

# Vedanta

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385 SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2015

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**The Ascent Of The Soul**

*Brahmachari Anantaraman*

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**From Mortality to Immortality**

*Swami Satprakashananda*

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## Divine Wisdom

### Teachings of Swami Adbhutananda On The Truth Of Brahman

Biharilal Sarkar: "Maharaj, the scriptures say that Brahman is seated in the heart of man. What does that mean?"

Latu Maharaj: "It is just a figure of speech. Words cannot really encompass the truth of Brahman, although the scriptures have tried to describe it in that way. Brahman is everywhere. There is no in or out, high or low, east or west with him. He is one, inherent in everything. He is all-pervading, limitless, eternal. Various attempts have been made to describe Brahman, but what is beyond thought cannot really be expressed in language. He is in everything and, again, is beyond everything. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Everything has been defiled by the lips of man except the truth of Brahman.'"

Bihari Babu: "Maharaj, you monks are inscrutable! Instead of making positive statements, you speak only in vague terms!"

Another devotee: "Maharaj, please tell us what you have understood of this truth."

Latu Maharaj: "You see, this realization cannot be expressed. One uses language to express an idea, but so far no adequate language has been discovered for talking about Brahman. The Master used to say, *"My boys, I would like to tell you many things, but the Divine Mother presses my lips, as it were, and does not allow me to talk."*

"You speak thousands of words every day. Have you ever thought about where these words come from?"

The devotee: "They must come from the mind."

Latu Maharaj: "Can you say then, from which part of the mind they come and in what form? And then, where is the

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## Editorial

### Willpower

(Continued from the last issue)

### Self-discipline

**I**f we have not learnt to develop willpower early in life, we should do so at any stage of life, because self-improvement is almost impossible without the exercise of willpower.

Everyone wants to improve himself. Self-improvement depends on self-discipline; self-control and self-discipline are synonymous. Willpower manifests best through self-discipline. Self-discipline is the key to the development of willpower. A man who has self-discipline is a man of tremendous willpower; he is already on the way to God.

The first step to self-improvement is to make a thorough analysis of one's character and form a right estimate of one's assets and liabilities. Every person has some weaknesses in himself. Self-improvement is to become aware of these weaknesses and try to overcome them. But within everybody there is infinite power to manifest purity and knowledge. This faith in the soul's latent divinity and strength alone can help us forward in our spiritual progress.

Swami Vivekananda says: *"Stand and die in your own strength; if there is any sin in the world, it is weakness; avoid all weakness, for weakness is sin, weakness is death."*

The very first step in self-improvement is not to cater to our lower impulses. Every time we yield to a lower impulse, we make it more difficult to overcome it. *Sadhana* is to use every moment either to develop a new habit or to overcome a defect. Even if we do not go lower and remain where we are, we still are in danger of loss of time and opportunity. Every victory that

we achieve over our lower nature helps us to know and realise the truth of our being.

We should organise a well-planned routine in our daily life. This routine should help us in self-improvement on all levels, physical, mental and spiritual. No matter what happens, we should strictly follow that routine.

There is no dearth of opportunity to develop our willpower. Circumstances are always presenting themselves where we can do or achieve something in the matter of our own transformation. It is by practising self-control that we learn how to conquer ourselves. Nature binds us in her meshes only when we allow ourselves to be bound.

We may sometimes think we are too weak to resist temptations; there is no temptation that we cannot overcome by exercising a strong will; there is no pain or sorrow which we cannot bear; there is no disturbance in which we cannot keep ourselves calm.

When the will-power is getting stronger we should gradually direct it to God and finally merge it in His will. This act of surrender is best done through prayer as taught by Sri Ramakrishna.

### **Surrender to the Lord**

The greatest manifestation of willpower is to surrender oneself to God, and to merge one's will in the Divine Will. This is the only way to make our will invincible. This is the acme of all spiritual practices. All Yogas, all religions end with this total surrender to God.

But doubts can assail us. Is not this self-surrender the total annihilation of our personalities? What remains if we merge ourselves in the Divine? The answer is man's personality will not be annihilated through surrender; on the contrary it makes

one big, as big as God. We find ourselves "*strong in the Lord and in the knowledge of His might.*" When we become one with the Infinite and the Eternal, no time or energy will be lost in futile indecisions, regrets and disappointments.

Contrary to what it may seem, self-surrender is not something passive. Self-surrender does not mean simply saying to God, 'I surrender myself to you,' and do nothing. Self-surrender means that we constantly try to see God's will in everything, we constantly try to see God in everything, and accept everything that happens as the will of God and rejoice in that as a gift of God.

Swami Brahmananda says:

*Surrender yourself fully to the Lord. There is nothing but Him. 'Verily all this is Brahman.' He is all in all, and everything belongs to him. ...Is it possible to surrender oneself in a day? When surrender is achieved, everything is achieved. One should struggle hard for self-surrender.*

Self-surrender is the most difficult of all *sadhanas*. Because it involves surrendering our ego — our sense of 'I' and 'mine' which is the greatest obstacle to God. In this path, we have to let go of everything and depend only on the Lord. How easy it sounds to live 'like a cast-off leaf in a gale,' as Sri Ramakrishna calls it. But when we try to put it in practice, we immediately find ourselves grabbing for something to hold on to. That 'something to hold on to' is in fact, our ego.

One aspect of self-surrender comes in the practice of Karma Yoga. Here we must, as the *Gita* tells us again and again, surrender the fruits of all our actions to God. We cannot claim ourselves to be the doer of anything, nor can we desire to enjoy the results of anything. This is not as simple as it may seem. As Swami Brahmananda said:

*Is it so easy to surrender oneself to God? Verbally many say: 'We have surrendered ourselves to God. We are doing what he makes us do.' But when we observe their lives, we see that their actions are quite contrary to what they say. If they do anything good, they take the credit for themselves. They say with pride, 'We did it, we did it.' But if there is any mishap, they blame God and say, 'He is giving us trouble and suffering.'*

In the Vaishnava School of South India, the greatest emphasis is laid on self-surrender as a devotional practice. In fact, it is considered the greatest path in itself, and all other paths to God merely preparations leading to the final act of self-surrender. In this path God is not merely our only refuge and goal, He is also our only means.

According to the great Advaita teacher Madhusudana Sarasvati, there are three stages leading one to complete self-surrender. As he says:

The practice of self-surrender takes three forms:

- (a) In the first stage a devotee feels '*I am His*'.
- (b) In the second stage he feels '*God is certainly mine*'. and,
- (c) In the final stage the devotee knows '*I am He*'.

When a spiritual practitioner reaches this stage his willpower is total and his sadhana is complete, all his bonds are broken. He becomes a *Siddha*, a free man.

(Concluded)

Swami Dayatmananda



*Never say "mine." Whenever we say a thing is "mine," misery will immediately come. Do not even say "my child" in your mind. Possess the child, but do not say "mine." If you do, then will come the misery.*

Swami Vivekananda

**The Ascent Of The Soul**  
Nammalvar's Spiritual Experiences  
Brahmachari Anantaraman

I

In India we always mean by a system of philosophy the successful systematization of a body of truths experienced by a long line of seers who had direct contact with the ultimate reality. We have in the teachings of the Alvars (Vaishnava Saints) a stress on the theistic ideal, later organized into a system by great Acharyas like Sri Ramanuja. There is a remarkable unity of thought in the lives and teachings of the Alvars and the credit for it no doubt goes to the strength and vitality of the Bhagavata tradition to which the Alvars belonged. The writings of the Alvars are not to be approached with the expectation of an intellectual feast —because they did not think of the logical formulation of their doctrines at all. Rather they are to be studied in a reverential manner as the record of the varied mystic experiences vouchsafed to them by the grace of the Divine. The intellectual prop to the views of the Alvars was given by Sri Ramanuja on the basis of the Brahma Sutras and the Gita and this enabled a wider dissemination of their doctrines.

It is interesting to observe that the Alvars came from all castes and communities and it was the sheer power of their holiness that won the hearts of the people who came to look upon them as the Incarnations of the various ornaments like the conch, discus, mace etc., of the Lord Narayana. The Alvars gave to the world not only a picture of Reality, but also an inspired poetry of a very high order in the form of their Prabandhas (works). The flood of their devotion inundated the vast field of Tamil literature and gave it, perhaps for the first time in its history a poetry that is truly

inspired, which is not written to praise this or that king, or which is caused by intoxication at the beauties of nature. The musical charm of their utterances is a speciality without which the real import of their works cannot be grasped in their true significance.

Nammalvar is considered the greatest among the Alvars in the Sri Vaishnava tradition since he exemplified in his life almost all the great truths now known to the world as the philosophy of Sri Ramanuja. The life of Nammalvar is without any outward incidents. He was born perfect and steeped in God-consciousness from the moment of his birth. Except for the fact that he was observed to be a wondrous child—he was always absorbed in God-consciousness – and had not the usual diseases of childhood and was moreover singularly devoid of bodily complaints such as thirst, appetite etc.,—there was nothing striking in his whole career and from his birth till death he was in a state of continuous absorption in the Deity and the occasions when he was forced, as it were, to descend from his lofty plane gave to the world his unequalled devotional works.

But the apparent inactivity on the physical plane was more than compensated by his tremendous activity in the world of the spirit: he was not merely content with realizing a section of Reality; he was not content to realize the Deity in its isolated aspects; but he wanted to possess It in all Its manifoldness and establish with the Godhead all possible relations appropriate to spiritual tradition. What arrests our attention in his life is the plasticity with which he adopted apparently contradictory attitudes towards the Deity while being at the same time immersed in God-love. Perhaps he longs for the service of the Lord even as Hanuman of the Ramayana longed to be the servant of Sri Rama.

The mood changes. He is enthralled by the Sundara (Beauty) aspect of the Godhead which leads to the complete transformation

of himself into a mother Yashoda tending Sri Krishna, the Child or a Gopi pining at the separation from the Beloved. At this stage, birds, beasts and even stones and trees are addressed in the agonies of separation for news about the lost Beloved. Then comes the happiness at the reunion when all the storms and stresses are over. A great calm descends on the Alvar and only the pure contemplation of the Supreme as the Antaryamin (Indweller) is left with but a dull consciousness of the physical world to intervene in the uninterrupted meditation. Nammalvar's self-effacement was so supreme that at all times and in all places and under all conditions he felt that he was a limb of the Lord. The very contemplation of the infinite solicitude of the Deity for the mortals in incarnating Himself as a human being would overpower him and he would remain plunged in Bhava Samadhi.

## II

The four great works of the Nammalvar in which we are given a glimpse into his mind are the *Tiruviruttam*, *Tiruvasiriyam*, *Peria Tiruvoandadi*, and the *Tiruvaimoli*. In Sri Vaishnava tradition, these four works are said to be the essence in Tamil of the four Vedas and there are Sri Vaishnavas who accept it as equal in authority with the Upanishads and the Gita. The striking quality of his works is that when he is in a particular mood, the idiom, the turn of thought, every lispig expression is saturated with that particular emotion. And he had the genius of a poet to adapt his rhythm to suit a particular idea. When he is in a mood of supreme anguish, the metre is tense and heavy. When he is exhorting his own mind towards good behaviour, or he is calling upon others to join him in this festival of Divine Joy, his expressions are short and crisp, piercing the mind to its very core. We shall examine here briefly his important works.

The *Tiruviruttam*, his first work, describes his feminine approach to the Divine. The Alvar has abandoned all notions of

himself as a man : he is a secret lover expectantly awaiting the coming of the Beloved. Even here the various intensities are revealed by his taking either the role of a handmaid, or of the lover or of the mother who is moved to pity at the sight of her love-smitten daughter. The first verse begins with a prayer for releases from the bondage of material existence. The Alvar feels that he is himself responsible for the separation : he is full of evils :

*“Oh! Thou the first among the Gods! Thou who didst take birth in innumerable wombs for the protection and liberation of beings. Do hear this appeal of this slave—let me be granted that I will not be subject to false knowledge, aimless conduct and this impure physical frame with its attendant evils. Do condescend to hear this supplication of mine.”*

The Alvar has had as yet only a vanishing glimpse of the Divine. The presence has not yet become an unalterable fact. Separation from the Beloved is still there, in spite of supplication and prayer. The verses from one to twenty-five depict for us the various intensities of longing. But how long is he to wait in suspense? The longing is too much. The Alvar thinks: Perhaps those swans that are flitting across the sky may know something about the beloved or they may possibly bring news about Him. He accosts them :

*“Oh! Ye swans that flit across the skies and ye bees, hearken to my prayer! How long since I sent my mind to get news from Him. But still there is no news. Those of you who go to my Beloved’s place earlier, do tell that mind of mine about my anguish and also chide him for his impropriety at such a delay.”* (Verse 30)

The thought of the Beloved invests all nature with a peculiar meaning. Every movement in nature is reminiscent of the Beloved. Seeing a bank of dark blue clouds, the Alvar exclaims in sudden remembrance of the Supreme :

*“Tell me, Oh dark blue clouds, how you came to possess that dark complexion so exactly resembling that of my beloved? May be it is due to your aeons of austerities done in the service of the world—carrying cool water across your backs in the deep blue skies.”* (Verse 32)

He had waited; he had sent messengers after the Beloved. But still there is no response. The Alvar is piqued at the apparent indifference of the object of love. Morning has passed and the evening is also going away. Now the dark night is approaching. Every minute is prolonged into eternity and the Alvar feels a sense of utter loneliness, He complains:

*“This darkness is like that of the pralaya, the final dissolution. Here I am waiting in all loneliness for Him. Even at this crucial moment, He does not pause to pity me, standing alone, ever remembering the sacred Tulasi garland of His neck. Oh the cruelty of it!”* (Verse 39)

At last the vision is granted. The Lord has revealed Himself to the Alvar in all His great Beauty.

*“Like lotuses are thine eyes.*

*Thine palm and feet too*

*Oh! God of mountain-like hue*

*My consciousness expanding,*

*Transcending Heaven*

*Going beyond Brahma,*

*Overspreading all else*

*Sees the Beauty of the helper of me and of the eternal!”* (Verse 43)

The Alvar has got what he had been pining for. In the intensity of delight the Alvar addresses his own mind thus:

*“Oh, mind, in these adverse days, He, our Lord, who as Varaha, (the Boar) saved the earth, has cast his benign glance on us. Who is there who has got such intimacy with Him of lotus eyes? Having got this supreme boon, why should you fear the pain of birth or death? Rest assured. Give up your anxiety and live in peace.”* (Verse 45)

The Alvar is sure that he is on the right path. He does not care for the jests and opinions of others.

*“Let people say that my mentality is low—I have not known till now anybody except Him who in His incarnation as the Boar saved the world by his horn and who is the source of all intelligence for the dwellers in the three worlds.”* (Verse 99)

Now the period of supplication is over. The Alvar has got at last a glimpse of the beloved. He is now firmly convinced that the God is the only thing that is to be striven after in this world.

### III

The *Tiruvāsiriyam*, the next work of the Alvar introduces us to his moments of supreme adoration of the Divine, the natural sequel to the periods of storm and stress undergone previously. There is an uninterrupted flow of delight in the Alvar's mind. Here there is no appeal for liberation from this world—there is no bargaining at all—it is all simple adoration. We are given an image of the Deity as the encompassing and sustaining principle of life. The Alvar is more philosophic and has time enough for a calm and collected survey of his experiences. The vision is described:

*“Like the lustrous emerald-green mountain with huge red-clouds, with crimson-sun, moon and stars adorned, asleep on the palm of the ocean, bright-jewelled, bright-lipped and red-eyed, with entrancing body lying on the serpent, poisonous, brooding, in the midst of the ocean enjoyest thou Yoga sleep.....”*

Each of the seven verses in this work brings before us the Lord either as the chief of the gods, or the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world or the compassionate One who is interested in the struggles and longings of the devotee. Throughout, the majesty of the Godhead is stressed. The last verse

reaffirms his faith in the Supreme and rejects the worship of all subordinate deities :—

*“Shiva, the wearer of the crescent moon, Brahma as well as Indra, the chief of the gods and all beings and all worlds and the five elements, the solar and the lunar systems, He encompasses within Himself and covers them. Him and except Him whom shall we adore?”*

But how to reach this height of vision? Is it possible by self-effort? The Alvar is emphatic that advance is not made by piece-meal efforts—without the fundamental offering of oneself at the feet of the Divine—a profound self-surrender that brings a change in the very nerve and core of the aspirant. Unless the Godhead in its infinite mercy comes down to our plane of consciousness even the desire for self-effort and purification will not be there. The Deity is willing to be born even as dwarf or as a lower order of existence so that the aspirant may understand a particle of His greatness. We thus come across a supremely original statement : The Goal of Life is the Godhead, the means is the Godhead Itself, and the obstacle is nothing but our own petty ego that thrusts itself between ourselves and the Goal.

#### IV

The *Peria Tiruvandadi*, the third work of the Alvar opens up another facet of the Alvar's personality. The ideas in this piece are not at all arranged in proper sequence thus showing us his extreme state of mind. He had tasted of the Divine Bliss in the *Tiruvoasiriyam*. The *Peria Tiruvandadi* reveals his insatiable desire for more of the same. The mind of the Alvar is here made to come down to a lower plane and some of his experiences are given as his own teachings to the men sunk in Samsara. At this stage even the idea of personal liberation appears ludicrous to him. He is not in need of escape from this world of births and deaths : he has no such personal end in view. Even this transient existence is not shunned as long as it does not interfere with the continuous

remembrance of the Supreme. Every movement in thought, every passing joy or sorrow is referred to the Deity as the locus. Nammalvar wants only one thing: to achieve even in this earthly existence the coincidence of his personal will with the Supreme will of the universe. The Alvar bursts out:

*“Oh! Let me tell you one thing—Oh! Thou ever gracious Lord! Methinks you are always intent on showering on the devoted your Grace and are waiting for an opportunity to do so. But of what use is Vaikuntha when the delight in singing your name is so great?”* (Verse 53)

His inmost desire is given in the supplication to the Lord to grant him that he may never forget Him at any time. He does not want Moksha (liberation) to serve Him in his celestial abode. He feels that continuous remembrance of the Divine in a spirit of utter devotion is the greatest service of the Lord. He speaks out :

*“I am immersed in the enjoyment of your auspicious qualities. O Lord! This is my prayer : I am not at all anxious to get salvation and attain your nearness, to serve you for eternity. The greatest treasure after which my mind runs is your continual remembrance for ever and ever.”* (Verse 58)

Or he chides his own mind which is ever after some sort of release from this bondage of existence. The Lord is so great that He can grant the mind any boon it wants. But it is the greatest art to choose the boon required. He says to the mind :

*“You fool of a mind, do not be carried away by the idea that your present experience is something inferior to life in Vaikuntha. Do not be under such delusions and go after those things. After all it is not so difficult for Him to grant you this small boon. Give up such ideas and long for union with Him even in this very life.”* (Verse 67)

The Alvar therefore values more some realization in this very life than waiting for some post-mortem condition. Time is fleeting, and every moment that is spent in trifles is an irreparable loss. This intense and steadfast devotion has brought the Alvar

the permanent possession of the Divine within himself. Nammalvar is conscious of it and he exclaims :—

*“Oh! The pity of it! The Supreme Lord Krishna of dark hue has not been satisfied with his lofty seat at Tiruvenkata (Tirupati) or the couch on the milky ocean, or even his Celestial Abode, but abandoning all these He has now entered my heart and is not leaving it!”* (Verse 68)

The Alvar has now approached the brink of the precipice that suddenly ends in God-intoxication. Only a slight movement is required for the final leap.

## V

The *Tiruvaimoli* takes us to the final scenes in the soul's journey. The soul has attained its goal which is kinship with the Divine. The Alvar is firmly established in the intimate experience of the Deity. In this work also we find the Alvar adopting various attitudes and addressing the Lord. But there is a radical difference. The Alvar is merely playing here. Having attained the highest, he has merely descended from his height for a greater and fuller experience of the Divine.

The *Tiruvaimoli* is considered the greatest work of Nammalvar. So authoritative was it considered by Sri Vedantadesika that he wrote two epitomes of the work called the *Dramidopanishadsara* and the shorter *Dramidopanishad Tatparya Ratnavali*. The work is important to us because here we are allowed a peep into the Alvar's thinking. Here there is a restatement of the fundamental categories of any theistic system of philosophy, namely, the nature and attributes of the Godhead, the nature of the goal, the means to be adopted for realising it and the obstacles that stand in the way. The previous experiences have convinced the Alvar as to the Personal nature of the Deity. In the very first verse he describes the Godhead as possessing many auspicious attributes :

*“Mind, save yourself by the loving worship of Him who has none above Himself in the excellence of His blessed qualities, who bestows knowledge and devotion for the destruction of ignorance and who is also the highest among the gods.”*

But the Deity is not an abstract unit resting apart from the common everyday world. He embraces within Himself the worlds animate and inanimate, being both the sustainer and ruler of them. Or rather the world inheres in the Godhead in an organic unity. Here we are given a statement which may be regarded as the corner stone of Nammalvar's whole thinking :

*“He, the Supreme has become the five elements, the animate as well as inanimate existence and He is seen inhering in objects just as the Atman inheres in the body and controls it.” (1-1-7)*

We are at once told about the relation between the body and the Self and the relation between the Deity and the world of creation. The world of everyday observation is not rejected as something spurious. It is described as the abode of the Deity and thus the whole attitude to life is changed. Life is no longer regarded as a mesh of misery, but as possessing something Divine in it, as the seat of the Lord. The Self, on the other hand is solely the possession of the Deity, and controlled by it, just as the Life Principle in each of us animates matter which is the principle of inertia.

Now the approach to the Godhead is not through the intellect, or reason, for he is behind all affirmations and denials. The Alvar points out :

*“If it is said, He is, then certainly He is. If it is said, He is not, then also He is, since He is behind both the denial and affirmation. His visible and invisible bodies are the visible and invisible objects of the world. He persists in all the tenses of time “ (Verse 1-1-9)*

But what is the way? It is intense yearning that opens our higher channels of vision. A deep and steadfast yearning to reach

the Divine is itself the necessary Sadhana for the final realization. The Alvar observes :

*“Oh, Lord! though incompetent to follow the ordained path of work and wisdom, my mind daily yearns after you and you alone. This yearning melts my soul and I live and sustain myself by that yearning.”*  
(Verse 5-7-1)

This yearning is not a desire for immersion in some Bliss. There is no trace of personal gain at all. Any joy which we may get in such a release is only incidental and should not be confused with the goal of eternal love for the Lord. At this stage love is quite impersonal and God is loved and worshipped not because he is lovable, but because of an innate urge which is quite inexplicable. Says the Alvar

*“Let Him be cruel (because He has not blessed me with His union) more cruel, unjust and hard-hearted towards me. My mind won't leave Him, I am already His. My seeking Him does not depend on his possessing auspicious attributes. He is my very life. How can I bear separation from Him?”* (Verse 5-3--5)

The first six books of the *Tiruvaimoli* assures us that the paths of Karma or Jnana and Bhakti are not sufficient by themselves. There is the necessity for Divine Grace for the advancement of the soul. The seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth books are interspersed with visions of God-union and the Alvar bears his life only by remembrance of His grace and blissful attributes. The ninth is the culmination. The direct and immediate perception of the Godhead is attained. In the last section of the tenth book the Alvar feels :

*“My yearning love was more than the whole universe of thine, such love has been fully satiated. I am drowned in Thyself and the great flood of eternal, infinite, limitless ocean of blissfulness.”*

The Alvar's soul has reached the end of its journey, from the panting for the Supreme in the beginning to the bliss of eternal

union with the Supreme. Here all words stop before the sheer majesty of the experience.

## VI

Many of these experiences have been felt by numerous mystics throughout our country during these thousands of years. But Nammalvar's experiences are unique, because he, like Sri Ramakrishna of our own age, was entirely devoid of any preliminary schooling in the life of God and the citadel of God was stormed and taken by the sheer power of conviction and sincerity. Nammalvar's life is an object lesson to us : it assures us of the Power that is working behind us and its true nature, a power which is not always sitting in judgement, but which is an ocean of mercy and is the very essence of Truth, Goodness and Beauty. He has been aptly called Namma-alvar 'Our Alvar,' an appellation that was given to him by the Lord Himself, since he was so dear to Him. His life has been relived in this scientific age of ours in a much more intense way, by Sri Ramakrishna and that is a sure sign that our spiritual traditions are intact and are eternally true.

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*Strength is the medicine for the world's disease.  
Strength is the medicine which the poor must have when  
tyrannized over by the rich. Strength is the medicine that  
the ignorant must have when oppressed by the learned;  
and it is the medicine that sinners must have when  
tyrannized over by other sinners; and nothing gives such  
strength as this idea of monism. Nothing makes us so  
moral as this idea of monism. Nothing makes us work so  
well at our best and highest as when all the responsibility  
is thrown upon ourselves.*

Swami Vivekananda

## From Mortality to Immortality

Swami Satprakashananda

**T**here is no denying that man is mortal. Not only is he subject to death, but each and every living thing must die. In this world of uncertainties, death is the only settled fact. Yet, no one knows how death will come, nor where, nor when. No place is secure from death. No measure of caution can avert death.

Death has no regard for anything in this universe. No position, be it intellectual, physical, moral, or even spiritual is immune from it. Yet, the human mind refuses to accept death as something final, and we find the sages of the world declaring that death of the body is not the end of an individual's existence.

The physical body dies and disintegrates, but the spirit that passes out of the body continues to exist. As long as a man is considered as only a physical being, death will be thought to end him; but man is not just a physical or psychophysical being, he is a spiritual entity. This is what the scriptures declare.

Our common sense, also, cannot accept death as the final end of an individual. This leaves human life completely meaningless and unexplained. If death were the end of existence, then our sense of justice is frustrated, our labour is unrewarded, and our desires and aspirations are unrealized. Human reason, human feeling cannot accept death as final.

Why should mortal man have such a deep-seated yearning for immortality? There must be some explanation for it. There is a story from the Mahabharata concerning the Pandava princes. These five brothers were living in a forest in exile. One day after walking a long distance, they felt very thirsty. The youngest brother was sent in search of water. He found a beautiful lake and was going to drink the water, when he heard a voice say, "I am the presiding deity of this lake, first answer my questions,

and then drink." But the brother did not listen; he sipped just a little water, and promptly fell dead.

Meanwhile the other brothers wondered what had happened and another brother was sent to search. He found the lake and saw his brother lying dead, close to the water's edge. This brother also wanted a drink and as he bent down the same voice spoke out, "I am the presiding deity of this water. First answer my questions, and then drink." But he could not stop to answer the questions and as he sipped the water he too fell dead. The third and fourth brothers went to the lake and the same experience happened to them.

Finally, the fifth brother, Yudhisthira, went to the lake, and saw his four brothers lying there. The same voice spoke to him, and appeared in the form of a yaksa [demi-god], the god of justice. The yaksa said, Answer my questions and then drink this water." "What are the questions?" asked Yudhisthira.

The yaksa asked him many questions, which the young sage duly answered. Finally he was asked, 'What is the most wonderful fact of life?' Yudhisthira replied, "Men and women are dying by the thousands, yet those who remain behind believe themselves to be out of death's reach. This is the most wonderful fact in the world." Yes, death comes to all, but all cling to life. Thus the Vedantic scriptures explain the immortality of the spirit.

In every case of perception there are two distinct factors. One is the object of perception, the other is the perceiver. What is the difference between the object of perception and the perceiver? We must remember that the existence of an object always presupposes the existence of a perceiver. It is the perceiver who establishes the reality of the object perceived. But we ignore the perceiver and accept the objective universe as real in itself, forgetting the necessity for a subject in order that an object can exist. The one fundamental difference between the object

perceived and the perceiver is this: the perceiver is self-aware. The object has no inherent consciousness.

Similarly, Vedanta says that this distinction between the object and the subject holds good with regard to the human personality as well. Just as an external object is perceived, so is this physical body an object of perception. An individual knows himself to be either dark or fair, sick or healthy, or whether his body is growing or decaying.

The body is an object of perception, and so is the mind an object of perception. Just as one can watch external events, so can one watch the movements of the mind. Mental phenomena are observed by that same perceiver. And there is a vital difference between the spirit that perceives the mind, the body, and the senses, and the objects perceived.

The spirit is always there whether the object is there or not. This whole universe, for instance, drops from your consciousness when you dream. There is an altogether different order of perceived objects and perceived facts in the dream state. Yet, the same perceiver is persistently there; but the objects perceived are changing. When deep sleep is experienced, there is no feeling, no memory, no thought; still, the perceiver is there. The same experiencer says, "I slept, I did not know anything. I dreamt, I slept, I awoke." This means that all the objects of perception belonging to this physical body and the mind are changing, but the perceiver is enduring and changeless. The external objects change, the body changes, the senses change, the mind changes, but the perceiver is constant. This is the one factor that never changes. It reveals your dream state, your sleep state, and waking state, but is separate from all of these.

So through reasoning one can become convinced that a person is not only distinct from external objects, but separate from his own physical body and ever-changing mind. While the external

objects—the body, senses, and mind—are bereft of consciousness, one always has consciousness within him. This is the same in sleep, in dream, or in the waking state, and this consciousness maintains our identity.

Our body may change, our thoughts and ideas be revolutionized; still, we say that we are the same. I was playing around my grandfather's knees; now I have grandchildren playing around my knees. Think of this! The mind and body have completely changed! A person may not even recognize himself in a photograph taken when he was a child; still he knows he was that child.

What maintains our individuality? Underlying all these changing factors, there is a perceiver which is of the nature of Pure Consciousness. It is changeless; and at the same time blissful, because it is always loved. And because it is loved, everything identified with it is loved. The house is dear, the children are dear, even the clothes one wears are dear because they are related to this Self, this Perceiver. That Self is pure, luminous, constant, changeless, and blissful. This is its nature, and it is ever-present.

Yet, just as fire is covered with smoke, this spirit is covered with a kind of ignorance. An individual fails to realize his true nature as pure spirit. He not only fails to do this, but he identifies himself with this body-mind and thus becomes young or old, healthy or sick, ignorant or wise, simply through the identification of the pure spirit with this body, and psycho-physical system. As long as he does this he cannot be immortal in the true sense. For example, a person may have some money in his purse, but if he is not aware of it he may as well be poor. Similarly, so long as a person does not realize his real self as being pure spirit, he will remain mortal.

It is said in the Upanishads that like corn, human beings die and decay. After death, a person may have another body, but he

will die again. Why do people die? Because they are born. Anything that has a beginning, anything that is born, must die. This is an inevitable truth.

Suppose the physical body is revived after having undergone death. Will not that make a person immortal? No, for death will come again. It is said that Sri Krishna restored to life the son of his teacher Sandipani. Jesus Christ restored Lazarus to life. But where are they now? Restoration of the dead body does not mean immortality, here or hereafter.

A person can attain immortality even while living by realizing his identity with the immortal spirit and the fact that this spirit is separate from the body. "Death, where is thy sting?" said St. Paul. He knew that the body would die, yet he knew that he was an immortal spirit. There have been sages and seers who have realized the immortal spirit, and they defied death. One story has been common in India for a long time. When Alexander the Great invaded India, he came as far as the river Indus. He was a great patron of learning and a lover of wise men, and he had heard of an Indian sage living nearby. He found one sage and requested him to return to Macedonia with him. The sage replied, "I am quite happy here, I do not wish to go anywhere." Alexander tried to persuade him in different ways, but when the saint said firmly, "No. I shall remain here." Alexander drew his sword and said, "Then I shall kill you." The sage laughed and replied, "You have never spoken so foolishly. How can you kill me? Weapons cannot pierce me, fire cannot burn me, water cannot wet me, air cannot dry me. I am immortal."

If an individual fails to realize the immortality of the spirit, he is mortal. Realization of our eternal nature can be effected in two ways. First reasoning about it; second, meditating upon this truth and thus attaining the realization of God. In Vedanta, God realization and Self-realization are not distinct. In trying to realize

your spiritual Self, you realize God, because God is the Soul of your soul. As Christ said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." In realizing God, then, you realize your Self. In realizing the Self, you realize God. Thus Sri Rama-krishna remarked, if a person can know himself in the true sense, he will know God. There is a kinship between the human Spirit and the divine Spirit, and when an individual realizes the true nature of his conscious Self, he realizes that he belongs to the supreme Spirit. Just as each and every wave belongs to the ocean, and each and every ray of the sun belongs to the sun, similarly, each and every soul belongs to God or the Infinite Soul.

We read in the *Upanishads*: "This form [the form of the Supreme Spirit] does not stand within the range of sense-perception. No one perceives Him with the eye; those who know him through intuition, that mystical awareness, as seated in the heart, become immortal. He lies hidden; Him the cosmic being knows as the source of Himself; those Gods and Seers who realized Him became identified with Him, and verily became immortal." Then one of the Seers declares, "Hear Me, O ye children of immortal bliss, ye that dwell on this earth, ye that dwell in other spheres; hear me. I have realized that Supreme Being, ever resplendent, being of the nature of Pure Consciousness, the Light of all lights, resplendent as the sun, self-effulgent. I know that I belong to Him, and not to this physical universe. Since I have known this truth, I am beyond death—this is the only way to immortality, there is no other way out of the realm of death." When one approaches the Supreme Being with devotion and worships him, the mind will become purified. Then one will realize his spiritual nature and eventually realize his Self and his essential unity with Divinity.

That Supreme Spirit can be contacted through one's own inner spirit. Whether one tries to realize the Self as distinct from the body, the senses, and the mind; or whether one gradually

becomes aware of the true nature of the Self, it is Spirit that contacts Spirit. Each and every kind of perception has its own instrument. For the perception of physical forms there are the eyes; for the perception of sounds there are ears; for the perception of mental ideas, there is the mind. Similarly, for the experience of pure spirit there is the spiritual Self. As one becomes aware of the spiritual Self within, God comes closer and closer as the Soul of one's soul, and ultimately one realizes his essential oneness with him. 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."*

The difference between mortality and immortality, the difference between death and deathlessness is to realize that man's pure Spirit is deathless and immortal, self-luminous consciousness, ever pure, and free, and one with the Supreme Spirit.

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*Let people say whatever they like, stick to your own convictions, and rest assured, the world will be at your feet. They say, "Have faith in this fellow or that fellow," but I say, "Have faith in yourself first," that's the way. Have faith in yourself—all power is in you — be conscious and bring it out. Say, "I can do everything."*

Swami Vivekananda

## **Gautama The Buddha**

### **The Light Of Asia**

Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao, M.A. Ph. D.

In the spiritual history of the world the sixth century B. C. is a period of great significance. We had Gautama the Buddha in India, Confucius in China, and Pythagoras in Greece. Gautama and his religion has a world outlook and world following. It has enjoyed a unique vogue with the rationalists, positivists, and humanists, and each claim him as their own prophet. "The men who declare that we cannot know Reality and those who affirm that there is no Reality alike use his name." Buddhism is described as the rational religion of the world. India exported Buddhism to the rest of the world and a section of the orthodox India treated it as a heresy at home.

Buddha lived for eighty years and preached for forty years. Like all the great religious teachers Socrates, Jesus, Confucius, he never wrote but spoke in parables the message of his life. Buddha is a continuator as well as a renovator of Indian tradition. Orthodox interpreters hold the view that Buddha represents a rival view inimical to the great revealed scriptures of India, the Upanishads. They argue that there are two traditions in Indian philosophy: the Upanishadic which declares the Reality of the Atman and its realisation as the ground and goal of existence; the Un-Atman tradition represented by Buddha, based on rational reflection and not revelation which preaches the extinction of the self and the composite and destructible nature of Atman and the momentary nature of the flux of existence. These two are erected into two ineluctable anti-thesis by traditionalists.

This is far from the truth. A close examination of the early canonical scriptures of Buddhism and the incidents of the life of Gautama the Buddha reveals to us that Buddha's gospel is

not negative and opposed to the Upanishadic tradition. Buddha was no alien, uprooted from the racial past of India's culture. A careful study of the Madhyamika metaphysics, a powerful school of Buddhism, as set forth by Nagarjuna in his Sutras, reveals, that Buddhism did not stand for nihilism or *Sunyavada*. He did not stress the metaphysical aspect of Reality as the Upanishad. He was interested not in denying it but in making enough ethical activity possible to reach it.

Utter selflessness is the doctrine and the message of the entire field of Indian philosophy. Buddha carried it to the most extreme extent. The self which he denied and which he asked us to get rid of, is the unregenerate self of man. Like all the systems of Indian philosophy he did differentiate the empirical ego from the transcendental self. He knew that man is a creature on the borderland with an immortal soul and perishing body. He stressed the 'glassy essence in man.' He asked us to strive to get rid of the thick layers of unreality that covered it. He held the view that all the suffering of man is the result of man's lusts, desires, and implacable self-will. He was out to destroy this unregenerate self and build the real self. He did not want to perpetuate the naive view of the physical personality of man which consists of desires that haunt us and the passions we brood over, and the spites and envies and tantrums that animate us.

He exhorted his disciples to put an end to all of them by ceaseless striving and unremitting moral life. The noble eight fold path is the discipline. The path of *Dharma* leads to *Brahma*. Dwelling in *Dharma* and *Brahma*, he uses alternately. He was opposed to dogmatism of any time and did not give credence to affirmative theologies which claimed exclusive disclosure of truth to them. He did not hold the view that man attains salvation through a supernatural gift or grace but by striving hard and relying on the real self. He said "Be ye as those who

have the self as their light. Be ye as those who have the self as the refuge. Betake yourself to no external refuge. Hold fast to truth as to a refuge." This exhortation indicates his affinity to the perennial philosophy of India.

An examination of the historical times in which Buddha lived, the sixth century B. C. rules out the attraction and the possibility for a glorification of the doctrine of nihilism. An arid rationalism would have had very little value to the men of the sixth century B. C, and hardly would Buddha have had such a large following, not to speak of royal patronage. Further to convict Buddha, of agnosticism as the late Prof. Keith did, is to mistake his stature. If Buddha did not know the ultimate Reality and still continued to preach to the ignorant masses it only makes of him a master-crook and not a master-mind. Much is made out of the silence of Buddha and his refusal to be drawn into any metaphysical discussions about the nature of ultimate Reality. To him religion was active strife. He preached after a deep abiding spiritual experience, not in the manner of a professor finding a solution for a problem in his erudition. Buddha's intellectual statements and ethical teachings are the transcripts of the experience central to his being. They are not the results of his speculative flight or intellectual calibre. If he could have had them through intellect, there is no significance in his great renunciation and ceaseless striving.

The supremacy of the ethical is the urgent need of the hour. Hence Buddha's appeal to us. Buddha's silence about the ultimate nature of Reality is in line with all the great statements of ultimate truth. Sankara held that silence was Brahman when pestered to describe it. The highest truths are beyond the reach of mind and words declare the *Upanishads*. Farther ultimate Reality is described as the truth which is conveyed in a wordless speech. All this indicate the ineffable and the indescribable nature of spiritual experience in terms of intellectual concepts.

The grand life of Buddha indicates to us the proper measure of things. He explained the dangers of extremes and stuck to the middle path. He inveighed against gross indulgence as well as total abstemiousness. He knew that men are unregenerate in their desires and imbecile in their minds and so exhorted them to overcome every mean desire, base passion and humiliating weakness. He founded organisation and admitted women too, very reluctantly, to the Order. Buddhist culture and influence, art and architecture, have considerably influenced Indian thought and are a part of it. Hinduism drove Buddhism out of India because it assimilated all that is best in it.

On political matters Gautama the Buddha was not without his ageless message to us. King Ajatasatru wanted to invade the Vajjin states and asked the Tathagata whether he could do so. Buddha turned to his favourite disciple Ananda and asked him whether the Vajjins meet frequently to discuss political matters, whether they reverence age, tradition, experience and precedent and whether they transact their business in concord and harmony. To all these queries, Ananda answered in the positive. So long as these are observed Buddha said, the Vajjins are unconquerable. We do not know whether any of our modern political charters can afford to be indifferent to those elements and hope to endure. The charm and the personality of Buddha has touched a world wider than wars and the revolutions. He represents the true East. To him religion is compassion and social welfare. He declared that " he is prepared to be born any number of times on Mother earth to save mankind from trouble and incarnate himself in any form of existence." He stood for universal salvation. This is the strain of perennial philosophy. Pascal declared that, "Christ continues to hang on the cross until the last atom of dust is divinised " Our beloved Gandhiji declared that " There cannot be happiness until it is won for all".

The great agnostic Anatole France went up to Musée de Clugny on 1st May 1890 in Paris and there in the silence and simplicity of Gods of Asia reflected on the aim of existence, on the meaning of life and the values which people and governments are in search of. Then his eyes fell on the statue of Buddha. Anatole France felt like kneeling down and praying to him as to a God the Buddha eternally young, clad in ascetic robes, seated on the lotus of purity with his two fingers upright admonishing all humanity to develop comprehension and charity, wisdom and love, *prajna* and *karuna*.

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*Be perfectly resigned, perfectly unconcerned; then alone can you do any true work. No eyes can see the real forces, we can only see the results. Put out self, lose it, forget it; just let God work, it is His business. We have nothing to do but stand aside and let God work. The more we go away, the more God comes in. Get rid of the little "I," and let only the great "I" live.*

*God is in every man, whether man knows it or not; your loving devotion is bound to call up the divinity in him.*

*When you help a poor man, do not feel the least pride. That is worship for you, and not the cause of pride*

*The power is with the silent ones, who only live and love and then withdraw their personality. They never say "me" and "mine"; they are only blessed in being instruments.*

*Love—The Prime Mover When you see man as God, everything, even the tiger, will be welcome. Whatever comes to you is but the Lord, the Eternal, the Blessed One, appearing to us in various forms, as our father, and mother, and friend, and child—they are our own soul playing with us.*

Swami Vivekananda

## Introduction to Hindu Theology-5

Swami Sunirmalananda

*(Continued from the last issue)*

**F**undamental Aspects of Hindu Theology Several subjects are studied under the heading of Theology. Of them, God, the universe, living beings, the human being, salvation, and so on are important. We shall touch each of these points in brief here.

There is an important point to be noted. Hinduism is not just a religion like the other religions of the world. It is a symphony. It is a bouquet of several religions. There are religions within Hinduism which entertain opposing ideas, but yet come under Hinduism. It is a conglomeration of several religions. Thus there is variety, openness, opportunity of different mindsets to think of God, opportunity for newer methods of seeking, and completeness. So the ideas of God according to Hindu theology are diverse.

### The Idea of God

Can God be defined? Yes and no. While it is impossible for the human mind to comprehend God, it is possible for the same human mind to lead the Soul to God. Again, while it is impossible for the human mind to limit, define, or know God, the same mind can love Him, glorify Him and try to understand Him. The mind is the best instrument to lead the Soul to God. Everything depends on the mind of the aspirant.

However, the mind is also material. According to Vedanta, the living being is trichotomous. That is, the Atman or Spirit has three 'coverings'—the causal body, the subtle body and the physical body. The bodies are material in nature and the mind is in the subtle body. The mind is also called a sense

organ. So it has its limitations. The Spirit is Consciousness itself. It is infinite, beyond life, death, time, causation, and so on. Thus, Spirit and matter are like light and darkness. The mind has one more problem: it colours things and limits the Unlimited. It is not possible to know God with the limited mind.

Q: "Is it possible to see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna says: "He is unknowable by the mind engrossed in worldliness. But He is knowable by the pure mind and the pure intelligence—the mind and intelligence that have not the slightest trace of attachment. Pure Mind, Pure Intelligence, Pure Atman are one and the same thing."<sup>1</sup>

The minds of sages have been purified by the fire of austerity. And with their divine eyes (*divya cakshu*) they comprehend the Reality and transmit their knowledge to us.

Thus, God can be known and realized. This is the fundamental concept of *Sanatana Dharma*. God can be known, can be realized, can be seen, can be experienced, and loved. Further, this is the only aim of human life.

What or who is God according to Sanatana Dharma? While discussing the history of Hindu Theology, we have mentioned that the concept of God in Vedanta is different from those of other paths. Sanatana Dharma says that God is both immanent and transcendent, both with form and without form, both personal and impersonal, both with qualities and beyond qualities, and both One and many, and much more. According to Hindu Theology, then, God is someone or something which is beyond limits, beyond conceptions and concepts. God is Deva. Deva or God means one who shines—through his own lustre.

In order that the human being can have some idea about God, sages have defined the impossible-to-define. Hindu scriptures define the Supreme generally in negative terms. For instance, they define God as limitless, beyond thought and speech, beyond the senses, and so on. The best definition that the human being can give about the Supreme Being is that He or It is Infinite existence, (*sat*), that He is Consciousness (*cit*) and that He is all-blissful (*ananda*). This is the definition of the supreme Reality. The Reality is beyond attributes. This is the *Advaita* way of expressing the human idea of God. Ramanuja defines God as all goodness, all perfection, all glory, full of qualities, and so on. To many dualistic schools, God is the Creator of this universe and its sustainer.

Nobody can say God should be this alone and not that. He can be anything He wishes to be. Thus there are numerous opinions about Reality. God is the only One that exists and the rest is unreal according to some, while God is the basis, the ground or the Soul of the universe and living beings according to others. To some others, God is one reality, the universe is a parallel reality, and the living being is yet another distinct parallel reality. According to all the schools of Hinduism, there is a divine element in the living being. This Divine spark or element is the source of true peace, blessedness, happiness and immortality.

People from a different religious background would be shocked to hear that they are Divine. 'How can a mortal be God?' they would ask. But according to Sanatana Dharma the idea of God is different. God is not some bearded Person sitting somewhere in heaven, though one or two *puranas* may paint him as such. God is supreme Consciousness. God is the eternal indweller of all beings. It is God Himself who has

become everything. In this, almost all groups of Hinduism agree—that the jiva or the individual soul is a spark of the Divine. Every little amoeba or plant is essentially God Himself. Everything is God.

So what or who is God or the supreme Reality, according to Hinduism? According to Hinduism in general, God or the supreme Reality is the all-pervading Consciousness, who is the source, the cause, and the material and efficient cause of everything. Further, He is the sustainer and the destroyer of everything. Moreover, He pervades His creation through and through. He is the regulator and the dispenser of the fruits of action. He is the indwelling ruler. Sri Ramakrishna used often to sing a song, which speaks volumes: 'How are you trying, O my mind, to know the nature of God? You are groping like a madman locked in a dark room. He is grasped through ecstatic love; how can you fathom Him without it?'<sup>2</sup>

The fundamental point of Sanatana Dharma is this: the Reality is One. *Ekam sat*. That is, God is one. The *Upanishads* declare again and again that there is only one Infinite and all-pervasive supreme Reality. 'God is one. He resides in all the living beings. He is omnipresent. He is the supreme Self of all. He is the deliverer of the fruits of action and is the eternal witness of all actions. He is the ruler and the Consciousness of all the universes. His nature is absolute bliss. Yet, He is beyond the three qualities.'<sup>3</sup> Vedanta goes one step further and declares that there is only One Reality or God, which is worshipped by people of different faiths and paths. Who else could be a greater testimony to this than Sri Ramakrishna, who has practised all the paths? He says: '...one cannot know the true nature of God unless one realizes Him. Hindus, Muslims,

Christians, Shaktas, Shaivas, Vaishnavas, the Brahmajnanis of the time of the *rishis*, and you, the Brahmajnanis of modern times, all seek the same object. Do you know what the truth is? God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion.<sup>4</sup>

The source of the knowledge of God is the *Vedas*. The Vedas are the most ancient records of human knowledge about God. They are not of human origin (*apaurusheya*) but are Divine in origin. They are revelations. The Vedas declare that God is One. It is based on the Vedas that all knowledge has come to us and it is with the Vedas as the foundation that several paths to God have arisen. It is basing on them that the living being can know God.

If God is One, what about the many gods and goddesses of Hinduism then? This is an old question, and has been answered many times over by scholars and saints. The One Divine Principle is worshipped in the many—through many forms and many names.

The next question is, did the Vedic sages worship nature? They did not. The sages of ancient times saw everything as brimming with Consciousness and Bliss. Nature was deified as Divine. They saw and encountered radiant forces controlling different aspects of nature and called them the gods. These gods were exalted positions. The sages knew that the supreme Being was One. Since everything is essentially divine, The One can assume millions of forms.

The mother of the gods is called Aditi. Aditi was in reality the expression for the Infinite. Gerald Massey writes: 'Aditi was the primeval form of Dyaus, the sky divinity, who

appears as such in the *Rig Veda*, however rarely. She alternates with Diti as the mother of the embryo that was divided into seven parts, the Seven who were also called the Seven Adityas. ...The Aryanists who begin with little less than infinitude insist that *Aditi* signifies infinity, or the infinite, as a mental concept. *Aditi*, says Max Muller, is in reality the earliest name invented to express the infinite....Both understand *Aditi* to mean the boundlessness of heaven as opposed to the limitation of earth.<sup>5</sup> Recent scholarship tries to equate the gods like Indra, Mitra, Surya, and so on with constellations, and say that perhaps these ideas were borrowed from Mesopotamia or elsewhere<sup>6</sup>. However, these theories are based on numerous assumptions and the study of some stray verses.

All the numerous gods and goddesses are but mere manifestations of that One Reality. Or, like there is one Emperor and many chiefs ruling over different provinces under Him, there are numerous gods who perform different actions. Not everyone goes directly to the Emperor for every small thing—and thus these gods and goddesses take care of the natural needs in a systematic way. In the early parts of the Vedas, considering the Mantra portion to be the earlier part, there are hymns directed to various gods and goddesses. The first and foremost verse of the *Rig Veda* begins with a hymn to Agni, the God of fire, who is considered to be the connection between the human beings and the Divine. Soon, however, the gods give place to the one Supreme God. In this way, though there appear to be numerous gods and goddess, the Reality is One and its manifestations can be numerous.

God is Ishvara or Isha—the supreme Controller. This Ishvara incarnates. This Ishvara is also called Shakti or the Divine Mother. The Upanishads speak of Brahman as the supreme Reality, whose nature is Consciousness, Being, and Bliss. This Brahman or Reality is the supreme Fourth, *Turiya*.

The next state, the Causal state, is the Reality in movement owing to envelopment or *maya*. And this has been termed Ishvara. The Supreme Reality, according to Sanatana Dharma, is both personal and impersonal, and can be much more. It is beyond all limitations. Sri Ramakrishna says: *'He who is attributeless also has attributes. He who is Brahman is also Sakti. When thought of as inactive, He is called Brahman, and when thought of as the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer, He is called the Primordial Energy, Kali.'*<sup>7</sup> He further says: *'When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive - neither creating nor preserving nor destroying - I call Him Brahman or Purusha, the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active - creating, preserving, and destroying, I call Him Sakti or Maya or Prakriti, the Personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The Personal and the Impersonal are the same thing, like milk and its whiteness, the diamond and its lustre, the snake and its wriggling motion. It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. The Divine Mother and Brahman are one.'*

The Vedas form the foundations for the six Indian philosophical systems and theology. Those systems that do not accept Vedic authority are considered atheist, as for instance, Buddhism. Deriving their knowledge from the Vedas as well as from personal experience, these philosophies have expressed several opinions—the dualistic, the qualified monistic and the monistic—about God. These three are the essential ones, but there are a few others. According to the

Dualist, God, the universe and the soul are all eternal and separate from one another. According to the qualified non-dualist, God alone exists and the universe is His glory as are the living beings. God is the Self of the universe and the living beings, while they are like His body. He is there, so all are there. If He is not, nothing is there. Finally, according to the non-dualist, there is only One supreme Consciousness. This universe, its multiplicity and so on are seen in this Consciousness as real owing to some sort of ignorance, which is impermanent. It is like seeing the mirage in the desert, or seeing the snake in a piece of rope.

This Consciousness is called Brahman in the Vedas. The Atman and Brahman are one and the same. In the individual, the Self is called Atman and in the collective, it is generally called Brahman. Both are identical and one and the same. 'The microcosm and the macrocosm are built upon the same plan,' declared Swami Vivekananda. So the amoeba and the human being, the smallest and the greatest—all are built upon the same plan, though they may be apparently different. This is yet another great discovery of the Hindus, and the greatest contribution to world theology.

After the Vedas, the histories (*itihasas*) and the Puranas deal extensively with the nature of God. Numerous opinions are presented in these works about God. He is Eternal, all-pervasive and One. He is the Soul of the Soul. He is the Creator. He is the lovable Lord. He can be the Father, Mother, Son, Friend or the Husband. The importance of the feminine, the respect for the feminine, and the role of the feminine in human emancipation have been highlighted in Hinduism. God as the Father is known, but God as the Mother, emphasized in the Tantras, is another speciality of Sanatana

Dharma. In fact, according to a story from the Upanishads, the Divine Mother gave spiritual knowledge or the knowledge of God to human beings for the first time. God can be everything. He comes as the Incarnation again and again to save humanity from existential sorrow and suffering. He loves living beings so much that despite undergoing intense suffering, He descends repeatedly. The incarnation is the greatest representation of God on earth. Since the term "God" is vague and we cannot comprehend the idea clearly, the incarnation becomes the window to know God. We can safely assume the incarnation to be God and grow personal relationships with him. This idea of having human-like relationship with God is the glory of Sanatana Dharma. Apart from the religious literature in Sanskrit, there is a huge number of books in local languages, and these books speak in diverse ways about God. Yet, there is a harmonious note of unity in all of them.

The image-worshipping Hindu and the tree-plant-serpent-worshipping Hindu have come under scrutiny since ancient times. Sri Ramakrishna has shown to the world the value of image worship, as he has shown that the all-pervasive Consciousness is in the so-called stone image too and that he would pray to the Divine Mother and not to the stone. Swami Vivekananda has answered critics of image worship in diverse ways, and the best was his reply to the King of Khetri, whose painting was put on the floor and someone was asked to spit on it. When that someone hesitated, saying that the painting is of the king and he would not do such a thing, Swamiji pointed out the idea behind worshipping God in the image and paintings.

The theoretical explanation given to God with form and without form is best explained in Sri Ramakrishna's words:

'The Primordial Power and the Supreme Brahman are identical. You can never think of the one without the other. They are like the gem and its brilliance. One cannot think of the brilliance without the gem, or of the gem without its brilliance. Again, it is like the snake and its wriggling motion. One cannot think of the wriggling motion without the snake, or of the snake without its wriggling motion. It is the Primordial Power that has become the universe and its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is a case of involution and evolution.'

We have discussed the nature of God according to Hindu theology. Now, why are there so many opinions about God in Sanatana Dharma? Sanatana Dharma believes in liberty as being the fundamental right of human beings. The goal is freedom, the way too is free. Depending upon the tastes and capacities of understanding, human beings choose from the different opinions. For some, God is somewhere, who creates and preserves the universe. For others, He or It is only Consciousness and formless. The goal of everyone, however, is to know God and to be free from the bondage of *karma*.

God-knowledge gives all knowledge. Knowledge leads to freedom. The Soul is bound, so to say, in the maze of *karma*, which leads to birth and suffering. By knowing who we really are, or who is God and what our relationship is with Him, we become free. The *Bhagavata Purana* shows innumerable instances of the desire to know the nature of God, the desire to study God and so on. Special mention may be made of Sage Kapila's instructions to his mother, Devahuti. In all the eighteen major puranas and other subsidiary ones, the discussion is always centred on the nature of God. Theological questions are asked and sages answer them. Everywhere,

there is the insistence that knowing God is the only way to overcome existential suffering and to attain supreme bliss.

Swami Vivekananda says this about one of the fundamental reasons for the desire to know God: 'The question is raised in the Vedas, "What is that, knowing which, we shall know everything?"' The Upanishads declare that by knowing the Knower, the Self, one knows everything, all doubts are removed, and one attains liberation. "*Kena ishitaṃ patati preṣitaṃ manah*, inspired by whom does the mind and other elements function?"<sup>8</sup> The *Kena Upanishad*, one of the exalted works on theology, answers this question as to how things function in diverse ways and finally concludes that everything functions due to the supreme Will.

The post Upanishadic literature too is filled with such theological ideas. Amongst the *Smritis*, the *Laws of Manu* is considered to be the foremost. Manu says: (12.72-73) : 'The foremost duty of the Brahmana, the highest success of this class, is in attaining Self-knowledge. Achievement of any other kind is not his success in life at all.'<sup>9</sup>

The highest ideal of an aspirant according to Sanatana Dharma is to see everything as vibrating with Consciousness. To see everything as dull matter is the ignorant state. To see Consciousness alone is knowledge. To see everything and everyone as embodiments of God is an exalted state according to Sri Ramakrishna. To see everything as lit with supreme Consciousness is the state of the *vijnani* according to Ramakrishna.

Not all can understand the highest ideal: not all can understand the truth that Consciousness pervades everything. So Sanatana Dharma has developed various stages to bring the ordinary aspirant to the higher levels of comprehension. The

first stage is that of the worship of images. The next stage is to worship the Lord in the higher regions. The third stage is to understand that God is the Indweller. The fourth and final stage is to see that God as Consciousness is ever-present in all beings.

The one goal of all human beings, according to Hinduism, is to know God and to become liberated. Knowledge brings liberation from the clutches of karma and ignorance. According to some Indian philosophers, heaven is the goal, but it is reiterated that this goal is temporary and not everlasting. Though the Vedas themselves teach the path of karma, which leads to heaven, they continue to show the path to liberation through meditation.

(To be continued)

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p 570
2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 683
3. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 6.11
4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 608-9
5. Gerald Massey, *The Natural Genesis*, , (1883), vol. 1, P. 468
6. Catalin Anghelina, *On the Nature of the Vedic Gods*, Sino-Platonic Papers 2013
7. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 119
8. *Kena Upanishad*, 1.1
9. *Manu Smriti*, 12. 72-73



*Selfishness is the devil incarnate in every man.  
Every bit of self, bit by bit, is devil. Take off self by one side  
and God enters by the other. When the self is got rid of,  
only God remains. Light and darkness cannot remain  
together. Forgetting the little "I" is a sign of a healthy and  
pure mind. A healthy child forgets its body.*

Swami Vivekananda

## God is also Mother

Hans Torwesten

The art of 'earthing' oneself

(Continued from issue 382)

**I**n this way the Motherly and the Earthly have the impartiality of the transcendental ground. Anyone who reproaches the female with only with capriciousness, irrationality and above all too much subjectivity, at the same time overlooks the bold and warm view of objectivity. It is a question of a feeling for realism, which not seldom escapes a man. Anyone who deceives himself, who likes playing a part and almost always stays in unreality, will be afraid of this view more than anything in the world – it penetrates through and through.

One can very clearly experience this in meditation. As soon as we begin to let ourselves go, letting ourselves go downwards, to “earth” ourselves, a feeling slowly arises inside us which exactly corresponds to this neutral viewpoint. Our whole spiritual paralysis lies naked before it in the undisturbed light of this consciousness, all too often as a disguised ego-trip. This observing consciousness, this alertness, has nothing to do with the critical view of the moral Super Ego, which continually reproaches us. This impartial view only just observes –but we feel it even more than the eye of the “fatherly” Super Ego. This also can finally drive us to greater efforts, it also has a transforming power, but it does so in a different, at the same time “healthier” way, which also goes deeper down to the deepest roots of our being – instead of only trimming our conscious Ego to “perfection”.

It is significant that in many meditation courses today in Christian monasteries and especially in our western civilisation nothing is so much used as this “earthing”, the descent of the extravagances of the spirit. In Western Christianity there was traditionally only the push upwards, which does as such of course

have its justification – and when someone stirred up the dust, it was not so much as to connect with the earth as to show himself to the eyes of the man-godly Super Ego as the greatest sinner that this earth has seen. At this point a sobering up should have begun, and the spiritual help of the Asiatic traditions is not to be overlooked.

There is definitely a transcendental dimension to which one must ascend if one wishes to make use of such “spatial” indications of help. But the certain way is travelled by the person who is aware of the relationship between the transcendental ground and the Mother foundation. The “ascent” is then not a cramped climb upwards (Gottfried Benn once said this with regard to a young expressionist poet): There goes another one “climbing up”, but a natural blossoming - after one has found solid earth beneath one. One can then not even say whether one is climbing higher or whether the divine flows into us. The “earth” is always at one and the same time a total self-opening. As Ramakrishna often stressed, the rain of divine grace cannot collect on the steep summit, but only in the valley. This means we must first become a trough, a hollow receptacle; and that also means that we must find the female in ourselves, irrespective of whether we are entered in the register of births as male or female.

In this way we do not wish to fix for ever the role which man has been glad to assign to the female: the role of the passive receiver. One can to a certain extent very well identify this attitude with the female constitution, but “man” always made the mistake of deducing a lower position of woman in society and not recognising all her other qualities. It is comfortable to regard woman as the silent sufferer, only as a passive creation, only as a vessel, into which one can pour the male divine grace. If the man regards himself as the human being, as is the case in many languages ranging from the Hebrew “Adam” to the

English “man”, woman is degraded to a female animal. If woman is however identified with the human creation, man again climbs a step higher and becomes God’s representative on earth. This hierarchy is also recognised by women saints, as for instance by the mystic Hildegard von Bingen, who with regard to the two natures of Christ – the divine and the human – wrote “The man is by his nature a pointer to the divinity of the son, the woman a pointer to his humanity.” In this way man could always compensate a little for his awareness of his being a creation with the fact that he was for woman a little Lord God, while for the woman it was only left to be a created being.

In meditation it is not of course a question of such a hierarchy. In the net of relativity, which is so obvious in the Shakti religion, taking and giving oneself melt together. The creature does not crawl in the dust before God – it is a question of opening oneself without any kind of inferiority complex. Waiting, stepping aside and self-surrender is taught, where there is no kind of personal creator God, to whom one could submit. One opens oneself for a divine reality, which is equally male and female, and transcends both. The feel-earthly is also not regarded as purely a stool, which one can kick away with one’s foot, when we have practised “humility” enough. It accompanies us to the goal. We always need Its impartial clear glance – yes, we need it even more, the higher we climb. Because the higher we climb, the more difficult we often find it becomes. The greatest alertness is required to the very last, and that also means that we have to “earth” again at every step.

Here the question often arises: If we open up completely – do we know at all what powers and energies we are exposing ourselves to? Are there not also dark powers, which take advantage of our naivety and defencelessness and with all their power flow into the hollow space that has come into being?

In this regard also “earthing” oneself and the alertness connected thereto are important, because earthing is not an uncritical self-opening. If this is closely combined with a watchful humility, the dark forces will keep away. Only the person who wants to climb high by his own power gets into danger because the diabolical soon becomes a companion to this “Faustian” aspiration.

Anyone who opens himself up to the divine power, who surrenders himself to God in advance and says: Take over the rudder, grow in me, fill me completely – does not, it is true, always go the easy comfortable way, because this surrender, this complete reliance on divine power requires the sacrifice of the ego. But we take no risk, we can rely on this divine power, as long as we have honest intentions and really surrender ourselves to it.

But it is right at this point again that many seem to have their doubts. Do we not say that she is also a “seducer”, that the Shakti religion – in contrast to the emphatically father religion – does not simply conceal the dark aspect of creation in an enemy of God, but openly admits that the darkness and the dark forces connected therewith are also an aspect of the Mother, one of her many masks? Is she then no more than a neutral energy, a creative power in the cosmos and as the Kundalini power in the individual, which can be used both for good or evil? And is it not somewhat thoughtless to give oneself over to this power? Is this not playing with fire?

We have already pointed out that praying to Shakti in the end demands such a lot from us that it draws us out to the distant and the depths, which cannot be sounded. In spite of her motherly love, Shakti is like a hard Guru, who plays hide and seek with us, who continually irritates us, and deliberately puts a spoke in our wheels, laughs at us, pushes us into crises, until we are just an existence puzzle, the solution of which seems impossible.

But the Mother knows what she is doing. As neutral energy she is, it is true, the basis of everything that moves whether towards the good or the bad. In this regard she is like the Ground, the pure Absolute whose consciousness-light is also neutral. "Brahman is not bound by good and evil", said Ramakrishna, "It is the light of a lamp. By its light you can read the Bhagavatam, or by the same light forge a document". Jesus also said that God has his sun rise on the good and the bad – which in no way hinders men from trusting this God, his "Father" and energetically knocking at his door, so that he opens it. In the case of the Mother it is no different. She is neutral and impartial, but this in no way means that she would let those perish who fully trust her and devote themselves entirely to her. To anyone who still clings to his ego she may perhaps now and then appear to be frightful, but for anyone who becomes a child before her there is nothing to fear. It all depends on us as to how the Mother appears.

Of course she is also a seducer, as we have already stressed; her whole creation is seducing for those who want to attain the Absolute. And as she is much more identical with this creation in all its various aspects, light and dark, than the "extracosmic" of the Father religion, it seems that something of the questionable of the relative existence is attached to her being. She presses us as "Mrs World", she seems to deliberately scatter out in front of us all the colourful toys, which often makes us lose our minds without us noticing it. No one should underestimate this Maya power, with which the Mother makes fools of us, and anyone who ignores her soft chuckle, will soon hear her loud roaring laughter.

This picture of God is not "pure" enough for many of us. We have for hundreds, even thousands of years imagined god as exalted, enthroned in heaven, surrounded by heavenly hosts, the exact opposite of the shimmering Mrs World, at whose bosom

we always like to suck, but whom we however would never confuse with God even though we often enough make her our God..

The Shakti religion admittedly in this case upsets our categorical thinking. We shall be horrified at the idea that we do not find God in heaven, but right here in “noble” pictures, in the famous “footprints” of God, in the rose and the pure lily and the clear mountain lake, but in all things. Meeting the Mother means first of all meeting life in all its totality, in all its contrast and also absurdities. Each of her creatures is at one and the same time one of her faces, who can become our guru. Grounding oneself in meditation will be thus continued in everyday life, in dealing with fellow human beings, with all living beings, with everything surrounding us.

*(To be continued)*

Translated by John Phillips



*What is it that attracts man to man, man to woman, woman to man, and animals to animals, drawing the whole universe, as it were, toward one center? It is what is called love. Its manifestation is from the lowest atom to the highest being: omnipotent, allpervading, is this love. What manifests itself as attraction in the sentient and the insentient, in the particular and in the universal, is the love of God. It is the one motive power that is in the universe.*

*Under the impetus of that love, Christ gives his life for humanity, Buddha even for an animal, the mother for the child, the husband for the wife. It is under the impetus of the same love that men are ready to give up their lives for their country.*

Swami Vivekananda

## **Programme for September - October 2015**

Sunday discourses begin

at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

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

Sept	6	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 6	Swami Shivarupananda
Sept	13	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 7	Swami Shivarupananda
Sept	20	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 8	Swami Shivarupananda
Sept	27	The Essence of Vedanta	Swami Sarvapriyananda
Oct	4	Day Retreat	
Oct	11	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 76	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct	18	Durga Puja	
Oct	25	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 77	Swami Dayatmananda

### **Day Retreat**

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda  
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 4<sup>th</sup> October  
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

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

### **Durga Puja**

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October**  
**At Bourne End at 4:30 pm**

Bihari Babu ventured: "There is a neural connection between the brain and the tongue, so the mind must be in the brain."

Latu Maharaj: "In what form?"

Bihari Babu: "As vibration."

Latu Maharaj: "Now tell me whether that vibration is continuous or whether it stops and starts."

Bihari Babu was surprised: "Maharaj, I haven't thought about it."

Latu Maharaj: "Then please think it over."

Bihari Babu: "Perhaps it stops and then starts again, exciting the nerves of the brain and bringing out the response."

Latu Maharaj: "If the vibration does stop, can you tell me what makes it start again, especially in the case where there is no external stimulus?"

Bihari Babu: "No, Maharaj, we really can't say."

Latu Maharaj: "So you see, you can express these things up to a point, but no further."

Swami Adbhutananda

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*Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them that they are all glorious children of immortality. Let positive, strong, helpful thought enter into their brains from very childhood.*

*We hear, "Be good," and "Be good," taught all over the world. There is hardly a child, born in any country in the world, who has not been told, "Do not steal," "Do not tell a lie," but nobody tells the child how he can help doing them. Only when we teach him to control his mind do we really help him.*

Swami Vivekananda



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