

Vedanta

387 JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2016

What Christ Means To Me

Swami Prabhavananda

Spiritual Precepts of Swami Saradananda

Swami Areshananda





Divine Wisdom

Awakenings

Every soul is destined to be perfect, and every being, in the end, will attain the state of perfection. Whatever we are now is the result of our acts and thoughts in the past; and whatever we shall be in the future will be the result of what we think and do now. But this, the shaping of our destinies, does not preclude our receiving help from outside; nay, in the vast majority of cases such help is absolutely necessary. When it comes, the higher powers and possibilities of the soul are quickened, spiritual life is awakened, growth is animated, and man becomes holy and perfect in the end.

Until the superconscious opens for you, religion is mere talk, it is nothing but preparation. You are talking secondhand, thirdhand.

No book, no person, no Personal God. All these must go. Again, the senses must go. We cannot be bound to the senses.

Vedanta

387 JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2016

Contents

- 2 **Editorial**
Worship of the Divine Mother-2
-
- 5 **What Christ Means To Me**
Swami Prabhavananda
-
- 13 **Spiritual Precepts of Swami Saradananda**
Swam Asehananda
-
- 23 **Three Types of Disciples**
Swami Gnaneswarananda
-
- 33 **An Introduction to Hindu Theology-7**
Swami Sunirmalananda
-
- 43 **Leaves from an Ashrama**
Principle of Alert Surrender
Swami Vidyatmananda
-
- 45 **Book Review**
Elsie Mack
-
- 48 **Programme**
-

ISSN 1355 - 6436

Editorial

Worship of the Divine Mother-2

"You were talking of images made of clay. There arises a necessity for them too. These various forms used for worship have been provided to suit the needs of different men at different stages of spiritual evolution."

(Sri Ramakrishna)

Each soul is potentially divine.

Worship of God is man's privilege and supreme act, and man has to raise himself to the peak of his being and personality to achieve this act. The aim of traditional ritualistic worship is to prepare man for this act, to purify him and to heighten the spirituality of his being. One must become God to be able to worship God.

The goal in the worship of God is to get into an intimate relation with the Deity. Relationship is the key to human conduct and character. All worldly relationships have reservations, while relationship with God alone is one without any reservations. There can be no secrets between God and devotee, since they are the obverse and reverse of the same reality.

To get into this unreserved relationship with God one must have a knowledge and understanding of the nature and glory of the Deity one worships, for it is these that make up the personality of the Deity. *Puja* or worship admirably fulfils this need. Worship forges a special kind of relationship between the soul and God, ultimately leading to the unity of the individual with the universal.

Worship of God can be mental, verbal or physical. In the *Bhagavatam* the great devotee Prahlada enumerates nine types of devotion: *'Listening to the stories of the Lord, singing His glories, constant remembrance of the Lord, serving Him in His devotees, ritualistic worship, constantly saluting the Lord, doing all work for His*

sake, friendship with the Lord, and complete self-surrender.' Anyone or these nine forms of devotion can lead a sincere devotee to the realization of God.

Worship of the Divine is the most effective way of attaining God. A spiritual aspirant can attain his cherished objective in life through worship duly performed according to the prescribed scriptural injunctions.

The basic philosophy of the science of worship is: '*Devo bhutva devam yajet*'. The aim of worship is clearly brought out in this definition of Puja: 'Puja is the oneness of the worshipper and God. This oneness of the worshipper and the Worshipped is verily the realization of the true nature of the Self or the attainment of Brahman. So what is the relation between the Jivatman and the Paramatman?

Sri Ramakrishna says: '*As a current of water seems to be divided into two when a plank of wood is placed against it edgewise, so the Indivisible appears divided into two, the Jivatman and the Paramatman, due to the limitation of Maya.*' What Sri Ramakrishna means is the individual and the universal, in reality, are one and the same but appear to be different due to *Maya*. The purpose of puja is to attain to this sameness. And worship is one of the most useful means in the achievement of this ideal. Thus the ultimate objective of all actions like Puja etc., is Self-knowledge or the attainment of *Brahman*.

Puja is defined in the *Kularnava Tantra* as that act which destroys the waves of Karmic flow resulting from past births, puts an end to the cycle of births and deaths, and grants complete fulfilment. The 'complete fulfilment' is total self-surrender of the worshipper in the worshipped. The complete or cherished fruit of worship consists in the worshipper's self-identity with the Worshipped. In this context devotees can recall the incident of *Shodasi Puja* in Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices.

For the worship of God to be effective one should discover one's special relationship with one's *Ishta Devata*, one's chosen

Deity. What special attitude an aspirant must develop is usually determined by one's Guru, or family or religious tradition. Without such special relationship one's devotion is bound to be shaky and superficial.

In order to realize God, Sri Ramakrishna advises spiritual aspirants to assume one of these attitudes: *Santa* (peacefulness), *Dasya* (servitude), *Sakhya* (comradeship), *Vatsalya* (parental affection) and *Madhura* (conjugal love) practised by the Vaishnava teachers. Sri Ramakrishna had practised all these attitudes and attained singular success in all of them.

The teachers of devotion have classified those relations into five divisions of the *Santa* and the rest mentioned above, and advised people to take up one or another of these moods for practice and establish themselves in a loving relationship with the Divine. All these moods when oriented towards God, help the aspirants advance quickly towards the realization of God

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, *"Hold fast to some form of God or some mood, which is to your liking; it is only then that there will be steadfastness. He is realizable by means of spiritual mood (Bhava) alone. How can God be realized by one who lacks it? Spiritual moods are necessary. One should cultivate a particular spiritual mood and then call on Him. As is one's mood, so is one's gain; it is faith that is its root. It is through a mood that love sprouts. Spiritual moods are an imperative necessity. So is faith; it is necessary to hold fast, then only one succeeds."*

These various forms of God are not fictions; they are spiritual realities discovered by saints in the depths of their meditation. Hence Sri Ramakrishna says:

'If a worshipper is convinced that the images of the Deity in the shape of various Gods and Goddesses are verily divine, he reaches God by their worship. Then one realises that everything, Images and all, is a manifestation of the Spirit. To him the image is not made of clay but of Spirit.'

Swami Dayatmananda
(To be continued)

What Christ Means To Me

Swami Prabhavananda

In the *Vedas*, the earliest scriptures of India, we find this truth: "Truth is one, though sages call it by various names." Later in the *Upanishads*, we come across a similar statement: "As different streams coming from various sources ultimately flow into one ocean, so do the many religions of the world, emerging from innumerable sources, at long last mingle in the great ocean of love." In this present age, we have again been taught: "As many religions, so many paths." All reach one and the same goal. Thus, from the earliest Vedic times up to our modern age this ideal of harmony and universality has been taught to every Hindu.

A Hindu learns to respect every faith and every prophet; but it is impossible for him to understand any religion that claims to be unique. This does not mean that Hindus are actively interested in other religions. Rather, it means that they respect them. They respect the beliefs of others and their saints and prophets, though they may not obey their dogmas, for in India, each individual has, as it were, his own path to follow.

Strange as it may seem to an Occidental, parents and children may live together collectively, yet individually worship God in different ways. The husband may be ignorant of how the wife worships, and the wife totally unaware of her husband's beliefs. Every member of the family is given a freedom to approach God in a manner which each finds most suitable to his or her temperament or inclination. It is this sort of freedom that has inspired the Hindu's respect for Christ. Now let me tell you how I personally became attracted to Christ and Christianity and the teachings of the Bible.

When I was sixteen years old I left the village where I lived and came to nearby Calcutta to enter the university. At that time, I received a present from the YMCA—a Bible. I tried to read it, but, having the impatience of a typical teenager, I never seemed able to

get beyond the "begats!" So I did not look at the Bible again for a long time. Then, several years later, when I joined the Ramakrishna Order, I had an interesting experience. A few days after my admission we held a Christmas celebration at our monastery; Christmas is celebrated at all the monasteries of the Order (though not in Hindu homes). In one of the large halls the monks had built an altar, upon which was a picture of the Madonna and Child. Seated around the altar were many of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Imagine, if you will, the physical presence of Peter, James, John, Matthew, and so on. This is how we felt, as though the counterparts of Christ's disciples were present before us.

A disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who had dressed himself up as a Christian *padre*, performed the worship. He offered candles, flowers, and, strange as it may seem, a fruitcake — the kind you buy in a Western market. It was unusual because I don't believe fruitcake existed when Christ was alive! Also we offered a cigar to him. You see, this again was our idea of what a Westerner might like. As the worship proceeded, all of us remained silent. Then my master, Swami Brahmananda, told us: "Meditate on the Christ within and feel his living presence." We all felt — suddenly — that a spiritual atmosphere had been created.

Later, after the worship, my master made us all laugh with his jesting and playful humour. This is one of the characteristics, I am told, he shared with Sri Ramakrishna — this ability to make others literally roll on the ground with laughter. Yes, he would tell such witty remarks, and then the next moment create an atmosphere of serenity and holiness. It was in that atmosphere that everyone of us felt that Christ was as much our own as Krishna or Ramakrishna.

There is also another reason why Christ is offered worship at our monasteries. As you might know, Sri Ramakrishna was interested in every religion, actively interested. He followed their particular paths to discover the truth of them. He found that all of them, like streams, mingled in the great ocean of love. A disciple of his would occasionally read the Bible to him, and then explain it in

Bengali. In this way Ramakrishna came to know something of Christianity. One day, while visiting a devotee, he chanced to see a picture of the Madonna and Child. As he was looking at the picture, it suddenly became living to him. His heart was filled with love for Christ. For a period of three days and three nights he stayed in his room, filled with the presence of Jesus. He even refused to go to the Hindu temple or worship any of the Hindu gods or goddesses. Curious to know how the followers of Christ worshipped their Lord, he was granted a vision of devotees kneeling before Jesus and praying to him. On the third day, as he was seated outside his room, Ramakrishna noticed a luminous figure approaching him. At once he knew that this was Christ the Saviour. The figure approached and embraced him and entered into his body. Thus Ramakrishna came to understand that Jesus was an avatar, a divine incarnation.

Christ has another significance for the Ramakrishna Order. After Ramakrishna passed away in 1886, his disciples took their final vows of sannyasa on Christmas Eve. So you can understand why Christmas Eve is particularly sacred to us; for the Order was really founded on that day. But now let me try to explain the significance of Christ and his teachings.

It is not possible to have an intellectual understanding of anything unless we relate it back to some other thing. In other words, it is impossible to understand a religion or a prophet of a religion without comparing them to some other teaching or teacher. If something is unique or has no parallel in history, it cannot be understood on an intellectual level. Therefore, I must try to explain Jesus in relation to other great teachers.

Anyone who has sincerely made a comparative study of the world's great teachers will find that they speak the same truth, though they might express themselves differently. In this country it is a bit different. Here religions are often studied with the idea that "Well, my religion is best, but let us see what the others have to say." This is not the way to examine comparative religion. First of all we must go to the source. For instance, if I were to consider

Christianity on the evidence presented to me by the theologians, I think I might have to reject it — totally! Instead, the scriptures must be consulted to appreciate and understand any religion. Read the "Sermon on the Mount" or the *Bhagavad Gita* or the teachings of Buddha, not the interpretations of a Buddhist monk or Hindu priest. If you go to the source, you will find that the same truth lies beneath all religions.

Who was Christ? The Gospel according to St. John gives us some indication of his role as an avatar. It begins: "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Without involving ourselves in a lengthy discussion of *Logos* — the Word — we should mention that there is a parallelism here with the Vedic scriptures. As you know, it is the *Logos* that is considered the only begotten of God, and it is the *Logos* which is at one with God and became flesh in Jesus. Now in the Vedas, we find this statement: "In the beginning was God; with him was the Word, and this word is Brahman." Of course, I am not of the opinion that John borrowed from the Vedas! But it indicates the universality of truth. This truth is in the very atmosphere; it exists eternally, in every human heart. It only waits to be unfolded. For instance, let us take the discovery of a scientific truth. How did Isaac Newton arrive at his theory of gravity? He saw an apple fall to the ground. This thought came to him: "I am seeing a law of nature in operation." He realized its existence. It is the same way with spiritual truths; they too exist as eternal verities of life. When we read the "Sermon on the Mount" or the *Bhagavad Gita* are we not simply seeing the same truth dressed in different garbs?

How often we find this truth directly before us, yet even then we refuse to accept it. Such has been the case with the greatest of men. Sri Ramakrishna, for instance, was regarded, while living, as an avatar by many of his disciples and devotees; but Swami Vivekananda steadfastly refused to accept this. He didn't believe

that God incarnated himself in the form of man. Of course, he accepted the presence of God in all men (and in that sense we are all incarnations of God), but he did not believe in any special manifestation of God in man.

When Sri Ramakrishna lay on his death bed, Vivekananda was seated next to him. He knew that his teacher would not be with them long. "If you now say you are God incarnate," Vivekananda thought to himself, "I'll believe you."

Suddenly Ramakrishna looked at him and whispered, "I see you still have disbelief. He who was Rama and he who was Krishna is born again as Ramakrishna, but not in your Vedantic sense." By this phrase "not in your Vedantic sense" he meant not in the sense that the Atman or Self of all men is identical with Brahman or the all-pervading God. What he conveyed to his disciple was that he was God himself, descended as man.

What is so special, so extraordinary about a divine incarnation? About his own birth, Jesus said: "Ye are from beneath, I am from above. Ye are of this world, I am not of this world." This Jesus told his disciples, and it is a peculiar feature of incarnations to reveal their unique status first to their disciples.

Sri Krishna, speaking in the Bhagavad Gita, replies to his disciple Arjuna: "I am the birthless, the deathless, Lord of all that breathes. I seem to be born; but it is only seeming, only my *maya*. I am still master of my prakriti, the power that makes me." This statement of Krishna's adds support to Christ's declaration that "I am not of this world." We must understand that man is born in ignorance, as a result of his past *karmas*. We are bound to the world by these karmas; indeed, we are of this world. But God comes through his own choice. He chooses to be born within this maya, the world of relativity. However, he is master of this maya, and we are slaves to it. That is the difference.

Why does he come? Because of his grace and in the cause of truth. We also read in the Gita why avatars enter this maya: "When goodness grows weak, when evil increases, I make myself a body.

In every age I come back to deliver the holy, to destroy the sin of the sinner and to establish righteousness."

A study of world history reveals a most interesting fact—that every culture develops and degenerates in accordance with laws of cyclic change. Like ocean waves, the cultures of the world rise and fall. Once so grand, where is the Roman Empire today? And the British Empire? Religion, as well, is subject to these same oscillating patterns. Great religious movements spring up and inspire millions; saints are born and carry the banner of truth. Then all becomes forgotten. Certainly we still have the Bible, the scriptures; and we still know the name of Jesus and Buddha. But where are the exemplars, the saints? Sadducees and Pharisees abound who can quote the scriptures to us; but how many are there that can live them?

It is during such a time that an avatar is born. And how beautifully it is brought out in the Gita that by worshiping the avatar, truth is easily reached. The disciple Arjuna asks Sri Krishna: "Some worship you with steadfast love, others worship God the unmanifest and changeless. What kind of devotee has the greater understanding of yoga?"

"Those whose minds are fixed on me in steadfast love," Krishna answers, worshiping me with absolute faith, I consider them to have the greater understanding of yoga.

As for those others, the devotees of God the unmanifest, indefinable and changeless; they worship that which is omnipresent, constant, eternal, beyond thought's compass, never to be moved. They hold all the senses in check. They are tranquil-minded, and devoted to the welfare of humanity. They see the Atman in every creature. They also will certainly come to me.

But the devotees of the unmanifest have a harder task, because the unmanifest is very difficult for embodied souls to realize.

How have the other avatars expressed their love for man and their assurance that they are the way and the truth? Christ said: "I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in

darkness, but shall have the light of life." And again, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I shall give you rest."

Sri Krishna promised: "He who knows the nature of my task and my holy birth is not reborn when he leaves the body. He comes to me. Flying from fear, from lust and anger, he hides in me, his refuge and his safety. Burnt clean in the blaze of my being, in me many find rest." And again, "Lay down all duties in me, your refuge. Fear no longer. I will save you from sin and bondage."

From Sri Ramakrishna we hear: "Take refuge in me. I am the sanctuary."

As we read these passages, it appears as though one is quoting the truth of the other, so close are they in spirit. But is there any reason why we should doubt this? For is it not the same God, the same spirit speaking, only clothed in different garments?

Let us now try to understand what Krishna meant when he said, "Come unto me ..." or Ramakrishna's statement, "Take refuge in me." First, we must understand that the essence of the religious struggle is to be absorbed in the consciousness of God. When Christ wants us to "abide in me, and I in you," he is asking us to feel that constant presence of God, through constant recollectedness. Sri Krishna also says: "Be absorbed in me. Lodge your mind in me. Thus you shall dwell in me. Do not doubt it, here and hereafter." But absorption in God is only possible when we have that complete and total love for him.

In this same connection, let me quote a Christian mystic, Angelus Silesius: "Christ may be born a thousand times at Bethlehem, but if he is not born anew within your own heart you will remain eternally forlorn." That is what it means, expressed in a negative way, to take refuge in Christ or Krishna or Ramakrishna — for you see him in the shrine of your own heart. You must talk with him. You must be completely united with him.

At one time a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Turiyananda, was approached by a lady in America, who asked him: "Swami, I wish I could read your thoughts."

The Swami smiled and said, "Well, on the surface you will find many of them. But go deeper and there is nothing but Ramakrishna." In other words, our entire lives must be moulded into His life, the life of Christ, Krishna, or Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say there are three classes of devotees. The lowest class conceives of God in heaven; the second class of devotee sees God within; and the highest class sees God both within himself and outside himself. He sees nothing but God. My master, Swami Brahmananda, taught me this truth: as long as you think the Lord is somewhere outside of yourself you will be restless. "But when you feel he is here," he added, pointing to his own heart, "then only will you find peace."

As we pray, as we meditate, as we learn to live our lives in God this peace will come to us. My master would often say that if you take only one step towards God he will come a hundred steps toward you. Only a little struggle, a little striving — strengthened by his grace — will lead you to the realization that, truly, He is. The Upanishads tell us that first one must realize his presence within. Then when you go to pray or to meditate you feel his presence, very near to you, nearer than your hands or your feet; for he is the mind of the mind, the eye of the eye, and the ear of the ear. You feel that — tangibly. And then he becomes manifest, and it is then you give your whole heart to him, and you know him to be pure consciousness itself and infinite love.

That eternal Christ is not to be found in churches, nor in temples; not in books, nor in scriptures — but within your own heart. Find him there.

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, November-December 1967)



Spiritual Precepts of Swami Saradananda

Translated by Swami Aseshananda

Directions For Meditation

Plunge yourself into spiritual disciplines with all your heart and soul. That will give me real satisfaction. Why for a few days? A whole life is to be spent for that purpose. Nothing can be achieved speedily. One who is prepared to persevere to the end receives the grace of the Lord. I pray that you may have unwavering devotion and abiding faith in him.

With regard to spiritual practices, the general rule is wise discernment and moderation in everything. You may have read in the Gita: *“Yoga is not for the man who overeats, or for him who fasts excessively. It is not for him who sleeps too much, or for the keeper of exaggerated vigils. Let a man be moderate in his eating and his recreation, moderately active, moderate in sleep and in wakefulness. He will find that yoga takes away all his unhappiness.”*

Do not strain yourself too much. Do as much as you can. Indeed, you must see that you get sufficient rest and maintain good health. But at the same time you must not give way to lukewarmness and become lax in your struggle. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the number of hours to be spent in study and meditation. Everything is to be done according to one’s convenience and capacity. Gradually you should increase japam, the repetition of the name of the Lord, and the period of your meditation. Regularity is very important in spiritual life. Therefore you must try to keep to the same hours as far as possible. At other times, keep a watch over your mind and see that recollectedness continues throughout the day. There is no need to observe the vow of silence. One can practice recollectedness even without it. What you should avoid is gossip and worldly talk.

Wherever you are, you must obey the orders of your superiors and perform your duties to the best of your ability. There is no need to ask me about such matters. Use your own discretion and act accordingly. If there is any problem pertaining to spiritual life, you may ask and I shall be glad to answer your question. For the rest, you must think for yourself and stand on your own feet.

If you carry on your spiritual practices with implicit faith in the Lord, who is our own, you will understand everything in due time. It will gradually be revealed to you how you can cultivate absolute reliance on God while performing your duties. If you are sincere and have the attitude that it is his work that you are doing, he will show you the way.

Remember these three things:

1. An impure person can never be a good worker.
2. A true worker works with skill and efficiency, but will at the same time maintain inner peace and tranquillity. However arduous his task may be, he will not grumble. He will avoid all misunderstanding and quarrel, and be tolerant of others' viewpoints.
3. If there is an opportunity of service, it is the giver who should be more grateful than the recipient.

In the midst of all kinds of work you must allot some time for japam and meditation, for they are the means to Self-knowledge. Jesus Christ said to his disciples: "*Ye are the salt of the earth.*" It seems to me japam and meditation are, as it were, the salt of work. In all religious organizations whenever interest in the observance of spiritual practices slackens, work becomes tasteless. And the members drift along without knowing where they are going and where their works are leading them.

Follow the instructions of your teacher and meditate regularly. Meditate on the Guru, seated on a white lotus with twelve petals.

This Center is situated in the brain above the eyebrows. Before performing japam and meditation, recite the hymn to the Guru mentally:

“I meditate on the Guru whose nature is that of absolute Reality, who is beyond good and evil, pleasure and pain, life and death, and all pairs of opposites, and who is the constant witness of the changing phenomena of the universe. I seek refuge in him, who is the embodiment of knowledge and liberation, who is pure, stainless, and all-pervading like the ether, and whose grace removes the darkness of my heart. May he awaken my consciousness and grant me freedom and bliss.”

When you meditate on the Guru, you are to think that it is the Lord who has taken the effulgent form of the Guru and who, with a smiling face, is showering his blessings on you.

You have written that at the time of meditation you find it difficult to think of the lotus. While meditating on your Chosen Ideal you are able to visualize the form only instead of the lotus. Do not worry. Your aim is to see the form, no matter whether you visualize the lotus or not. Again, if you cannot bring before your vision the luminous form of your Guru, think of him as you have seen him with your eyes. All these devices have been prescribed in the scriptures only as aids to concentrate the mind. The main thing is to turn your mind toward God. Sri Krishna says in the Gita:

*Give me your whole heart,
Love and adore me,
Worship me always,
Bow to me only,
And you shall find me:
This is my promise
Who love you dearly.*

You seem to think that meditation is not possible unless one is aware of the true nature of God. That is not correct. If you have perfect knowledge of God, you are already illumined. To say that you will practice spiritual disciplines only after you have attained full conviction and knowledge of his Being is tantamount to saying, “*I will enter the water only after I have learnt to swim.*” In that case you will never learn. It is only through japam and meditation that one removes all obstacles, attains purity of heart, and finally arrives at the full consciousness of God.

A Sanskrit verse says, “*He who wishes to meditate on the Lord after all his problems are solved is like the fool who wishes to bathe in the sea after the waves have subsided.*” That moment will never come. The sea will always have waves. Similarly, favourable opportunities are hard to find in this world. Therefore do not wait for propitious moments. Every moment is propitious if you use it properly. If you call on Him with a yearning heart, he will surely respond. Create an intense dissatisfaction for the things of the world. Cultivate longing for holy company and desire to know God, by knowing whom all our wants are satisfied.

Sri Ramakrishna used to inspire his listeners with this song:

Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the ocean of God's beauty,

Descend to the uttermost depths

And you will find the gem of love.

Light up, O mind, light up wisdom's shining lamp,

And let it burn with steady flame

Filling your heart with unceasing joy.

Freedom Through Desirelessness

To attain peace one has to practice control of the senses and the mind. Conflicting desires arise in the mind. Because of those desires the mind is constantly lashed into waves. As long as these waves

exist, the mind is restless. In order to control these waves which give rise to thoughts of a worldly and distracting nature one must live a life of self-discipline. Of all disciplines chastity is the foremost and fundamental, and all other disciplines will follow naturally if one practices this primary virtue. He who leads an unregulated life and thinks impure thoughts loses all powers and strength of mind. He is at the mercy of the passing desires and feverish cravings of the senses and a slave to his will.

The mind has tremendous potentialities. It is the storehouse of infinite energy. Through control and inner check we can unfold these potentialities and gradually develop the power of the mind for working toward good. Each one of us is a repository of infinite power. If we can manifest our latent capacities, we will become almost all-powerful. Prophets and incarnations who have come and gone have shown us one thing, that we too can become the heirs of knowledge and power like themselves, if we only have the will. If we struggle, walking the path trodden by them, we too will one day reach the goal. If it were not so, the life of an *avatar* would have no meaning. The great teachers and incarnations of God exemplify for us the truth that *"life is worth living."* They set before us a goal and show us how to realize that goal in our individual lives. They point out methods of discipline which are suited to the age and applicable to people of diverse moods and temperaments. Their one message is the call to spiritual awakening, for who knows when the Atman, the Self, will be awakened from its slumber? Sri Ramakrishna used to say, *"If the soul hungers for God, Self-knowledge may come in three years or in three months. If the desire is intense, it may come even in three days."* Rightly does the Gita say:

When can a man be said to have achieved union with Brahman? When his mind is under perfect control and freed from all desires, so that he

becomes absorbed in the Atman, and nothing else. "The light of the lamp does not flicker in a windless place": that is the simile which describes a yogi of one-pointed mind, who meditates upon the Atman. When, through the practice of yoga, the mind ceases its restless movements, and becomes still, he realizes the Atman. It satisfies him entirely. Then he knows that infinite happiness which can be realized by the purified heart but is beyond the grasp of the senses. He stands firm in this realization. Because of it, he can never again wander from the inmost truth of his being.

Is it possible to realize this truth living the life of a householder? Many people think that if one gets married and has a family, it is almost impossible for him to practice self-control. This is utterly wrong. If he has the desire, what stands in the way of a householder controlling his senses? Sri Ramakrishna used to say, *"Make your mind and speech one and you will attain everything. What to speak of restraining the senses! Many other excellent qualities will be reflected in your life."*

Forgetful of the true nature of the Atman, which is eternally free, man seeks worldly objects for the enjoyment of his senses. He considers pleasures derived from external things as sweet and enchanting. But, alas, how many people realize that every pleasure is invariably mixed with some measure of pain? Accepting the one necessarily involves accepting the other. Swami Vivekananda would often say, *"Joy comes to man wearing a crown of sorrow on its head."* Ordinarily man is so engrossed in the joyful side of the picture that he finds no time to think of the crown of sorrow. He forgets that if he accepts the one, he must take the other with it. Hence our scriptures warn us: *"Beware, O man! Think not that the enjoyment of the senses is the goal of life, for suffering is its inseparable companion. Look upon both pleasure and pain as your teachers. Enlarge your vision and accept that as your goal which will free you from the bonds of maya."*

The aim of the scriptures therefore is to teach people how they can develop the spirit of renunciation in married life. Through experiences of the world, with its joys and sorrows, they will be able to know the value of detachment, without which no happiness is born. Gradually they will come to the understanding that the pleasures of the world are short-lived and unreal, and the only reality that exists is God. And to know him, and to be united with him by prayer and meditation, is the noblest aim and aspiration of life.

It is an undeniable fact, proven by experience, that the mind will not pursue an object of enjoyment for long if it proceeds to enjoy with proper discrimination. That is why Sri Ramakrishna would repeatedly say that discrimination between the Real and the unreal is imperative for a spiritual aspirant. A seeker of God should always discriminate in this manner: *“Well, my mind, you hanker so much after this food and that dress and are never satisfied. But don’t you see that all kinds of food, whether they are quite ordinary or the finest delicacies are the same? They are nothing but modifications of the five elements of matter. Similarly, the same components of blood and flesh, of bone and marrow, which are the products of those elements, form the beautiful figures of women as well as those of any other being. Why should you then have preferences and liking for such special objects? Will they ever help you to attain that which is the abode of supreme bliss?”*

What should one do if in spite of these arguments the mind refuses to listen? In that case one should enjoy the object of desire once or twice, while discriminating between the Real and the unreal. Small desires, such as for sweets, can be renounced in this way after enjoying their fulfilment with proper discrimination. But with regard to major desires it is dangerous to apply the same method. For, the moment an aspirant begins to gratify them, he becomes so involved that he cannot extricate himself. Therefore these desires have to be

renounced and uprooted completely from the mind by realizing the evil and the defects inherent in them. If they are given free rein, they will stifle the power of discrimination and have serious consequences.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that all his spiritual attainments were for the sake of others. If people would do one-sixteenth of what he did, they will be blessed. That is why he assumed the responsibilities of married life and exemplified the noble ideal of the hearth. Had not Sri Ramakrishna married, some of his critics would probably have remarked that he talked so vehemently against lust and gold, and preached the ideal of renunciation so eloquently, because he himself had not married.

The marriage of Sri Ramakrishna has a deep meaning. He entered into it with the idea that people might learn from his example that marriage is a sacrament and has an ideal much higher than the mere gratification of the senses. It was not exemplified in the lives of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Shankara, and others. It is now demonstrated in the life of Ramakrishna to fulfil a great need of our age. For the first time in the history of the world an absolutely pure married life was given expression as a result of lifelong spiritual practices and austere disciplines. Sri Ramakrishna would say, *“Let men cast their own lives in this mould and fashion an image of purity and perfect beauty.”*

Preparing The Ground

Instead of sitting idly, waiting for an illumined soul to become your Guru, make an effort to do these three things which are necessary for spiritual life: contemplation of God, study of the scriptures, and association with the holy. First prepare the ground by digging, removing the weeds, and watering the soil with earnest care. It is one of the secrets of life which will be revealed to you if you study nature intelligently, that as soon as the soil is ready the sower of the seeds inevitably comes. Wherever there is want, there is also

fulfilment. Where there is demand, there is also supply. Whenever an aspirant intensely longs for God, he finds the way toward the fulfilment of his desire. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: *“The Mother will not allow any of her children to go hungry. He who is hungry in the morning will be fed in the morning. He whose appetite is aroused late in the evening will be fed in the evening.”* Every sincere wish of man will be fulfilled. This truth has been corroborated by saints and seers all over the world throughout the ages. We too have experienced it in our own lives to a greater or lesser degree.

An illumined teacher is a great spiritual power because he has entered into the heart of Reality. His perception is not clouded by the fog of ignorance. He has free access to supersensuous knowledge, which is a sealed book to an ordinary man. Of him Sri Krishna says in the Gita:

*“The recollected mind is awake
In the knowledge of the Atman
Which is dark night to the ignorant:
The ignorant are awake in their sense-life
Which they think is daylight:
To the seer it is darkness.”*

You have asked how an illumined soul knows the past and the future of his disciples. In reply I should say that this is to be understood in a spiritual sense. A good teacher sees through the subtle body of his disciple and imparts his teaching according to the past and future impressions which are revealed to him in the depth of meditation. An enlightened soul does not use occult powers nor does he take recourse to astrology, for astrological calculations are in many cases unreliable.

When you feel depressed, you must drive away that feeling by saying, *“I belong to the Lord, he is my very own. I am his child. He is*

holding me by the hand and will surely do what is good for me.” Thinking thus, you must bring strength to your nerves and faith in your heart. When you are not able to fix your mind on God, pray earnestly to him, “O Lord, please make my mind steady since I am not able to do it myself. Helpless as I am, I seek refuge at your feet.”

Know for certain that the Lord hears everything and knows everything. He listens to your least whisper. He is aware of every thought that arises in your mind. Whatever you ask of him with a yearning heart will be granted. Do not be too inquisitive. It is not possible to understand the deeper truths of spiritual life with an impure mind attached to sense-objects. To practice religion according to the direction of such a mind only leads to a maze in which one goes round and round without finding an escape. Therefore give up all attempts to understand spiritual truths with your limited intellect. Have absolute faith in the Lord; rely upon him and practice spiritual disciplines. Cry unto him with a longing heart. He will reveal himself to you when the time is ripe. Listen to a song which Swamiji used to sing before Sri Ramakrishna:

*O Lord, must all my days be spent
So utterly in vain?
Down the path of hope
I gaze with longing, day and night.
My poor heart's humble cottage door
Is standing open wide;
Be gracious, Lord, and enter there
But once and quench my thirst.*

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, July-August 1953)



Three Types of Disciples

Swami Gnaneswarananda

“Gurus there are by thousands and tens of thousands, but a real disciple can hardly be found—he is one out of a million”.

There are three things that are considered of utmost importance for a student of spiritual enlightenment. The first is his human birth. It is a rare opportunity to be born as a human being. This earth planet of ours is inhabited by innumerable species of living beings and the proportion of human beings to the other species is as a handful of dust to the vast desert of Sahara. Certainly privileged we are, for as human beings we have the possibility of attaining the highest illumination. Individuals belonging to the other species do not have the instruments for higher understanding.

Then, it is a great privilege for a human soul to be awakened to the fact that there is a world of spirituality, by knowing which one may attain infinite bliss and inexhaustible existence. Out of thousands we would not be able to find even one who is really awakened, who understands and comprehends the beauty and the magnificence of the inner world. For this reason, the awakening of the soul to the inner truths has been considered the second great privilege.

The union of this awakened soul with its spiritual guide or Guru, is the third supreme privilege. But it cannot be gained without a good deal of conscious preparation. Only when the soul has been fully awakened to the finer ideals of the spiritual world, and the mind has been completely directed inward, can one contact a real Guru. Before that, even if a real Guru comes, one would not be able to gain much by contacting him. The

Guru is the living luminary, or the lighted torch that kindles the potential fire of spirituality in a disciple. Do you think that a torch, with all its fire, can kindle a piece of ice? It is only when the student has reached a certain stage of unfoldment that a Guru can help him. There are stages of preparation which he must go through alone, and as soon as he is ready to receive the light the living luminary comes spontaneously, drawn by a subtle law of spiritual magnetism.

The question is often asked how to obtain a real Guru; But this is not a matter for the student to solve, for as soon as he is ready he certainly gets his Guru. The problem is for the Guru—how to get a fit disciple. The illumined souls are always radiating the truth, so that those who are ready for it may receive it at once, and the seed of spirituality may be sowed. But a seed cannot grow on a bed of rock. Unless it is sowed on fertile ground, and nurtured with water, light and air, it will not mature and fruit cannot be produced. So the soil of the mind of the student has to be prepared. He has to start work all by himself. He has to draw his inspiration from his own inner self, his environment, and the world at large. He must cultivate sincerity of heart and strength of mind, and develop his power of understanding. The stupid and the weak are unfit for the realization of higher truths. They must gain the fitness first.

There is a very common saying in the Bengali language. It is a colloquial expression, and can be translated only in slang. "A 'hobo' disciple always attracts a 'hobo' Guru". And it is remarkably true. If a student is not fit, but just for the sake of doing something he tries to find a guide, what kind of a guide do you think he deserves and would actually get? Because his appetite is for the sensational it is only proper that he will

attract a guide who will give him plenty of stunts. Such a student very often turns around and blames his guide, but he alone is to blame. He gets what he draws by his inner state of consciousness. When I was in India I came across a so-called Sadhu. He could not read very well so he brought me some manuscripts to read to him. I discovered that they contained matters of jugglery and trickery, which could be used only to fool people, and I ask him why he was studying such things. He frankly answered, "You people are educated and have patience to understand things, but what can I do? There are many people who like to be fooled, and I am thinking of something that will satisfy them. They will be fooled by others anyway, so why shouldn't I fool them? Fine logic! Nevertheless it is true. This is only an illustration of the fact that stupid seekers create a demand for "naughty" guides.

Then there is the opportunist type. They have the idea that by practicing the occult sciences of breathing, yoga, and so forth, they might be able to attain great material results in a very easy and inexpensive way—a short-cut to success! But these people are deluding themselves. They do not have the stamina and intelligence to follow the royal road of reason. If you want to follow some profession you must work for it and study for it. If you want good health you must exercise, eat right, and live a good life. But those people who are weak and gullible and who cannot think of any reasonable process of study and discipline are the ones who resort to this kind of miracle-mongering. It is not higher spiritual unfoldment that they are interested in at all. What they really want is an easy-going life of do-little and get-much! For that reason, what they get is enough to bring them stern disillusionment. In the last analysis, nothing great can be accomplished by trickery.

It is only through diligence, courage and the power of understanding that great things are achieved in this life. A story of such an opportunity will give you a clear conception of the type I am speaking of.

There was a man who worked very hard in his line of business for some time, but he could not succeed. He thought he would try to become more successful by following the occult method, by getting a Guru who would teach him some yoga. In that way he would live in greater enjoyment. He went to a monastery, met the holy people and expressed his wish to be taken into the brotherhood as a disciple. The chief said to him, "Do you think you will be able to follow all the disciplines which a disciple has to go through?" He answered, "Oh, yes, I am ready. But please tell me how soon am I going to be illumined?" The teacher replied, "That depends on you. However, I shall put you in the care of another teacher who will explain everything to you." So he started through the monastery with the other teacher. His guide said, "If you stay here you must rise early in the morning, forty-five minutes before sunrise, take your bath, and meditate for two hours. After that, there will be some housework to do. You must render personal service to the teachers and advanced disciples, cook food, draw water, and get wood. This will be your room." The man found nothing that he could call a bed. There was only a raised platform with a blanket over it. The teacher said to him, "Here you will sleep. You have to have control over your senses, so you must practice austerity. You will be served only coarse food. You must have just bare sustenance for a while." During this time the man noticed that there were other rooms with better beds and furnishings. "I saw some very nice rooms with good beds. Who lives in them?" he asked the

teacher. "Oh, those are for the Gurus, who have advanced in their understanding." The man then asked, "Who eats that good food I saw in the kitchen?" "That is for the Gurus," said the teacher. The man abruptly turned to him, "I have made a mistake. I want to see the chief again." When he was taken back to the head of the monastery he said, "Master, I am very sorry, but I have made a mistake. I don't want to be taken in as a disciple. I want to be taken in as a Guru!"

The question is, do you really want spiritual illumination or is it only a passing hobby? Are you ready to go through all the practices of disciplines, austerities and sacrifices for the attainment of the state you say you want? If so, you are to be considered a real student. No cleverness or miracle is necessary. Only genuine and sincere thirst for truth makes the student ready, and when he is ready he receives the leadership and guidance of a Guru. Let me tell you again, it is not the disciple who has to find the Guru. It is the Guru who discovers the disciple. So do not worry yourself about finding a Guru. Just make the soil ready, so that when the seed comes it will not be wasted. It will sprout and produce rich harvest.

Now let us consider the different types of real students. Those students who are attempting to attain the highest truth fall under three different types. They do not all belong to the same level of unfoldment. There are some who are highly developed and can work things out in a much shorter time than others. There are others who are mediocre and occupy the ordinary level. They take a longer time and have to go through more elaborate processes of discipline and study. Thirdly, there is the slow type. They are awakened but have not yet developed the faculties needed to reach spiritual perfection.

These three types have been classified in the technical language of Hindu psychology under three terms: Sattwic, Rajasic, and Tamasic. The slowest type is called Tamasic. Tamas means darkness. This type has not yet gained the necessary preparedness. They have the spirit of awakenment, but so far as the instrument of the mind is concerned it has not been fully developed. They work through fear, mystery, superstition, secrecy and ignorance. Let me tell you, before I enter into details, that when I am describing this particular type I am not condemning them. They are real students, as distinguished from the false types we have considered before. It is their sincere urge that qualifies them as students. Although they have that right motive force, yet they do not have the other qualities which are present in the higher types. In their case the urge for the purification and improvement of life comes from the motive force of fear. They are afraid of hell-fire, brimstone, and the devil, and for that reason they want the mercy and protection of God. There is no trickery or insincerity about them. They are only weak, and they cannot feel secure without the protection of some overlord. If they are told about the truths of higher spirituality in plain, logical language they will fail to understand it. However, if you tell them stories about the terrors of hell and how to avoid them by performing some rituals, they will be roused to action. This is the only appeal through which they can be helped. They will go through the different stages of evolution and will eventually reach the goal. Being of weak mentality they are naturally interested in all kinds of mysteries. If they are told something about the relationship of the human soul with the ultimate reality they will simply look vacant. If you present something to them in a logical and reasonable way they will become bored

or go to sleep, but if you appeal to their weakness of superstition, fear or mystery, they will wake up and become enthusiastic about it. They are very much like little children and should by all means be helped to unfold rather than be exploited.

Do not think that by going after mystery you act very smart, or that you are an advanced student and above the ordinary. It bespeaks only of an undeveloped state of one's consciousness. Nobody should think that if he belongs to a mystery society he is holier than the rest. Far from it. It only shows that one is not at all advanced in the path of spirituality. Such a student is queer in everything. He talks queerly, acts queerly, and thinks queerly in matters of spirituality. This Tamasic type is, for these reasons, very slow in his process of development. Such a student will have to go through a cleaning process. Sometimes even a well-meaning teacher cannot help presenting things to him in a way he can understand. For that reason I do not blame teachers who use a moderate dose of hellfire and brimstone to get these Tamasic students stirred up.

Suppose you are taking care of three children. You want them to do their school work. You realize that one of them will obey you only when he is afraid of something, say punishment. Therefore it is necessary for you to appeal to that child in the stern language of fear. He will behave only under repression or coercion. Certainly this shows a poor state of unfoldment in the child. He should be carefully helped to improve his mental make-up by a gradual process of education.

The second child you have to deal with is of a different mentality. You cannot scare him into obedience, and you should not. But he responds quickly to the idea of competition

and reward. He gets quite enthusiastic about rising above his fellow students or about obtaining some prize, which he values more than his education. This is the illustration of the Rajasic type of student. The sense of competition, ostentation, power, noise, and vanity appeals to him more than the ideal of spiritual unfoldment. In the first place he likes display of any kind. He can only follow a course that has a great deal of pomp and show in it. No doubt he wants the truth, but the truth in its own simple form does not make an impression on him. So it has to be presented to him with all the splendour of material life. He will join a church that will spend a million dollars for its building. He will talk about the million dollar organ, the costly velvet hangings, and the expensive robes of the pastor or priest. His is an adolescent soul and must go through the experience of material splendour, even in the path of his spiritual development. His vanity is satisfied by the exclusive nature of his religion. God, in his estimation, is a mighty big autocrat whom only titled peers can see. So he cares more for his titles than for real illumination. This Rajasic type of student moves in a roundabout way. He thinks he is speeding but he gets caught at every corner, so his progress is slow too. The dust and dirt of vanity, pride, love of splendour and display have to be thoroughly washed out before he can attain spiritual perfection.

The third child is such that he understands the value of education for its own sake, and he does not have to be appealed to either through fear or competition and reward. He goes directly into the truth. Therefore he is the quickest of the three. He illustrates the Sattwic type of student. He gets to the goal very quickly, for he does not have to stop for anything. He is like a piece of dry fuel. As soon as the spark comes from the

Guru he catches the fire. He is thoroughly clean and pure. His mind is so constituted that it can go directly into the truth. He does not have to follow any roundabout method. The seed of spirituality grows into a beautiful tree in this field and bears the most wonderful flowers and fruits.

There is infinite possibility of growth for every soul. It would be absolutely wrong to presume that if a person is now occupying the state of Tamas he cannot improve his condition. But one has to be thoroughly conscious of his present state in order to improve his condition. Where there is no self-deception there is a chance of improvement, but where there is misunderstanding, conceit, vanity or ignorance about one's own position, there is danger of being detained for a longer time.

The first thing necessary for such an improvement is self-analysis. Analyze and try to find out if you are a real student or just an amateur. If you are convinced that you are a real student, try to find out to what stage of evolution you belong. If you belong even to the lowest, do not despair. Cultivate courage, strength and perseverance, and exercise your power of reasoning. If you are the Rajasic type rise above that restlessness of worldly desire. At the dictates of your ego you have been chasing phantoms in the maze of worldly glamour. Endeavour to unfold the higher qualities of Sattwa—peace, poise, and directness of understanding. Whatever your condition, sincerely and diligently work to better it. Every soul has to pass through these different stages of evolution, and one will attain the goal sooner if he does not let anything stop his endeavours.

There was once a poor woodcutter who cut wood in the forest and took it to the market to sell. Thus he supported his

family, although by that work he could not earn much. One hot, sultry summer afternoon he was carrying a big load that was too heavy for him. He threw down the load and sat under a tree to escape the scorching sun. He was complaining about his hard lot when a holy man came by. The woodcutter was glad to see him. He said, "Father, can you tell me how I can improve my condition? How can I get what I want?" The holy man simply said, "Don't stop. Go right ahead." The poor woodcutter did not understand, and he sighed and went on his way. The next day when he went again into the forest he remembered the words of the holy man. "Don't stop. Go right ahead." So he went deeper into the forest, where, to his surprise, he discovered a forest of sandalwood. By selling this sandalwood he got much more money than before. Then one day he remembered that the holy man had told him not to stop, but to go ahead. He penetrated beyond the forest, and there he found a gold mine! He became very rich. Then again one day he remembered what the holy man had said. He left his family and his riches and went on and on past the gold mine. There he found the holy man sitting in his cottage. The holy man smiled and said, "My son, after all you have come to me! Those were necessary steps which you had to go through, and I am glad that you did not stop. Now you are with me, and I will give you the secret of highest spiritual understanding. Now is the time. Before, you would not have been able to avail yourself of it. Having gone through all these stages of experience without stopping, you are now ready. Whereupon the holy man gave the woodcutter the highest spiritual illumination.

This is the lesson of life — don't stop, go right ahead!

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, November-December 1949)



An Introduction to Hindu Theology-7

Swami Sunirmalananda

(Continued from last issue)

4. The idea of the Living Being

The fourth theological idea is the living being. Who are we? Where did we come from? Where do we go? Who made us? Why are we suffering? –there are numerous such questions. And these questions have been asked since time immemorial. We see millions of species on this earth, and we do not know how many more might be there elsewhere. Who created all this? Where did all this come from? In the *Prashna Upanishad*, six young men go to a sage and ask some important questions. The first question was from Sukesha. He asked the sage Bharadwaja: ‘Sir, where do living beings come from?’ The sage answered this question scientifically, by stating that the Creator created pairs—of matter and energy—and these two interacted to create living beings.

The theological doubt about our origins has been one of the fundamental questions of humanity since the beginning, perhaps. There have been all sorts of answers—from the stork bringing us, to our not being existent at all. Advaita Vedanta proposes that we are essentially Brahman and our Divine nature is enveloped by the material, owing to ignorance. This beginningless ignorance has projected the material around us and has made us live in total confusion. We mistake the snake for the rope, the body for the Self, and the universe for permanence. This projection is called *adhyâsa*. We therefore suffer. Our goal is to know who we are and be free. Other schools of Vedanta say that there is the supreme Self, *Paramatman*, and we are individual souls. Our relation to Him is that of Whole and the part. Our goal is to become one with

the Whole. Yet other schools say that we are separated from God and through noble actions, we shall become nearer to Him.

All Hindu schools agree that we are neither the body nor the mind. Hinduism has long, long ago discovered that we are trichotomous. We have the physical body, the subtle body, and the causal body. But we are different from all these bodies. We are essentially one in the Self or Atman. This Atman which we really are, is infinite, one and eternal. All limitations pertain to the body. Owing to ignorance, we superimpose the qualities of the body on the Self and vice versa. And due to this ignorance again, we are born again and again in numerous bodies—high or low. Until we uncover the ignorant covering and reveal our true Self, we have to come again and again.

If we are the Atman, pure and infinite, how did we become bound? Vedanta says that there is no need to answer this question because, essentially, this bondage is ignorance. Further, until we break out of this illusion, we cannot understand even if it is explained. Furthermore, if a child wakes up from sleep and asks her mother about the location of palace and king she saw in dream, the mother smiles.

To the devotional schools, however, we are here because God has created us in this way, so that we may love Him. We are God's glory. The word the scriptures use is that we are the "body" of God. We can love God in diverse ways and sport with Him here. To the yogi, it is owing to *prakriti* that creation has come into existence. We are numerous *souls*, imprisoned in *prakriti*. Our goal is to transcend the limitations set by *prakriti* and know our nature as the limitless *Atman*.

According to the Saiva schools, we are *pashus* (animals) held in the bonds of worldliness and karma. We must overcome these bonds and become free.

Rebirth is an important concept of Sanatana Dharma. Every soul is reborn—either as a man/woman or an animal or plant—depending upon the actions he/she has performed. Virtuous actions lead the soul upwards while wicked actions take him downwards. Rebirth stops when the soul knows its divine nature.

The next question is, if everything and everyone is a manifestation of God, what about the sinners? What about wicked persons? Are they having God in their hearts? Do they also have the Kingdom within them? Here, Vedanta comes to help. One should understand Vedantic ontology to see why there are certain bold statements made by Vedanta. Vedanta says that we are tripartite: we have this body, we have the mind, but we are different. We are divine or the Self. In this way, whether it is the little insect or the elephant or the human being himself—all are trichotomous. We are all one—we are the Self, which is limitless, pure, eternal, and ever-perfect. All imperfections and limitations pertain to the body and mind.

Christian Theology has a long list of sins and a long discussion on sin and sinning. There is a special science called Haematology. Vedanta or Sanatana Dharma accepts sin as error. That is the difference. It is not that Vedanta does not accept sin and it is not that Vedanta asks people to do whatever they like. No. What Vedanta says is, there is always a bright light at the end of the tunnel. You are not doomed. If you feel guilty of being in bad company, of having done bad deeds in the past—just shake it off. That is not your true nature. If you

are not essentially good, you can never wish to be good and be good. So you are essentially good, you are Divine.

Of all the living beings the human being is considered to be the most important, as it is in human birth that one to attain the goal of life. All the scriptures give tremendous importance to human birth. So much so, that the *Bhagavata* says that in this small human body, God Himself, whose eyes are the suns and stars, whose body is the whole universe, resides. Thus, human life is precious. All saints and scriptures insist that no one should waste this precious birth but strive to be perfect.

5. About the Paths to Knowing God

Christian theology begins with faith and ends in faith. In Sanatana Dharma, though several paths say that the first step to spirituality is faith (*shraddhâ*), there are some exceptions. In this system, even atheists are respected and given a due position.

Why does one seek God? Why does one seek to know God? Is it because of fear? No, it is not. Human beings seek God because they are essentially divine. It is seeking their true nature. We seek knowledge because our essential nature, the Spirit, is the embodiment of knowledge. We seek bliss because our essential nature is bliss. We seek permanence for the body without knowing that permanence is our real nature, as we are Existence itself. All knowledge is within. God-knowledge too is within. What we do is only to unveil this knowledge. Thus, seeking God is not something unnatural or some superimposition on our regular day-to-day life. Seeking God or Truth or the Reality is our real and natural endeavour.

This endorses two theological concepts: one, that we can seek God and know Him and, two, Hinduism teaches that all knowledge is within. Spiritual practice is for unfolding this knowledge.

Thus, the science of theology in Sanatana Dharma begins with a desire to know, to enquire, to investigate. This is called *tattva-vichâra*, enquiry into the nature of Reality. And this, in fact, is true theology. In Sanatana Dharma, the question begins in this way. 'Now, therefore, let's enquire into the Supreme Reality.' This is not a statement, but a proposition, an aphoristic proposition, put forward by *Brahma Sutras*. '*Athâto Brahma jijnâsâ*, let us now enquire into Reality.' And the enquiry begins.

Some may think that the Reality or Brahman is without name and form, beyond qualifications and concepts. Some others may think that Brahman is God Himself. But, the search begins.

There are numerous ways of knowing God. The soul has absolute independence in choosing its path. There is such independence in Sanatana Dharma that, sometimes two paths may appear completely contradictory. For instance, you may prefer image worship, and another may be averse to images. Both have a place in Sanatana Dharma. You may think meditation is impossible for you and take to some other method, while another may be drowned in meditation. Both are equally important. This is one of the most important aspects of Sanatana Dharma.

How many types of sadhana or spiritual practices are there according to Sanatana Dharma? Five, ten, sixty or seventy perhaps? All are valid paths to God. Anything done with love is acceptable. Nowhere has it been said that this alone is the path, so far as Sanatana Dharma is concerned.

Some say that cleaning the God's house, arranging flowers for His worship, eating food offered to Him—these are the best practices. Some others say that repeating God's names is the easiest and the best. Some others say that serving the living God is the best. In general, the devotional schools teach nine types of devotion: listening to God's glories, singing God's glories, remembering Him constantly, worship, service, saluting the Lord repeatedly, service of His devotees, friendship with God and self-surrender.

All of the different paths have been broadly classified into four yogas. These four yogas fulfil the needs of all types of aspirants. Yoga is union with God, and the paths too are called yogas. There are four yogas: the path of contemplation (raja yoga), the path of enquiry (jnana yoga), the path of emotional love for God (bhakti yoga) and the path of selfless action (karma yoga). Swami Vivekananda said that one can choose whichever path suits best and march forward. However, there are some who may initially follow all the four paths. As the soul's intimacy with God increases, the relationship deepens and there is one-pointedness in the soul's seeking.

Which path is the easiest? It depends on the seeking and nature of the person. Sri Ramakrishna's verdict about the different spiritual paths is the final word so far as their harmony and necessity are concerned: 'God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope. You can also climb up by a bamboo pole.'

Sri Ramakrishna further says: 'You may say that there are many errors and superstitions in another religion. I should reply: Suppose there are. Every religion has errors. Everyone

thinks that his watch alone gives the correct time. It is enough to have yearning for God. It is enough to love Him and feel attracted to Him: Don't you know that God is the Inner Guide? He sees the longing of our heart and the yearning of our soul.' Ramakrishna gives an example to illustrate this point: 'Suppose a man has several sons. The older boys address him distinctly as "Baba" or "Papa", but the babies can at best call him "Ba" or "Pa". Now, will the father be angry with those who address him in this indistinct way? The father knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well. All children are the same to the father. Likewise, the devotees call on God alone, though by different names. They call on one Person only. God is one, but His names are many.'

Sadhana or spiritual practice is stressed in all the traditions of Hinduism. Sadhana is necessary for mental purification. It is also necessary for removing obstacles to one's love and desire for Truth. Further, sadhana brings one-pointedness in seeking, destroys past tendencies, and makes the aspirant fit for God-knowledge. Though grace is highly stressed in all paths of Hinduism—be it the grace of God or the spiritual master—the prerequisite to such grace is the aspirant's seeking.

How long does it take for an aspirant to reach the goal? There is no time limit. It may be one second or several life-times. It all depends on the preparation of the soul to receive the Lord, or the reduction of one's karmic pressure on the soul. Truthfulness, purity, austerity, study, self-surrender, and so on are the essential qualities for one who seeks the Truth. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Through selfless work, love of God grows in the heart. Then, through His grace one realizes Him in course of time. God can be seen. One can talk to him as I am talking to you.'

Sadhana is different, austerity is different though one leads to another. Regarding austerity, all the Hindu scriptures and paths warn against going to extremes. They all say that extreme self-torture in the name of austerity is a waste and harmful to spiritual progress. Similar is their warning against breath control exercises. Therefore Sri Krishna gives a beautiful list of simple austerities for the common man in the *Bhagavadgita*. Sri Ramakrishna Says: 'truthfulness is the greatest austerity for this age'.

Even though there are numerous paths leading to god, almost all the paths say this: for an aspirant, control of the senses, control of the mind, forbearance, peaceful nature, and faith are necessary. The aspirant has to cultivate these qualities. Further, he should not be depressed, not covet false experiences, and be healthy in his habits, etc.

As the aspirant walks along the spiritual path, various temptations present themselves before him and bother him. They distract him from the path. Unlike other systems, Vedanta or Sanatana Dharma understands these temptations not as ghosts or Satan, but the past impressions. Due to the aspirant's having assumed numerous bodies in the past, he has accumulated innumerable impressions of the experiences of the world. These impressions instigate desires to torment him during his spiritual struggle. Let alone the attractions of the world, higher attractions like the powers of the mind also disturb him. Scriptures and saints warn aspirants against such pitfalls and say that if once the aspirant gets caught in the snares of these powers, he is doomed. He must resolutely say no to any attraction and forge ahead.

This is an important difference between Hindu theology and other theologies. While miraculous powers are considered

qualifications for sainthood in other systems,, Sanatana Dharma has resolutely rejected all such powers as belonging to a world completely different from that of the spiritual. Supernatural powers are obstacles to spiritual progress, according to Sanatana Dharma. This is an important and vital teaching, which goes a long way in helping millions of people gain true religious experience.

Speaking of experiences, Vedanta accepts countless experiences of God. God is Infinite, and so are our experiences of Him. Yoga gives a list of the various forms of Samadhi the soul can attain—from simple concentration to the highest state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, where there is virtually no mind at all. All schools of Vedanta accept the practical system of yoga and add some of their own methods to that. This gives variety to Sanatana Dharma. And this also gives an opportunity to different kinds of minds to choose the path suited to their tastes.

The results arrived at by the different enquirers could all be different. Thus theology in Sanatana Dharma embraces all concepts of God, all interpretations of God, and all paths to God. The general example given is that of the ocean. There is the infinite ocean and there are numerous beaches. Different people stand on different beaches and claim that the ocean is of this shape or that. All opinions are true. But the one who flies above the ocean sees the ocean correctly.

One question challenges us: Can God, who is beyond mind and thought, be known? "Yes!" affirm all the schools of Sanatana Dharma. He is not known as a thing is known, but He is knowledge itself. God knowledge is already there and ignorance has covered this knowledge. Sadhana is a "negative" process of removing this covering. Sri Ramakrishna says : *'Let me tell you one thing. God can be seen. The Vedas say that God is*

*beyond mind and speech. The meaning of this is that God is unknown to the mind attached to worldly objects. Vaishnavacharan (a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna) used to say, 'God is known by the mind and intellect that are pure.' Therefore it is necessary to seek the company of holy men, practise prayer, and listen to the instruction of the guru. These purify the mind. Then one sees God.'*¹

Is this God-vision an ideal for a few chosen people only? According to Hinduism, everyone should seek God. The goal of life, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is God-realisation. Everyone should live in such a way that the mind has this highest ideal as the goal. For this, Hinduism prescribes five 'duties' (*yajnas*) for everyone, especially the householders. These daily duties—service to everyone from animals to the gods—helps realising the ideal.

1 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 175

(To be continued)



What is the good of that spiritual practice or realization which does not benefit others, does not conduce to the well-being of people sunk in ignorance and delusion, does not help in rescuing them from the clutches of lust and wealth? Do you think, as long as one jiva endures in bondage, you will have any liberation? So long as he is not liberated—it may take several lifetimes—you will have to be born to help him, to make him realize Brahman. Every jiva is part of yourself—which is the rationale of all work for others.

Swami Vivekananda

Leaves from an Ashrama 51:
Principle of Alert Surrender
Swami Vidyatmananda

One day Shiva, looking down from heaven, noticed that one of his devotees was about to be set upon by a highwayman. So Shiva started forth to take up the man's defence. However, by this time the devotee had found a stick beside the road and was busy trading blows with the bandit. Eventually, although battered, the devotee was able to drive his assailant away. In the meantime Shiva had relaxed, remarking, 'Why should I interpose my aid when he prefers to help himself?'

This story illustrates a truth whose subtle implications I am learning to appreciate. If you think yourself capable of managing everything for yourself, the Lord will let you do it. (God is too well mannered ever to impose himself upon anyone.) Generally, however, since my knowledge is limited, my solutions will not be very good; I shall have to fight my way through life and am bound to end up the worse for wear. In due course, as my ego diminishes, I shall come to see how poor my management is. It will become a habit with me more and more to leave things to God.

But certain conditions prevail. First, there is the time element. His timing is often very different from what mine would be. He seems to work with more deliberation. I must recognize this and await events with patience.

Secondly, just because you aren't responsible doesn't mean that you can be lazy. Indeed, you must be alert to His promptings, because sometimes it is you yourself that He uses as His appointed agent in coping with your affairs!

And third, if we leave things to the Lord we must accept the solutions He offers. He will not excuse us from all exertions, but

He will, I am convinced, save us from serious strain. I once had a demonstration of this principle—or so I fancy. It was night and I was tired. My course lay up two long hills and across two level stretches. I decided to leave in the hands of God the matter of whether I should get a lift to my destination or be forced to walk all the way. What happened was that at the bottom of each of the two hills a motorist came along who offered me a ride. But the driver in each case was going only as far as the summit. So I got rides up the steep places but was forced to walk on the flat parts.

It is hard to describe exactly how it operates—this policy of resigning one's fate to the Divine. It is a matter of living intuitively, in a state of 'alert surrender'. But the principle does work, for at moments now and then I have managed to abide by it. As I reflect upon these occasions I can see how well matters have gone when managed by Him instead of me.

I have become a devotee of God. Why then should I not take advantage of what He is eager to do for me—to become my protector and the able director of the least of my affairs?



Potentially, each one of us has that infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss as our birthright, our real nature; and the difference between us is caused by the greater or lesser power to manifest that divine. Therefore the Vedanta lays down that each man should be treated not as what he manifests, but as what he stands for. Each human being stands for the divine, and, therefore, every teacher should be helpful, not by condemning man, but by helping him to call forth the divinity that is within him. But the goal of all is the knowledge of the Self, the realization of this Self. To it all men, all beings have equal right. This is the view acceptable to all.

Swami Vivekananda

Book Review

Sri Sarada Devi and her Divine Play
by Swami Chetanananda

Published by Vedanta Society of St Louis Price £ 27 .00
Available from the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End

What a delightful surprise! Here is the latest publication from Swami Chetanananda: *Sri Sarada Devi and her Divine Play*, a biography of Holy Mother, and there is her serene face on the cover cleverly blended with a view across the Ganga at Belur Math, the back cover showing her home village of Jayrambati.

The writer has just finished studying the companion book, Swami Chetanananda's retranslation of Swami Saradananda's Bengali work Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play.

This work must have been fairly straightforward. Not so, however, for this work on Sarada Ma. Many books have been written about her and are available in English; but many more exist in the Bengali language. In all cases the swami refers back to the original Bengali. Not only did he find many books about her, but he himself had done research over a number of years with elderly monks and devotees who had been in contact with Sarada Ma; so he had all that material to incorporate. This he has faithfully done and has referenced every single quotation. They are collated at the back of the book, needing nearly twenty pages to get them all in.

The books he referred to mainly are listed on page 12 but he says that most of the earlier work was incorporated into *The Gospel of the Holy Mother* published in English by the Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. However, he says that he relied heavily on Swami Gambhirananda's *Sri Ma Sarada Devi* because "it is the most exhaustive and extensive account." He also admits to quoting extensively from Swami Nikhilananda's version. This was an extensive work and it took the swami nearly seven years to complete the whole thing.

The illustrations are very comprehensive- there are about 102 altogether. I think all the photographs of Sarada Ma ever taken are included, but many photos are of places she visited, etc. After all, what did Sarada Ma really look like? Each photograph seems to present a different sector of her personality. In some she looks like the goddess, in others just a simple Bengali woman. One can choose the aspect which one prefers. Which is your favourite?

Now to the body of the text. The swami says it falls into three parts: *Adi Lila* 1853-1886; *Madhya Lila* 1887-1908; and *Antya Lila* 1909-1920. As well as a Preface an Introduction, there are 25 chapter headings, plus an Epilogue, plus five appendices, a chronology, a glossary, references, an index, and a few "Quotes" (mostly her famous pronouncements). The chapter headings include, for example, Ch18, *Mahamaya's Maya*, a chapter mainly concerned with her domestic problems; Ch24, *Mother of the Ramakrishna Order*, a very broad look at her function as a guru,; Ch28, *Untold Stories of Jayrambati*; and so on, giving a taste of the contents and a desire to read on. Each chapter begins with an invocation, a short prayer to get one in the right mood. Chapter 30 is entitled *The Divinity of the Holy Mother*, which makes one curious.

It is interesting to read how the Mother accepts the fact that she can be "the Mother of the Universe". "On 4 Sept 1918, the Mother told Sarajubala Sen: people call me Bhagavati, the goddess. I think that it must be so. So many incredible things have happened in my life! Golap and Yogim are witnesses of those events. If I think 'let this happen, or I shall eat this,' immediately God makes these things possible." (p594) Quite apart from all things in this chapter, in the Introduction Swami Prabhavanda is quoted as saying that Sarada's mind never went below the throat centre. Just imagine that! Compared with most of us who are wondering about our next meal!

So Chapter 30 has 32 pages all about strange things that happened around Sarada Ma. It starts off with generalizations about "Siva-Shakti", and it continues with anecdotes under the heading: "Holy Mother Reveals Herself". After about nine pages the heading changes to "Manifestation as a Devi". After another nine pages we have "Holy

Mother Speaks the Truth” followed quickly by “ Holy Mother’s Divinity is Hidden”. The next heading is “The Mother’s Omniscience,” and after five more pages we find “Giver of Liberation”. The following Chapter 31 comes down to earth with “The Human Aspects of Holy Mother.”

Going back to the beginning, it seems that Holy Mother’s spirituality was a matter of evolution. Chapter 5 is called the “Awakening of Divinity” and leads to the Shodashi Puja, performed to Sarada in the early days of her residence at Dakshineswar. Page 63 shows a beautiful picture of the imagined scene. It would follow that her mystical powers would increase over time according to the amount of “sadhana” performed and culminating in her becoming the mother of all, in her advanced age. Her life could not have been an easy one. Being the first-born meant she had the responsibility of looking after her numerous siblings at quite a young age. After her father died there was little money for essentials. At least Sarada could return to Dakshineswar, but there she was falling ill with dysentery and soon had to return to her home village where she was so ill that she almost died.

Until the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna she spent periods at Dakshineswar, and other times at Jayrambati. After she had been widowed she spent some time on pilgrimage, and then went to the family property at Kamarpukur. There she had not enough money even to buy salt to flavour the grains she picked from the garden. Eventually she was rescued and taken to Calcutta where devotees started to look after her. Subsequently whenever she visited Calcutta, she never had a permanent home until Udbodhan House was built for her and she moved there in 1909. Much of her time she stayed in Jayrambati, and these were the periods she seemed most happy.

There is so much detail in this book that one can be sure to find something to please everyone.

Elsie Mack

Programme for January - February 2016

Sunday discourses begin
at the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Jan	1	Holy Mother's Puja	
Jan	3	No Lecture	
Jan	10	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 84	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	17	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 85	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	24	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 86	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	31	Swami Vivekananda's Puja	
Feb	7	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 87	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	14	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 88	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	21	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 89	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	28	Day Retreat	

Holy Mother's Puja

Friday 1st January
at Bourne End at 4:30 p.m.

Swami Vivekananda's Puja

Sunday 31st January
at Bourne End at 4:30 p.m.

Day Retreat

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

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

At present we are tied down—like persons dying of cold in the glaciers. They feel such a strong desire to sleep, and when their friends try to wake them, warning them of death, they say, "Let me die, I want to sleep." We all cling to the little things of the senses, even if we are ruined thereby; we forget there are much greater things.

Every thought that we think, every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form, so to speak, and lives in the fine body in a potential form, and after a time it emerges again and bears its results. These results condition the life of man.

Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws excepting those which he makes for himself. The more I live, the more I become convinced every day that every human being is divine. In no man or woman, however vile, does that divinity die. Only he or she does not know how to reach it and is waiting for the Truth.

Swami Vivekananda

Vedanta

is a bi-monthly magazine published, since 1951, by the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire
SL8 5LF, U.K.

Phone: (01628) 526464

www.vedantauk.com

Subscription rate for 6 issues: £9 or \$17.50 post free.

Editor: Swami Dayatmananda

£1.50

Hold to the idea, "I am not the mind, I see that I am thinking, I am watching my mind act," and each day the identification of yourself with thought and feeling will grow less, until at last you can entirely separate yourself from the mind and actually know it to be apart from yourself.

When this is done, the mind is your servant to control as you will. The first stage of being a yogi is to go beyond the senses.

When the mind is conquered, he has reached the highest stage.

Swami Vivekananda



A registered Charity