropologist, has no place. There is only what may be called Enlightened Polytheism, which is based on the doctrine that the infinite and all-pervading Brahman manifests Himself in a hierarchy of spiritual forms through which He could be approached, communed with and ultimately realized.

When rightly understood, this Enlightened Polytheism is far nobler and philosophical than the much vaunted monotheism of Semitic religions. Semitic monotheism has a background of tribalism. When different tribes contended for supremacy, the victorious one destroyed the tribal Gods of the vanquished and put its own God in their place. The so-called one God of Semitic religions is originally the victorious tribal God, no doubt considerably changed afterwards by successive thinkers and saints. They are however still jealous Gods who do

The Hindu (Vedantic) Idea Of God

not tolerate another God beside them, and their followers still do everything in their power to impose Him on others as the one true God. When Christianity or Islam dominated a new society, desecration of places of worship and forcible conversion of heathens and *kaffirs* have been the usual order in the past, although the forces of non-religious enlightenment of the modern era has changed the attitude very much. In striking contrast is the way of the Enlightened Polytheism of the Vedantic Hindu. The Gods of all races are recognized as the emanation of the one supreme Brahman, and worship offered to any of these emanations in truth and in spirit, is considered as worship offered unto Him. When the Vedantic philosophy brings to bear its ennobling influence on any cult, be it based on history or myth, its cult God gradually loses his tribalism and even his unelevating characteristics, if any, and passing through a phase of intermingling of localism and universalism, finally becomes recognized as an emanation of the Upanishadic Brahman. Monism combined with Enlightened Polytheism is what Vedanta offers as substitute for tribalistic monotheism to civilized humanity.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, September 1966-67)

Great souls, wherever they are, create a spiritual zone around them; and anybody coming within that zone realizes something like an electric current passing into him. Once, when our Math was located in Nilambar Mukherji's garden-house at Belur on a Dussera day, I touched Swamiji's feet in obeisance and experienced a shock like that of the electric current.

Swami Vijnanananda

Some Reflections on Time

Aldous Huxley

Time destroys all that it creates, and the end of every temporal sequence is, for the entity involved in it, some form of death. Death is wholly transcended only when time is transcended; immortality is for the consciousness that has broken through the temporal into the timeless. For all other consciousnesses there is at best a survival or a rebirth; and these entail further temporal sequences and the periodical recurrence of yet other deaths and dissolutions. In all the traditional philosophies and religions of the world, time is regarded as the enemy and the deceiver, the prison and the torture chamber. It is only as an instrument, as the means to something else, that it possesses a positive value; for time provides the embodied soul with opportunities for transcending time; every instant of every temporal sequence is potentially the door through which we can, if we so desire, break through into the eternal.

All temporal goods are means to an end beyond themselves; they are not to be treated as ends in their own right. Material goods are to be prized because they support the body which, in our present existence, is necessary to the achievement of man's Final End. Moral goods have many and very obvious utilitarian values; but their highest and ultimate value consists in the fact that they are means to that selflessness, which is the pre-condition of the realization of the eternal. The goods of the intellect are truths and, in the last analysis, these are valuable insofar as they remove God-eclipsing delusions and prejudices. Aesthetic goods are precious because they are symbolic of, and analogous to, the unitive knowledge of timeless Reality. To regard any of these temporal goods as self-sufficient and final ends is to commit idolatry. And idolatry, which is fundamentally unrealistic and inappropriate to the facts of the universe, results at the best in self-stultification and at the worst in disaster.

Aldous Huxley

Movement in time is irreversibly in one direction. "We live forwards," as Kierkegaard said, "but we can only understand backwards." Moreover the flux of duration is indefinite and inconclusive, a perpetual lapse possessing in itself no pattern, no possibility of balance or symmetry. Nature, it is true, imposes upon this perpetual perishing a certain appearance of pattern and symmetry. Thus, days alternate with nights, the seasons recur with regularity, plants and animals have their life cycles and are succeeded by offspring like themselves. But all these patternings and symmetries and recurrences are characteristic, not of time as it is in itself, but of space and matter as they are associated with time in our consciousness.

Days and nights and seasons exist because certain heavenly bodies move in a certain way. If it took the earth not a year but a century to move round the sun, our sense of the intrinsic formlessness of time, of its irrevocable one-way lapse towards the death of all the entities involved in it, would be much more acute than it is at present; for most of us, in those hypothetical circumstances, would never live to see all the four seasons of the long year and would have no experience of that recurrence and renewal, those cosmic variations on known themes, which, under the present astronomical dispensation, disguise the essential nature of time by endowing it, or seeming to endow it, with some of the qualities of space. Now, space is a symbol of eternity; for in space there is freedom, there is reversibility of movement, and there is nothing in the nature of a space, as there is in that of time, which condemns those involved in it to inevitable death and dissolution. Moreover, when space contains material bodies, the possibility of orderliness, balance, symmetry and pattern arises, the possibility, in a word, of that Beauty which, along with Goodness and Truth, takes its place in the trinity of manifested Godhead.

Some Reflections on Time

In this context a highly significant point should be noted. In all the arts whose raw material is of a temporal nature, the primary aim of the artist is to spatialize time. The poet, the dramatist, the novelist, the musician – each takes a fragment of the perpetual perishing, in which we are doomed to undertake our one-way journey towards death, and tries to endow it with some of the qualities of space: namely, symmetry, balance and orderliness (the Beauty-producing characteristics of a space containing material bodies), together with multidimensionality and the quality of permitting free movement in all directions. This spatialization of time is achieved in poetry and music by the employment of recurrent rhythms and cadences, by the confinement of the material within conventional forms, such as that of the sonnet or the sonata, and by the imposition upon the chosen fragment of temporal indefiniteness of a beginning, a middle and an end.

What is called 'construction' in the drama and the narrative serves the same spatializing purpose. The aim in all cases is to give a form to the essentially formless, to impose symmetry and order upon what is actually an indefinite flux towards death. The fact that all the arts that deal with temporal sequences have always attempted to spatialize time indicates very clearly the nature of man's natural and spontaneous reaction to time, and throws a light on the significance of space as a symbol of that timeless state, towards which, through all the impediments of ignorance, the human spirit consciously or unconsciously aspires.

There has been an attempt on the part of certain Western philosophers of the last few generations to raise time from the position to which the traditional religions and the normal sentiments of humanity had assigned it. Thus, under the influence of evolutionary theories, time is regarded as the creator of the highest values, so that even God is emergent – the product of the

Aldous Huxley

one-way flux of perpetual perishing, not (as in the traditional religions) as the timeless witness of time, transcendent to it and, because of that transcendence, capable of immanence within it. Closely allied to the theory of emergence is the Bergsonian view that 'duration' is the primary and ultimate reality and that the 'life-force' exists exclusively in the flux.

On another line we have the Hegelian and Marxian philosophies of history, which is spelled with a capital H and hypostatized as a temporal providence working for the realization of the kingdom of heaven on earth – this kingdom of heaven on earth being, in Hegel's view, a glorified version of the Prussian State and in the view of Marx, who was exiled by the authorities of that State, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, leading 'inevitably' by the process of the dialectic to the classless society. These views of history make the assumption that the Divine, or History, or the Cosmic Process, or Geist, or whatever the entity which uses time for its purposes may be called, is concerned with humanity in the mass, not with man and woman as individuals – and not with humanity at any given moment, but with humanity as a succession of generations. Now, there seems to be absolutely no reason for supposing that this is the case, absolutely no reason for supposing that there is a collective soul of succeeding generations capable of experiencing, comprehending and acting upon the impulses transmitted by Geist, History, Life-Force and all the rest.

On the contrary, all the evidence points to the fact that it is the individual soul, incarnated at a particular moment of time, which alone can establish contact with the Divine, to say nothing of other souls. The belief (which is based on obvious and self-evident facts) that Humanity is represented at any given moment by the persons who constitute the mass, and that all the values of Humanity reside in those persons, is regarded as absurdly

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shallow by these philosophers of history. But the tree is known by its fruits. Those who believe in the primacy of persons and who think that the Final End of all persons is to transcend time and realize that which is eternal and timeless, are always, like the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Taoists, the primitive Christians, advocates of non-violence, gentleness, peace and tolerance.

Those, on the contrary, who like to be 'deep' in the manner of Hegel and Marx, who think that 'History' deals with Humanity-in-the-Mass and humanity-as-successive-generations, not with individual men and women here and now, are indifferent to human life and personal values, worship the Molochs which they call the State and Society, and are cheerfully prepared to sacrifice successive generations of real, concrete persons for the sake of the entirely hypothetical happiness which, on no grounds whatsoever, they think will be the lot of Humanity in the distant future.

The politics of those who regard eternity as the ultimate reality are concerned with the present and with the ways and means of organizing the present world in such a way that it will impose the fewest possible obstacles in the way of individual liberation from time and ignorance; those, on the contrary, who regard time as the ultimate reality are concerned primarily with the future and regard the present world and its inhabitants as mere rubble, cannon-fodder and potential slave-labour to be exploited, terrorized, liquidated or blown to smithereens, in order that persons who may never be born, in a future time about which nothing can be known with the smallest degree of certainty, may have the kind of a wonderful time which present-day revolutionaries and war-makers think they ought to have. If the lunacy were not criminal, one would be tempted to laugh.

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, September-October 1946)

Leaves from an Ashrama 46: Samsara as Developer of Moral Muscles

Swami Vidyatmananda

I watch the struggles of government leaders trying to straighten out political troubles, observe businessmen coping with competition, see medical workers endeavouring to find cures for diseases. How gallant they are; how tireless! And yet, observing these efforts makes me sad.

I look back upon the struggles in my own life. How hard I worked for worthwhile ends. Yet much that I did left me frustrated. My social service activities did not seem to do me or anyone else any particular good.

True, says Vedanta. Nobody working for the world is going to succeed in doing much for the world. The sum of good can never be increased or evil lessened.

Then how can I face my daily life? As a conscientious person I feel I must be active and working for something worth while. But how and what?

Several courses lie open to me. I may take the position that I should serve mankind as God and hence spiritualise myself doing selfless work as a sacrament. Or I may attempt to avoid activity as much as possible, trying to devote myself to contemplation.

But these approaches demand spiritual talents which I for my part am not sure that I possess.

In searching for a method I could use, I happened upon a remark by Swami Vivekananda which suggests a course satisfying to me. In his *Karma Yoga* Swamiji says that the world is a gymnasium designed to provide human beings with moral exercise. I can do the world no good at all. In fact, the world exists in order that I may be benefited. Coping with it has the value solely of developing moral muscles in me.

If I could only remember this it would allow me to proceed with a serene attitude – excused from the extremes of enthusiasm and disappointment. Like a gymnast intent on developing

Swami Vidyatmananda

himself, I could accept tension as natural and desirable, for the strain of tissue in opposition to tissue is the process through which muscle is built. I must not press this simile too far, for in all personal growth the factor of grace is fundamental. On the other hand, the example of the athlete-in-training should help me deal with the challenges which come my way, calmly, as desirable exercises. My criterion of success will be: What are the results in me? Am I manifesting more and more the attitudes of strength; a willingness to do my duties without complaint; to accept others for what they are; to absorb the blows of circumstances?

I must not avoid challenge; and I must not complain. And most of all, I must never let myself feel that I am being nobly martyrish. The world got along without me before I came and will get along after I have gone. I must do what is mine to do; it is I alone who will benefit if I do it well.

The question that arises in my mind is, where shall we be after giving up this mortal frame? I asked Mahapurush Maharaj who told me that we would be in the Ramakrishna world where we would be keeping company with the Master. But I have decided not to go anywhere. To contemplate on the Master all the time and not to forget him even for an instant is to be in his company That is Ramakrishna world - to think of him all the time with heart and soul, never losing him even for a moment.

When we have control over our passions, we shall succeed; we shall ourselves then feel that we are advancing towards God. When the mind is completely under your control, it will have nothing to exist on except noble thoughts.

Swami Vijnanananda

Programme for September - October 2014
Sunday discourses begin,
at the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm
Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

Sep	7	Katha Upanishad	10	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep	14	Katha Upanishad	11	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep	21	Patanjali Yoga Sutras	55	Swami Dayatmananda
Sep	28	Day Retreat		
Oct	4	Durga Puja		
Oct	5	No Talk		
Oct	12	Patanjali Yoga Sutras	56	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct	19	Katha Upanishad	12	Swami Shivarupananda
Oct	26	Patanjali Yoga Sutras	57	Swami Dayatmananda

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 28 September
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

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

Durga Puja

Saturday 4 October
at Bourne End at **4:30 pm**

Please note that the Puja starts at 4:30 p.m.

Our worldly pleasures are but a speck of dust, when weighed against that great mountain of joy.

Your body is built through the food you take, and if that is not clean and pure, how can you expect mental perfection?

There have been spiritual interpretations of rathayatra and snanayatra (the Lord's Car Festival and the Festival of Bathing). Whoever sees God inside the chariot of the body derives the joy of the Car Festival. In the Katha Upanishad, also, it is written that the body is the chariot and the soul is the charioteer. The 'Festival of Bathing' means dipping oneself in the water of noble and sacred thoughts .

There are three particular regions of the body which are good for the purpose of meditation: the heart, the spot between the eyebrows, and the nerve centre in the brain (*sahasrara*).

You recite 'Ram, Ram' (the name of Rama). Do you know what 'rum' is? It is an intoxicating drink. You cannot know what it is like unless you drink it. You cannot know the glory of God's name unless you chant it.

Swami Vijnanananda

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This universe - the entire creation and all living beings - has been there from the beginning of time. Nothing new is happening; the same process has been going on in different ages, just like a lump of clay being made into a particular image and then broken and made into another image. This is how the process of creation has been going on; nothing new, only a repetition.

Swami Vijnanananda



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