

Vedanta

388 MARCH - APRIL 2016

A Ramakrishna Symbol

Swami Swahananda

Boredom

Joan Rayne



Divine Wisdom

Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna

A Disciple and Her Pot of Curds

Once there was a rice-feeding ceremony in a Guru's house. His disciples volunteered, according to their powers, to supply the different articles of food. He had one disciple, a very poor widow, who owned a cow. She milked it and brought the Guru a jar of milk. He had thought she would take charge of all the milk and curd for the festival.

Angry at her poor offering, he threw the milk away and said to her, "Go and drown yourself.", The widow accepted this as his command and went to the river to drown herself. But God was pleased with her guileless faith and, appearing before her, said: "*Take this pot of curd. You will never be able to empty it. The more curd you pour out, the more will come from the pot. This will satisfy your teacher.*"

The Guru was speechless with amazement when the pot was given to him. After hearing from the widow the story of the pot, he went to the river, saying to her, "*I shall drown myself if you cannot show God to me.*"

God appeared then and there, but the Guru could not see Him. Addressing God, the widow said, "*If my teacher gives up his body because Thou doth not reveal Thyself to Him, then I too shall die.*"

So God appeared to the Guru—but only once.

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Editorial

Worship of the Divine Mother-3

(Continued from the last issue)

Man is a born thinker. He is always curious to know the cause and origin of the things around him. He is not satisfied with the limitations of life, and wants to get rid of them. The goal of his life is to attain Liberation, and for this he toils on.

The limitation (*Maya*) is due to ignorance of the Supreme Reality known as *Brahman* in the *Upanishads*. It has been described as Impersonal, Eternal, Immortal, Infinite, etc. This idea of Brahman is too abstract for the ordinary people. So people need something concrete to think of, something from where they can make a start and proceed to understand the highest reality.

Swami Vivekananda says : *All is Brahman; the one without a second; only, the Brahman, as absolute, is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped. So the Bhakta chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is, Iswara, the Supreme Reality.'*

The Philosophy of Mother Worship

Devi or the Divine Mother is Divinity conceived in its feminine aspect. This is a conception peculiar to the Hindu religion and perfected, perhaps, not met with anywhere. So how is it that the Hindus who talk in terms of Brahman, the Absolute, etc. also speak of a Goddess and worship Her?

Sri Ramakrishna provides the answer for this question:

"Brahman and Sakti are identical like fire and its power to burn. When we talk of fire, we automatically mean also its power to burn. Again the fire's power to burn implies the fire itself." "What the Vedas call supreme Brahman, we call Kali."

These words of Sri Ramakrishna give us the clue to the philosophy of Devi worship.

But the Mother (*Shaktas*) worshippers believe that the personal God should be called *Mother* rather than Father because of the kindness, love, mercy and sweetness. They look upon God as the Divine Mother, and for them Mother has various forms. But all these different goddesses are nothing but aspects of the same Mother.

Also in human beings, emotions like love, hatred, anger, compassion, etc., are inborn and it is almost impossible for an ordinary man to be completely free from them. Therefore, the devotional scriptures advise him to develop devotion by directing his emotions towards God.

For this, man needs a concrete object, with a name and a form. Hence the Vedas and Puranas speak of various forms of God—like Durga, Kali, Durga, Shiva, Rama, Krishna, etc., for the sake of worship and meditation. It is to think of the Supreme Reality as the Divine Mother and adore Her is easy.

Filial love has its definite claims to distinction. Who is there in this world, who does not love one's own mother? Mother is everything to us. Every man has unquestioning faith in the mother and makes a complete self-surrender to her. The noble mother even sacrifices herself for the welfare of her child.

Naturalness of Mother Worship

To look upon God as Mother is very natural and very sublime. God as Mother, creates, supports and nourishes all beings. There is a greater freedom and spontaneity in the devotee's relationship with God as Mother.

The highest and the purest of all human relationships is that of the mother and child. Mother represents the pure love that knows no barter, no selfishness, no personal gain. The mother's love is a love that never dies. It is said that '*a wayward child may be born, but never a wicked mother*'.

Sri Ramakrishna says, '*Just as a child can force its demand on its mother, even so the devotee can force his/her demand on God as Mother.*'

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'He who is the Absolute Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss is also the all-knowing, all intelligent, and all-blissful Mother of the Universe. The Divine Mother and Brahman are one.'

In a way, the entire universe is nothing but the display of the Divine Power of Brahman, and this Divine Power is worshipped as Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna was a child of the Divine Mother. To Sri Ramakrishna, *Kali*, the Divine Mother, was not merely the Mother of the universe; She was a living presence. He felt Her presence within and without, at all times, everywhere. He used to say that whatever was done or spoken by him really came from the Divine Mother.

If God, who is the source of all power, all goodness, and all beauty, can be conceived as the Divine Mother, the best way that we can keep our relationship with Her will be as Her children.

The Divine Mother in Her Terrible aspect

When we speak of the Mother as the destroyer, it is not to be understood as making for annihilation. What looks like destruction for our eyes, is only resumption by the creative force of what It projected in creation. Behind the chastisement of every mother, there is great love and the intention that the child should grow up in the right manner. Her chastisement is an act of infinite mercy and compassion.

When Kali kills, she does it only to save and shower Her children with the light of knowledge and the grace of Her love. The act of destruction is one of reclamation. That is why every mortal who dies by divine hand attains immortality. (*'Misery is the gift of God' says Holy Mother!*)

The animal sacrifice found in some of the Hindu Pujas is in fact, the Mother demanding the sacrifice of the *beast* and the *demon within us*. Until we kill *the animal* in us we can never become true devotees.

Mother-worship is the straight and swift road to mystic union with the Divine and this is illustrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He declared:

"This attitude of regarding God as the Mother is the last word in Sadhana", 'O God, Thou art my Mother, I am Thy child'".

Motherhood is an inclusive concept. It knows no barriers. Thus worship of God as Mother has very great ethical significance. The Mother unites us all in the clasp of Her embrace and there we know no difference of creed or colour, of race or religion.

As Sri Ramakrishna observed from his realisation, *'Brahman alone is addressed as the Mother. This is because a mother is an object of great love. One is able to realise God through love.'*

We can follow Sri Ramakrishna in his prayer:

"To my Divine Mother, I pray only for pure love. I offer flowers at Her lotus feet and pray to Her: 'Mother, here is Thy virtue, and here is Thy vice. Take them both and grant me only pure love of Thee. Here is Thy knowledge, here is Thy ignorance. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is thy impurity. Take them both, Mother, grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy dharma, here is Thy adharma. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee.'"

let us pray that we may become worthy children of the Divine Mother.

Swami Dayatmananda

A Ramakrishna Symbol

Swami Swahananda

Symbols play a great part in human life. In fact, all our activities in life, especially the creative ones, are based on symbols. To carry an idea, a sign, a mark or a symbol is used. We are very familiar with such symbols for easy identification in elections. All great teachers of mankind have used much of symbolism consisting of ritual in imparting education. They have also often used a type of language which is clearly symbolic. But other than these familiar symbols, another type could be found out in connection with a teacher. He applies particular stress on some of his teachings. This repeated emphasis on a few important things, gradually creates in the people's mind an association of the teacher and his particular ideas.

Thus Buddha suggests sympathy, Christ reminds of grace. The peculiar ideas, especially attached to a particular teacher, may be said to be his symbols. It is with these implied symbols he conveys his ideas to the people. Sri Ramakrishna as a teacher of man also laid some special stress on a few topics and used concrete things for abstract ideas. Not that he used them consciously as symbols, but they got associated with him in the course of our reading of his life and teachings. These then we shall call the Ramakrishna symbols. Our endeavour now is to discuss one such expression of his which is clearly symbolic.

What is the idea Sri Ramakrishna represents which immediately strikes a man? The opinion of a great man will be of much help in clearly stating it. In the Foreword to the book titled: *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*; Mahatma Gandhi says :

“The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is

real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his experiences. They therefore leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of skepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light."

Whenever we look at the life of Sri Ramakrishna we know that he knew nothing else than God. He himself said once: *"Truly I say, I do not know anything other than God."* All the three photographs of the Master that we have show him as immersed in spiritual ecstasy. And Sri Ramakrishna prescribes this spiritual absorption, this love of God, this divine madness, for others also. To a group of devotees he said: *"If you must be mad, be it not for the things of the world. Be mad with the love of God."*

What is the importance of this particular trait of the Master? The present world is being filled with the ideas of secularism and a callousness about the higher aspirations of individuals. While totalitarian societies do not give any cognizance to the personality of man and hence are free to treat him as they like, the democracies based on secularism are faced with the menace of 'loss of character', as has been described by some thinkers. Non-recognition of higher entities fosters selfishness. A counter-wave of otherworldliness, of stress on higher values, must work in the world. If it is done for expediency only, it will have no enduring effect. Experiences of saints and mystics help us to regain our faith in the higher values and thus enhance the quality of our unselfishness. Sri Ramakrishna's realization of God and his remaining constantly merged in Him in the present age have helped us to regain our faith. And recovery of faith is recognized by all thinkers to be the urgency of this age.

We live in an age of doubt. 'Does God exist?' is a question that agitates the mind of modern man. Proofs through inference, ontological, cosmological or teleological, are given. According to these arguments, the inherent belief in or idea of God in man's mind, the necessity of the *First Cause* of this cosmos and purposiveness in the creation indicate the existence of God. But they are not satisfying enough to many people. Then direct experience only can convince a man. He himself may not have that realization but it is enough if he comes in touch with a man who had that experience. Then his faith returns and he is filled with hope and enthusiasm. At the beginning of all religious movements, we find direct experience of the founders. Otherwise they cannot have any root in the mind of men. Sri Ramakrishna's testimony is a reappraisal of this truth.

To be convinced of the existence of God and to be merged in His thought, it is necessary to practice detachment and dispassion. Renunciation for an evolved soul is spontaneous; there is no strained effort on his part. Sri Ramakrishna had that natural renunciation. Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, regarded this to be very important.

One day a disciple said to her:

"Mother, what a unique thing our Master gave to the world! He has established the harmony of all religions." To this the Mother replied: "My child, what you say about the harmony of religions is true. But it never seemed to me that he had practiced the different religions with any definite motive of preaching the harmony of religions. Day and night he remained overwhelmed with the ecstatic thought of God. He enjoyed the sport of the Divine by practicing spiritual disciplines, following the paths of the Vaishnavas, Christians, Muslims and the rest. But it seems to me, my child, that the special feature of the Master's life is his renunciation. Has anyone ever seen such natural renunciation?" As she said to another, "renunciation was his ornament;"

Renunciation does not become natural so long as attraction for the worldly life remains. Two most important causes of the bondage of man in this world, according to Sri Ramakrishna, are the attraction of physical enjoyment and wealth. "Woman and gold", remember, he said, "keep man immersed in worldliness and away from God. And again, when attachment for wealth and sex is wiped out from the mind, what else is left in the soul? Only the bliss of Brahman." While reading The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, we often come across the expression *Kamini-Kanchana*, literally meaning, 'woman and gold'. Regarding this it has been pointed out thus: The term, 'woman and gold', which has been used throughout in a collective sense, occurs again and again in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to designate the chief impediments to spiritual progress. This favourite expression of the Master, *kamini-kanchana*, has often been misconstrued. By it he meant only 'lust and greed', the baneful influence of which retards the aspirant's spiritual growth. He used the word "*kamini*", or 'woman', as a concrete term for the sex instinct when addressing his men devotees. He advised women, on the other hand, to shun 'men'. "*Kanchana*," or 'gold' symbolizes greed which is the other obstacle to spiritual life. (*Gospel* p. 6)

By 'woman' he meant sex or carnality, but the great teacher that he was, with deep insight into the workings of the human mind, he preferred to use the concrete for the abstract, and always spoke of the bondage of 'woman' and not of 'sex' to his men devotees. His motive must have been purely psychological; for speaking on the same subject to his women devotees, he used to warn them against the dangers from 'man'. Just as 'woman' stands for sex, 'gold' stands for acquisitive instinct and is a concrete representation of all the material things that men value and like to possess. The correct English expression for it is 'wealth' or 'riches'. (*Sayings* p. 45) Unless we are aware

of the symbolic nature of the expression, 'woman and gold', and unless we know that this expression was used by Sri Ramakrishna only before his men devotees, there is every chance of misunderstanding and losing the purport of this important teaching. In fact, to avoid such a confusion, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Saradananda have often used the expression '*Kama-Kanchana*'. However, it will be clear beyond doubt from the above quotations that the words are purely symbolic.

So according to Sri Ramakrishna, sex and wealth are the two main attractions, and 'woman and gold' are their symbolic expressions. Most of the other attractions are centered around them. The two theories that have given a terrible shaking to the thoughts of men in modern times are the Freudian ideas of sex and the economic interpretation of history. Both have claimed to be the roots of civilization and though both cannot be the whole truth, they have profoundly influenced modern society.

Sri Ramakrishna's singling out of sex and wealth as constituting the world becomes understandable when we consider how these two major ideas have created commotion in the life of the individual. While the one has encouraged people to let go all moral restraints, the other has hardened man against all compunctions of heart to usher in a hypothetical Utopia. Sri Ramakrishna's stress on holiness and unselfishness directly challenges the two aggressive contemporary ideas.

Sri Ramakrishna preached no hatred between opposite sexes. His rejection of sex simply meant that he rejected women as objects of enjoyment but raised them to the pedestal for reverence, as manifestations of the Divine Mother. He saw the Mother even in the fallen women and worshipped Her in them. So mutual respect and turning the attraction towards God are the remedies that he suggests for conquering .

For overcoming the attraction of wealth he practiced, as some have described it, a new method of *sadhana*. Once on the bank of the Ganges at Dakshineswar, he took a silver coin and a lump of earth and repeated several times “rupee-earth, earth-rupee” and then threw away both into the river. The aversion for wealth became so instinctive with him that his hands and other limbs shrank with pain if they came in touch even unknowingly with any metal. Swami Saradananda has pointed out that the ‘rupee-earth’ formula does not mean that the two things are equal or of no consequence, pragmatically speaking, but that they were both equally useless for God-realization.

About the validity of this *sadhana* the Swami says : Under the control of past impressions, a man does not try to give up with his body and senses a thing, even when he realizes that it is good to renounce it, but goes on thinking, ‘Let the body do anything, but let the mind think otherwise’. Eager to have *yoga* and *bhoga* simultaneously, he deceives himself. For, like light and darkness, these two things can never co-exist. No one has so far been able to discover such an easy method in the spiritual world through which God and the world, or lust and gold, can be served at the same time. The scriptures, therefore, repeatedly teach us : ‘Whatever should be given up, has to be given up with body, mind and speech, and whatever should be accepted, has to be accepted similarly, Then and then only will the *sadhaka* be fit to realize God.’ [Refer: *Great Master* p. 140].

The ideal of renunciation and non-possession has a great social value. Wealth is coveted by man for acquiring goods conducive to enjoyment. Material happiness has a natural attraction for the common man. Very few people can go against the innate liking for it. It is taken for granted that people will normally strive for it. But individual searches for happiness naturally create competition. And unless the resultant animosity

is controlled by an integrated view of life or by a stress on the higher values, society may disintegrate. That was the general view. And all teachers of man have taught him in that way. But in recent times materialistic ideas are being rallied round man's selfish instincts. Though thereby the immediate organization becomes easy and determined, the prospect is rather gloomy, This idea has been corroborated by many a leading thinker of the world.

But it would not do to glorify or idealize material happiness and encourage an outlook on life that feeds an insatiable hunger for material goods. There can be no peace in the minds and hearts of men, no peace amongst men if this hunger gnaws away at them continuously. That would necessarily set up an uncontrolled competition between individuals, groups and nations. Everyone would be trying to outdo his neighbour and every nation not only to catch up with other nations but to leave them all behind. In such a restless society, violence and war would be endemic. All values of life would be subordinated to this *overmastering desire for more*. Religion, art, philosophy, science would have to serve that one aim of life : to have more and still more. Equality, freedom, brotherhood would all be in danger of being submerged in the universal flood of materialism. There would be no peace in human life, no real satisfaction because the possession of more would only whet the appetite for still more.

It will be clear from the above discussion that though Sri Ramakrishna preached the idea of the rejection of lust and greed primarily for spiritual aspirants, it has a great social implication too. And so it should be, for the teachings of an Incarnation, though addressed to a limited circle, always have a wider perspective and are meant for the entire humanity.

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Boredom

Joan Rayne

Boredom has accounted for more casualties among spiritual aspirants than most of the more obvious tribulations, setbacks and obstacles put together, and when prolonged the ordeal has caused many to abandon the spiritual life entirely. Most of us are prepared to take a heroic stand and at least try to do battle against what we consider the forces of evil when they assail us from within, but if boredom is the enemy we drop our swords and shrug our shoulders. It does not occur to us to offer any resistance to something we do not recognize as a menace. We fail to see that this unprofitable state of mind is a threat, however camouflaged, to our spiritual progress and should therefore be included among the forces of evil and dealt with accordingly.

Boredom is generally experienced by aspirants quite early in the spiritual life. Few of us can escape it, and indeed it appears to be the almost inevitable reaction after the first glow of enthusiasm has died down. Once Vedanta ceases to be merely an intellectual pastime and becomes our guiding principle, we begin to put its teachings into practice and to lead the spiritual life. This involves us in a number of activities which are new and strange; meditation, self-analysis, and self-denial or renunciation, in the course of which, according to our fervour and circumstances, we may have given up anything ranging from candy to our homes.

The sheer novelty of making these gestures is in itself stimulating and absorbing, and while it lasts we live in the clouds. Probably during these first few months we enjoy a greater measure of serenity than we have known hitherto; it comes to us almost gratuitously without our having made any apparent effort to acquire it—a grace, in short. But this newly found peace of mind, the indispensable mental condition for spiritual self-

development, we seldom value at its true worth, and the idea of trying to preserve it at all costs never enters our heads. Quite possibly we regard our mood of unaccustomed tranquillity as a reward for trying to be better people and no more than our due, so we take it for granted.

As time passes we get used to it and then gradually, ungrateful creatures that we are, we begin to find this uneventful contentment a little tedious. And if, as it is to be hoped, we have arranged our activities according to a fixed daily routine, this begins to pall too; spiritual disciplines, study, and duties which we have been performing with zest are now merely gone through without interest. The final stage of disenchantment is reached when we find ourselves more bored than we have ever been before. We are not basically unhappy, only apathetic. Everything we do seems flat, everyone we speak to seems dull, each day is faintly unpalatable.

Such, then, is the state of boredom. As a form of suffering it is perhaps harder to endure than the more spectacular agonies of grief, despair, humiliation, anxiety, remorse, temptation—the catalogue is endless of the sympathy-deserving woes. We look back on our lost serenity with regret and view our present dreariness with a mixture of bewilderment and annoyance. Not that we expected our happiness to last indefinitely, for had we not been warned that the starry-eyed period would end sooner or later to be replaced by a span of suffering? So we were fully prepared to accept the onslaught of misfortune in whatever form it might come—some external calamity, perhaps, or a bout of intense mental anguish—since it would be a test demanding all our strength to survive it and from which we might hope to emerge with our spiritual stature appreciably enhanced. Suffering was inevitable and we were ready to welcome it; we waited

almost eagerly for the karmic sword of Damocles to fall. But when it did, we were confronted by the anti-climax of boredom.

The danger lies in our not taking it seriously. Not that anyone is so naive as to believe that in the spiritual life the only alternative to scaling the heights of rapture is to plumb the depths of despair, but one cannot help suspecting that perhaps a dose of real, honest-to-goodness misery might be a more fitting adversary to overcome. There is something a bit strange about boredom, and the chances are that one adopts a negative attitude towards it.

Naturally, we seek to escape it, and in our preliminary attempts to do so we are even inclined to revert to our recently discarded belief that the solution to our problems lies outside ourselves. This convenient fallacy will soon be shown up yet again for what it is, but in the meantime we are prepared to give it another try. Here we take the line that perhaps we have been overdoing the spiritual life and have gone stale on it, and that therefore the best means of recovering our former zest might be by not exactly cutting down on our virtues but by balancing them with a few harmless worldly distractions.

We are in for a shock, however. For when we seek refuge in what used to be our time-killing devices, we find that they have lost their tang! We can no longer be entertained by a visit to the movies, relaxed by a good meal in an attractive restaurant, absorbed in a book; we derive no comfort from a gossip with a friend, find no satisfaction in our work, and even a change of surroundings proves abortive since we must take ourselves with us wherever we go. Diversions which in the past could always be counted upon to effect at least a brief respite from our tedium can no longer do the trick. Somehow we have lost our capacity for responding to the artificially manufactured good time. Our so-called pleasures having failed us, our sense of weary futility

increases because we feel that we have nothing to take their place. We feel cheated out of both worlds; we find neither enjoyment in distractions nor solace and bliss in the spiritual life. There is nothing to look forward to and nothing we wish to do, since we know in advance that each experience will prove a dull disappointment.

Nothing is interesting, entertaining, or emotionally stimulating. Everything is flat. In desperation we may be tempted to make the experiment of drinking or drugging ourselves into a state whereby the mundane will at least appear exciting; by deliberately dulling our sense of discrimination we can inject the commonplace with a shot of glamour. But this hazy self-deception, while it may provide the temporary thrill we crave, can never be a satisfactory solution for long and if persisted in will always end in disaster.

There is no justification for despair in our jaded reaction, however, which should be regarded as a step forward since it indicates a genuine distaste for what the world has to offer. Had we, on the other hand, been able to find adequate consolation in some trivial pursuit there would indeed be cause for alarm, for it would be obvious that since embarking upon the spiritual life we had not developed at all. Surely it is ridiculous for the grown, mature man to lament the fact that he can no longer be amused by his nursery toys!

Bored, then, and having drawn a blank in our attempts to recover our early peaceful happiness by taking recourse to external means, we feel cornered. This is all to the good, and it is to be hoped that this impasse will drive us to the obvious conclusion, belated though it may be, that we had better turn our thoughts inward and seek within ourselves the cause of our apathy and its cure.

We shall find that the peace of mind we possessed during the early stages of our spiritual life was earned by the initial efforts we made in practicing spiritual disciplines. But we must realize that these initial efforts, through repetition, become stabilized and habitual, and reach a stage of development whereby we should make greater demands upon ourselves because we have become capable of greater strivings. If we ignore this fact, however, once we have advanced even a little, and merely continue repeating our mild, kindergarten exertions, we are living beneath our spiritual level and heading for stagnation.

The onset of boredom is the first indication of this, and is a warning that our serenity is not simply to be had for the asking and can only be preserved by our making increasingly strenuous endeavours according to our capacity. Failure to heed this danger signal will cause us to weary of our easy-going routine, our tranquillity will leave us and degeneracy will set in, boredom having undermined our resolution to persevere even with those disciplines we have got used to. We must never make the mistake of resting on our laurels. Our ascent of the spiritual ladder is like climbing up a downward-moving escalator, and if on any step we pause for breath, lost in a self-congratulatory reverie, we cannot expect to be carried on up or even allowed to remain stationary.

God is our only refuge, and all obstacles that we encounter in spiritual life should serve to remind us of this fact and make us turn to him with greater single-mindedness. Boredom is no exception. But the chances are that it will make us try everything under the sun first before turning to the Lord as a last resort. Pascal has said that men prefer to occupy their minds with almost anything rather than to think of God, and there is certainly no one more disinclined to meditate than the bored spiritual aspirant; but in the end we shall be driven to calling on the Lord, and in

this lies our only hope. No matter how fed up we may be by now, and no matter how distasteful the idea of spiritual disciplines, once we have decided to turn our problem of boredom over to the Lord we should begin lengthening the periods of our meditation and japam.

At the same time we might practice unobtrusively one or two extra forms of self-denial such as, for example, getting up in the morning half an hour earlier, eating a little less at mealtimes, and refraining from uttering the amusing, yet hurtful and unnecessary remark. These and similar disciplines should be quite enough to go on with, and the efforts involved in carrying them out should absorb us sufficiently to prevent an attack of soul-destroying boredom from taking root in our minds.

Of all these fresh ventures in self-development, japam and meditation are the most important; they can be relied upon to solve most of our problems if we will only give them a try. Calling on the Lord may not alter unfavourable circumstances, but it will alter our reactions to them and restore and preserve our tranquillity, without which our spiritual progress will be negligible.

This is a hackneyed prescription, but then so are all time-proven remedies. The cure is guaranteed if we follow the directions with patience and sincerity. There is no other way.

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At Kamarpukur I have seen the mongoose living in its hole up in the wall. It feels snug there. Sometimes people tie a brick to its tail; then the pull of the brick makes it come out of its hole. Every time the mongoose tries to be comfortable inside the hole, it has to come out because of the pull of the brick. Such is the effect of brooding on worldly objects that it makes the yogi stray from the path of yoga.

Sri Ramakrishna

The God of the Hindus is a God of Love Umesh Gulati

In monotheistic religions, like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God is addressed only as father, and we can ignore his command at our own risk. That is why he is a God of fear. This writer remembers his primary school days. The Christian missionaries used to run the school. Outside the office of the headmaster was an assembly hall, not like modern halls, but it was really a long veranda, open only from one side, and was often used when the headmaster or an outside speaker had to address the whole school. On the top of the wall outside the headmaster's office was written in bold letters: *'The Fear of God is the beginning of Knowledge.'* We didn't quite understand what these words really meant, except that God punishes those who do not speak the truth or copy someone else's paper.

This God of fear is based on the assertion of the monotheistic religions that God lives far away from this world in some heaven. Besides, these religions associate their God with father, and since father is often looked upon as one who is a strict disciplinarian and brooks no disobedience, anyone disobeying him would do so at one's own risk of being punished. God is to be feared.

Some Hindu priests also create a similar kind of fear in the minds of worshippers to make them get some talisman to ward off bad omens. But in every case where God is looked upon with fear, it is because there is misconception of what religion is all about. Going to churches and temples, reading scriptures and putting money in collection boxes are merely the kindergartens of religion. As Swami Vivekananda said: *"Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming, it is realization."*

In other words, it is not enough to just *believe* in the existence of God, but to see him and realize him; and the best way to realize him is to love him. According to Sri Ramakrishna, God reveals

Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of a worldly man for worldly possessions, the attraction of the mother for her only child, and the attraction of the chaste wife for her husband. If one feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions, then one can attain Him. In other words, one needs to cultivate intense love and yearning for God.

You cannot, however, love God intensely, on the one hand, and at the same time fear him; love and fear are two opposing emotions. Swami Vivekananda, in his lectures on *Bhakti Yoga*, talked about '*The Triangle of Love.*' A triangle has three sides, and unless all these sides are present, it doesn't make a triangle, so also unless one fulfills the three necessary conditions for divine love, it's not love. The three conditions are: *love knows no bargaining; love knows no fear; and love knows no rival.*

In our everyday life we love our spouses and our children. If one loves one's wife, doesn't he expect anything from her in return? Can he honestly say that his love for her is selfless? Usually, every man has lots of expectations from his wife, and vice versa. If there were real love, there would be no such expectations, nor would there be any jealousy, or the feeling of possessiveness, and so on. In other words, if we really love anyone, it must be completely unselfish. Why do I love you? I love you for love's sake and for nothing else.

The second condition for divine love is that love knows no fear. Supposing a five-year-old child slips into the family's swimming pool while its mother is sitting outside and reading a book. What would the woman do? Without doubt, she would jump into the pool to rescue the child without giving a thought as to whether she herself knows how to swim. That spontaneous reaction is love. There is no talk but action; that is love. So, loving God in fear of losing his favour is hypocrisy. I love God because God is love, and I cannot live without loving that which is the embodiment of love.

The third condition for the triangle of love is that love knows no rival. This means that one cannot divide love. Love is the quality of mind, which integrates and harmonizes; it doesn't analyse or divide. In other words, there is nothing else in the world for which I would trade off my love for God. Or to use Sri Ramakrishna's simile, you cannot have *yoga* and also *bhoga* at the same time. The Bible says the same thing: "*you cannot love God and Mammon at the same time.*"

Sri Ramakrishna once told a story of a young boy, Jatila. He used to walk to his school through woods, which frightened him. One day he told his mother about his fear of walking alone through the woods. She told him not to be afraid, and whenever he did feel fear, he should call *Madhusudana* (another name for Sri Krishna). The boy asked: "Who is *Madhusudana*?" The mother replied, "He is your Elder Brother."

One day after this talk when the boy again felt afraid of walking through the woods, he remembered what his mother had told him, and accordingly he cried out: "*O Brother Madhusudana!*" But there was no response. The boy began to cry loudly, and with a voice *full of passion*, he spoke: "*O Brother Madhusudana, where are you? Please come; I am very afraid.*" Then God could not stay away and appeared before the boy and said: "*Here I am. Why are you frightened, My brother?*" God took him by the hand out of the woods and showed him the way to his home. Taking leave of the boy, God said: "*I will come whenever you call Me. Do not be afraid.*" Concluding the story, Sri Ramakrishna said that one must have this faith of a child, this yearning.

The idea of God being a God of fear is based on the belief of religionists that God is up there in heaven, and the way to get to heaven after death one should accept certain dogmas: belief in the existence of God; literally following the words of the scriptures; observing all the rituals as prescribed by priests and practice austerities suggested by them. Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita doesn't approve of these dogmas. In fact, all scriptures of the Hindus

assert that mere belief in the existence of God is of no value; God has to be realized and experienced within one's heart through the practice of various systems of yoga, like that of the yoga of knowledge, of work, of devotion, or of meditation.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that hearing is better than reading, but seeing is still better than hearing. Yes, God can be seen, realized, and experienced. Once when Narendra, the future Swami Vivekananda, asked Sri Ramakrishna: "*Sir, have you seen God?*" The Master said: "*Yes, I have seen Him as I see you, and in fact, I see him more intimately than I see you.*"

In the Bhagavad-Gita (5.29), Sri Krishna assures us all through Arjuna: "*Knowing Me as the receiver and dispenser of (the fruits of) sacrifices and spiritual practices, as the great Lord of all the worlds, and as the friend of all beings, one attains Peace.*" (Emphasis added) We should also note that unlike monotheistic religions where God is supposed to be only 'Father', in Hinduism, we say God is my Mother and my Father, God is my brother, and God is my friend, God is my knowledge and God is my wealth, God is my all in all. So if God is everything for me, then how can I fear Him?

The *Upanishads*, the knowledge portion of the Vedas, call God or The Ultimate Reality as *Brahman* without attributes or *Nirguna*, and with attributes as *Saguna*. *Brahman* without attributes is called Impersonal God, while God with attributes is the Personal God. The Impersonal God is a living God, a principle. Said Swami Vivekananda: "*The difference between Personal and Impersonal is this, that He (Impersonal God) is the angel, the man, the animal, and yet something more, which we cannot see, because impersonality includes all personalities, is the sum total of everything in the universe, and infinitely more besides.*" Moreover, according to Vedanta this Impersonal God is the most rational of all religious theories. For, Personal God cannot be demonstrated, and yet, "*He (Personal God) is the highest reading of the Impersonal that can be reached by the human intellect.*"

The *Brahman* of the *Upanishads* and the *Atman* (or the Self) of the Bhagavad Gita are identical. The only difference is that while

Brahman is a transcendent Reality, Atman is the immanent Reality, which pervades everything and every being. The Bhagavad Gita describes it as our true Self. While our body is subject to change, and ultimately to death; Atman is neither born nor does it die. It is the Spirit, which sword cannot cut, water cannot wet, air cannot dry, and fire cannot burn. In other words, this world of names and forms is the highest reading of the Self.

The Personal God and the Impersonal God can be looked upon, according to Sri Ramakrishna, as a snake in motion and a snake coiled up. The Personal God is also called *Shakti* or the power of the Impersonal God. So we have *Brahman* and *Shakti*, or *nirguna* and *saguna Brahman*. *Nirguna Brahman*, a snake coiled up, and *Saguna Brahman*, the snake in motion, is *Brahman* with attributes. But Sri Ramakrishna says: "*Brahman and Shakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. When a man thinks of fire, he must also think of its power to burn. Again, when he thinks of the power to burn, he must also think of the fire.*"

One who wants to realize the Impersonal God uses what is called the path of knowledge, knowledge that this world is unreal, changeable; it is *Maya*, while *Brahman* alone is Real; it is the only Reality that one must realize. But the path to realizing Impersonal God is very difficult; it is like walking on the sharp edge of a razor, difficult to tread and hard to cross. The Personal God or the *Shakti* aspect, however, is easier of approach, says Sri Krishna in the twelfth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, and Sri Ramakrishna in the modern age. It is *Shakti* that manifests as the universe and its living beings. *Bhakti* means an intense love, inexpressible love, of God. Love can only be to a person; one cannot love a table or a chair. So *bhakti*, or the path of devotion, is centred in the personal aspect of the Impersonal-Personal God of Vedanta.

The *Bhakti* literature, like the *Devi Bhagavatam*, gives the following definition of this intense or highest love—*Para Bhakti*: "*As oil poured from one vessel to another falls in an unbroken line, so, when the mind in an unbroken stream thinks of the Lord, we have what is called*

Para Bhakti or supreme love." According to Swami Vivekananda, this kind of supreme love (also called *Prema Bhakti*, in the words of Sri Ramakrishna) in which the mind and the heart are completely concentrated on, and thinking of the Lord with an inseparable attachment, is the highest manifestation of one's love to God.

In fact, the path of devotion that is often recommended to realize God enjoins that one should form a relationship with one's God; God has to be regarded as the devotee's parent, Master, friend, child, husband or sweetheart. These attitudes are the human representations of the Divine ideal of love. These attitudes are: *shanta, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya*, and *madhura*. The lowest form in which this love is apprehended is what is called the peaceful, the *Shanta*. When one worships God without the fire of love in one's heart, without its madness in one's brain, when one's love is just the calm commonplace love, a little higher than mere forms and ceremonies and symbols, it is called *Shanta*, says Swami Vivekananda. (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*): So, the *Shanta*-attitude is calm, peaceful, and gentle.

Next to the *Shanta* attitude is the attitude of *Dasya* or servant. In such a relationship a person thinks that he or she is the servant of the Lord. This attitude towards the Lord expresses one's being the most faithful servant to one's master, which makes one say in all earnestness, "*nothing is mine except you.*" When someone asked Sri Ramakrishna how, despite being hardly literate, he uttered such words of wisdom that could only be found in the Bhagavad Gita and the *Upanishads*, his answer always was that it was "my Mother", the Divine Mother, who was supplying him with the answers to the questions asked. Besides, he advised many of his devotees to have this 'servant' attitude towards God.

But higher than the *Dasya* (servant) attitude of love, is the *Sakhya* or the friendship attitude. Ordinarily we all tend to open the secrets of our heart to a friend, secrets, which even the spouses would tend to keep from each other. A good friend will never betray one's friend, and will often give him the best advice. Besides, the

Sakhya attitude assumes a relationship of equality; the worshipper is not overwhelmed by the power of God. God is like our playmate. *"We may well say that we are playing in this universe. Just as children play their games, ... so is the Beloved Lord Himself in sport with this universe. ... It is all really in sport; the universe is His play going on. ..."* (Ibid.)

Next to the friendship attitude towards God is the *Vatsalya* or the parental attitude. Here one loves God not as one's Father but as our Child. Regarding God as our Child is very significant in the sense that it detaches all ideas of power from the concept of God and reinforces our contention that Hinduism regards God as the essence of love; He is love absolute. Swami Vivekananda says, *"It is to avoid this association with God of the fear-creating sense of power that he worships God as his own child. ... The child's position is always that of the receiver, and out of love for the child the parents will give up their bodies a hundred times over. ... The women in India often look upon themselves as Krishna's mother ..."* (Ibid.)

The highest of these human representations of the Divine ideal of love is the *Madhura* or sweet ideal of love. Such a sweet representation of love can only be conceived between a man and woman madly in love with each other. *"In this sweet representation of divine love, God is our husband. We are all women; there are no men in this world. There is but One Man, and this is He, our Beloved [Lord]."* (Ibid.) This is exactly what Meera Bai seemed to have conveyed to Advaita Goswami, a companion of Sri Chaitanya who was in Vrindaban, whom the former wanted to see. On Goswami's refusal to meet her because she was a woman, Meera sent him word: *"Is not there but One Man, the Lord? The rest of us are all women."* The Goswami could not anymore turn her down!

The tremendous love that we humans bestow on our friends, children and even spouses often does not last for long. This is because our friends move away, where they make new friends and get into new activities in which we may not be interested. Children grow up and find their own bliss. Even spouses get to know each

other better only after marriage, and discover that the marriage was a mistake after all. But there is only one entity, the highest one who never changes, and never dies, and that entity is the Lord, the infinite ocean of love.

Swami Vivekananda says, *'God is the one goal of all our passions and emotions. If you want to be angry, be angry with Him [your Beloved]. ... Say unto the Beloved, "Why do You not come to me; why do You leave me thus alone?"'* Sri Ramakrishna, however, advised his disciples not to cherish this *'madhura'* attitude towards God, because it often degenerates into lust. So he would rather like us to cultivate either the servant attitude or child attitude.

Let us illustrate it by Sri Ramakrishna's own experience of the living presence of the Divine Mother, Kali. As is well known, initially Ramkumar, Sri Ramakrishna's eldest brother, was appointed as the priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. However, after Ramkumar's death in 1856, Sri Ramakrishna took over that position.

But Ramakrishna turned out to be an unusual priest; for the way he put his whole heart, soul and strength into the worship of the Deity in order to have Her *darshan* (vision) and have Her living experience within his own heart, is without equal anywhere in the religious literature on *Bhakti*. Addressing the image of Kali, he would often exclaim piteously: *"Mother, you showed yourself to Ramprasad in the past. Why won't You show yourself to me? Why won't you grant my prayer? I have been praying to you so long!"* And he would weep bitterly. Many a time before the image in the shrine, he would become so absorbed that he stopped the performance of the ritual, sitting motionless for hours at a time in the hope that his Mother would soon grant his prayer.

And She finally did. Sri Ramakrishna describes his agony of separation from Mother: *"There was an unbearable pain in my heart, because I couldn't get a vision of Mother. ... In my agony, I said to myself: "What is the use of living this life?" Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that hangs in the temple. I decided to end my life with it, then and there.*

Like a madman, I ran to it and seized it." What happened then is impossible to put into our words; so let Sri Ramakrishna himself describe it:

"And then – I had a marvellous vision of the Mother, and fell down unconscious. ... The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali Temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the doorsill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness—all was Consciousness, an infinite shoreless sea of light. However far and in whatever direction I looked, I saw shining waves, one after another, coming towards me. They were raging and storming upon me with great speed. Very soon they were upon me; they made me sink down into unknown depths. I panted and struggled and lost consciousness."

To conclude this essay, the Hindus regard God not only as Father, but also as Mother, Brother, Friend, and also Sweetheart. Such a God cannot be one of fear, but of love. Even when one regards God as Father, He is a loving Father, is a loving Guide, and eternal support. Most importantly, however, God is our all in all. But to get God's love, we must sincerely express our yearning for God just as a mother loves her child or a man yearns for his sweetheart.

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A French Pilgrim's Offering To Sri Ramakrishna (Jiva is Shiva or the Living Being is God) Romain Rolland

[In the following paragraphs the great French thinker places before us in brief the central message of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings from a point of view that is both positive and spiritual. To those who confound spirituality with barren other worldliness, this article will be an eye-opener.]

It is related that when Sri Ramakrishna, in the first days following his great ecstasy, in the state of oneness with *Brahman*—and this was after *Totapuri's* departure—allowed his consciousness to return to earth, he saw two boatmen quarrelling. And because of this as from a wound, his heart was bleeding; and he screamed; the sufferings of the universe were torturing him. For all the pains of the world were imprinting themselves into the tender flesh of his re-awaking consciousness.

What would he have felt, what would he have suffered, in these days of the present world, when the whole of humanity seems given up to hatred, when war rages or smoulders everywhere under the ashes, between nations, between races, between classes.

But the mighty Swan (*Paramahansa*) had wings that enabled him to hover above life. If he did not try to detach himself from life, as so many mystics do, to avoid its sufferings, it is because universal love, which was to him a second sight, revealed to him, in a flash, in the presence of human misery, that "Jiva is Shiva"—that the living being is God—that whoever loves God must unite himself with him in sufferings, in misery, even in errors and excesses, in the terrible aspect of human nature.

We all know that he took away his great disciple Vivekananda from the fascination of the fathomless God in order to force him into the service of men. And that is what you, following his example, have been able to accomplish, you whose monastic Ramakrishna Mission, like your emblem, the swan, covers the

unhappy with its wings and helps them as brothers. You have carried out the pregnant saying of your Master: "*If you want peace of mind, serve others. If you wish to find God, serve man! . . .*"

The enfeeblement and the ruin of so many religions lie in the fact that they have forgotten this saying. They have forgotten man. And man, in his turn, forgets them. He has learned to help himself without God, (as one of our European artists, and one of the most religious too, Beethoven, proclaimed when he said to those who called upon God for help, "O man, help thyself "). He has even learnt to help himself against God, —whom he identifies with those Churches which, too often, stand against the mass of the oppressed as the courtesans or the handmaids of power. Has not the Catholic Church, the most powerful of these Churches in Europe, laid down the cynical rule of ranging itself on the side of any power that has victory, provided only that it respects the church privileges? Thus they associate themselves with the injustice set up by force. The churches should not then wonder that oppressed peoples in their revolt against unjust force, associate the former with the force from which they want to liberate themselves. Although not conscious of it, those seething people, even when they believe themselves to be without God or against God, are nevertheless to be regarded as the living God, while in their fight for justice, in their ascent towards light." *Jiva is Shiva*" .. And we ought to recognize this truth.

We live in a world turned upside down. And, indeed, the masses have always been downtrodden. But they had not, up to this day, the knowledge and the consciousness of that universal oppression, which has been revealed to them by the increased means of communications and the progress of international solidarity. We may no longer remain indifferent to those people who are today making a desperate effort to break their chains and set up a more equitable and more human order. And this is no longer permissible especially to us, your friends in the occident who do not happen to possess like you the faith in survivals (lives after death). Time is

pressing us. The wave of men's sufferings is drowning us, like a tide.

We must fly to their help. Even if we had before us the eternity of "lives after death", each one of these lives is a "living thing" which has its own duties and its laws corresponding to the particular time of its birth and the human surroundings in which it has its course. Each single life is neither permitted to leave undone all the present good it is capable of doing nor to decline to fight, with its total might of today, all the iniquities of the time being. The *Ramakrishnite* of the West that I am, I do not admit that for one's own salvation, one should withdraw from action, when it is urgent to act in order to help the oppressed. I remember the holy anger of the great disciple when he exclaimed to one of his brethren who was endeavouring to avoid the tragedy of the present world in order to betake himself to the sweetness of divine contemplation:

"Put off to the next life the reading of the Vedanta, the practice of meditation. Let this body of today be consecrated to the service of others!"

And this immortal prayer : *"Would that I could be born and reborn again and suffer a thousand miseries, provided I might adore and serve the only God that exists, the sum total of all souls, and, above all, my God the evil-doers, my God the unfortunates, my God the poor of all races!"*

Oh! what an error, too common among religious God-lovers, to think that their love diminishes and that their soul is lowered in value on account of intercourse with men. On the contrary, it expands and is revived because of embracing the whole and entire Being, the innumerable Being, with its million forms ever in motion, ever advancing as they are, like a Ganges.

Doing thus, you will serve, by being wedded to it, each one of the forms of the living God, but without ever losing the feeling and the very presence of the all-powerful Unity, wherein these conflicting million forms find harmony. It is not doing a wrong to the unchanging Divine Peace that hovers over the storms of Existence, if one holds out a hand to those who struggle in those storms. Vivekananda did not cease repeating to his *Sanyasins* that

they had taken two vows, and that, if the first was "to realize the truth," the second was "to help the world" .. "To help men to stand erect by themselves .." Let us help them, then, those peoples who, "by themselves and alone," heroically try "to stand erect!" Let us cooperate in their efforts! Even in this manner it will be possible for us afterwards to cooperate in the harmony of warring forces.

You are the bearers, in this storm-tossed world, of the Supreme Harmony wherein must blend and melt away all combats and opposite efforts. It is your proper role, your privilege, and your sacred duty, to radiate peace, order and unity in the chaos in which people are blindly at odds with one another. Be, like Sri Ramakrishna, the wide-spreading banyan tree in whose shade thousands of souls, weary and wounded in the fight, come for shelter and peace. Pour on them the balm of reconciliation, which is the fruit of reason, no less than of love. We know well that the most wicked are but misguided. They know not what they do.

The misfortune of the world comes from its want of knowledge. Let us then teach it to know. Let us enlighten it,—by preventing it from doing harm—from harming itself. For he who harms his neighbour does not know that it is himself whom he is harming. Another of our great men of Europe, the inspired poet Victor Hugo, speaking of those who wanted to harm him, uttered these beautiful words, so allied to the wisdom of India: "Oh! fool, who thinkest that thou art not I" It is the supreme miracle of Ramakrishna that in him "Thou" is "I," that the whole world is not only reflected but incarnate in a man's heart—that God is realized on earth, in his universality and his multiplicity . *Jiva is Shiva*"

And Ramakrishna works in him,—in us—this Divine Identity.

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Introduction to Hindu Theology-8

Swami Sunirmalananda

(Continued from last issue)

“Our Father” and Vedanta

U ntil now we have mentioned some important aspects of Hindu theology. We have shown in brief what the Hindu theologians think of God, soul, universe, salvation, and so on. We shall conclude this brief introduction with a comparison of revelatory theology.

What is revelatory theology? Revelatory theology is based on revelations. The Vedas are revelations. Their mantras are revelations. Using an important Vedic mantra and the most important Christian prayer, we shall compare the two important theologies—Hindu and Christian.

The greatest and the most popular prayer of Christianity is ‘Our Father’ has this great prayer which Jesus Christ Himself taught.

And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

And He said unto them,

This prayer is repeated endless times by millions of Christians all over the world. This is a mantra, given by the incarnation. So it is indeed a revelation. The mantras which the Vedic sages “saw” were also revelations. Of all the Vedic mantras, the best known is the *Gayatri Mantra*. [It was revealed to the great Sage *Vishwamitra*.] This mantra is in the *Gayatri* meter, and is recited by millions every day since ages. It is a powerful mantra.

We shall make a comparative study of the two mantras—the Christian and the Vedantic. The fundamental point to remember is this: in Christianity, prayer is called oration. It has three steps, one leading to the other: Petition, Repetition, and Meditation.

Similarly, in the Vedantic tradition of the *Sanatana Dharma*, there are three steps of prayer or *prarthana*. These three are: *Sandhya*, *Gayatri*, and *Om*. While Petition leads to Meditation in the end, *Sandhya* leads to *Om* in the end. Sri Ramakrishna says:

“He who has realized God no longer performs religious duties such as the sandhya. In his case the sandhya merges in the Gayatri. When that happens, it is enough for a person to repeat just the Gayatri mantra. Then the Gayatri merges in Om. After that one no longer chants even the Gayatri; it is enough then to chant simply Om.” [1]

What does this mean? The Christian devotee petitions to God repeatedly for different things initially. He then takes up the repetition of the Jesus prayer and repeats it constantly. Finally, he is led to meditation or contemplation. In the Vedantic tradition also, the commoner performs numerous rituals in the beginning. We have shown before that there are four stages of knowing God—the lowest is to think that God is in symbols; the next stage is to think that God is in Heaven; the third is to think that God is in one’s heart; and the final stage is to see Him as omnipresent. Through rituals (called the *sandhya*, the daily ritual during dawn and twilight), the devotee is led to the idea that repetition of the *Gayatri* prayer is better, and repeats it constantly. Finally, he is led to meditation on OM, the single syllable. Now we shall study the two prayers.

The first words of the two prayers are ‘Om’ and ‘Our Father’. ‘Om’ is the supremely sacred syllable, the primordial sound, and an indicator, the verbal indicator, of the Supreme. Similarly, ‘Our Father’ is the indicator of the Supreme. Both prayers are being addressed to someone, and that is the Supreme. No name is given in both the prayers. It is neither Krishna, Rama, Shiva, Christ nor anybody else. It is just ‘our Father’ and ‘Om’. Why Father? Father is the creator. Father is the protector. So, the son or daughter assumes the relationship at the very outset. Without a proper

relationship with God, one is not able to talk to Him or seek something from Him. This is fundamental to practical theology.

There is yet another important significance of the word 'Our Father'. When God is our Father, we are His children. We are not ordinary beings, menial creatures, sinful beings. We are God's children. Our self-image has changed. This is the positive element of Christ prayer: teaching us that we should change our outlook of ourselves. When we repeat the sacred syllable Om, we are connected to the Supreme, because the name and form are non-different.

The next part is, 'Who art in Heaven'. Christ has specifically added this in the prayer he taught. He declares that God is in Heaven. Similarly, the *Gayatri* mentions '*Bhuh, Bhuvah, Swah*'. That is, the three worlds are mentioned.) *Bhuvah* and *Swah* are heavens. The meaning of the *Gayatri* prayer is, God is beyond the three worlds. This shows that God is above our state of being what we are now. God is beyond limitations. Returning to the Christ prayer, where is this heaven? Christ has reiterated that it is within us. 'Our Father who art in Heaven' means our Creator who is within us. In the *Gayatri* prayer, God being beyond the three worlds—the three bodies, the trichotomous personality we have mentioned earlier—means He is the self of the Self.

The next part is, 'Hallowed be Thy Name'. Does God want His name to be glorified by human beings? In one sense yes; in another He is beyond all this. By glorifying His name, we add not even a millimetre to His glory. But, 'hallowed be thy name' implies that may His Name be glorified in us and through us so that we may become pure and see the Light. Similarly, the *Gayatri* prayer teaches us: This salutation and hallowing are deeds which we do—not to add to God's glories, but to remove our little selves, which stand in between. We adore God this way.

The next part is, 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, .' This is the fundamental petition that Christ wants us to make. Why? Many are tempted to ask God: 'I glorify you, please cure my son's disease, find a good job for me.' These are temporary, and transitory, prayers, which have very limited value. We are higher than this. We are His children. So we say, 'Thy kingdom come.' Where shall it come to? To us—within us. Until now we are ruled by our false egos. The false ego demands only glorification, sensuality, and worldly good. 'Thy kingdom come.' May your glory be manifested from within. So, first, may I manifest the Kingdom—without selfishness, meanness, etc.—in me. Then '*Thy will be done, .*' The *Gayatri* prayer seeks exactly the same thing.

'May the Supreme, who is in and beyond the three worlds, awaken my spiritual consciousness.'

The final part is, '*Give .*' God as the provider of everything is sought here to take care of us totally. This is called self-surrender. Whether the rich or the poor, everyone has to seek God. Sin is nothing but self-gratification. When we surrender ourselves to God, we seek everything through Him. We live for Him.

'Lead us not into temptation.' This does not mean God leads us to temptation. It means that may our minds, naturally inclined towards the world, should turn inwards. The false 'I' is the culprit that tempts us to worldliness. The prayer is for God to take care so that we are not led towards the downward path. Read together, the two lines have profound meaning. It means that we should lead lives of contentment. Greed is sin. So, Christ taught that we should be satisfied with our needs rather than our wants. A similar teaching comes from the first mantra of the *Isavasya* Upanishad, which says that one must not covet 'others wealth;'

So Christ teaches in this prayer that we must be delivered of our evil tendencies—the past karmas which lead to desires and bondage. The *Gayatri* prayer: "Your profound light should

remove the darkness and bring knowledge supreme. So we pray to you.”

In this way, both Christ’s prayer and the *Gayatri* prayer are for seeking enlightenment and overcoming ignorance.

Every mantra in the Vedantic tradition has three important things: a sage who discovers or ‘sees’ the mantra (the *rishi*), the style or meter of the mantra (*chandasa*), and the deity to which it is addressed (*devata*). The *Gayatri* mantra has all these. For the Jesus prayer, Jesus Christ himself is the sage. The word ‘*rishi*’ means the one who receives the revelation. The incarnation himself received this revelation or gave this prayer to the world. So the prayer is thrice blessed. Next, the meter or *chandasa* is poetic in the original Aramaic. The *devata*, theos or God is God Himself.

The *Gayatri* mantra begins and ends in Om. It is like the Jesus prayer ending in Amen. The three worlds mentioned in the *Gayatri* are called *maha-vyahritis*. They are to be uttered before the prayer proper. In a similar tone is in the Christ prayer.

The mantra is called the ‘seed’. It enters the heart through the guru’s medium and grows into a huge tree, breaking the soil called ignorance and bringing the fruit of enlightenment. This is what the Jesus prayer also does.

All theology should end in this highest goal of attaining God.

(Concluded)

References

[1]: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 371

Swami Visuddhananda : An Apostle of God

Swami Lokeshwarananda

I

I do not remember when I first saw Swami Visuddhananda — it was, I think, sometime in the late twenties. Long before I saw him I had been hearing people refer to him as a great contemplative. Being young I liked men of action and thought rather poorly of a contemplative. Why should a man spend all his time thinking of God? I would argue, why should he not do something for the good of society also? Did not Swamiji preach service to man as a kind of worship? Yet I found people refer to Swami Visuddhananda with great respect and admiration. This rather puzzled me. How could people be so much enamoured of a man who was a mere contemplative?

I did not have to wait long for my answer, for I soon came to know Swami Visuddhananda personally and having once known him, had no difficulty in discovering the secret of his charm. I remember the first time I saw him. He was then head of the centre at Ranchi and had just come down to the Math to attend a meeting. Without knowing who he was, I felt drawn towards him at first sight. It was his fine chiselled face, auburn complexion and poise that attracted me. He was not imposing, not even striking by any standard, but there was an aura of sweetness around him which one could not but notice.

When I was introduced to him, I was a bit nervous, but he soon put me at ease by treating me with utmost affection and by speaking to me as if he had known me a long time. He was a soft-spoken man who knew also the real art of conversation, for he never spoke much himself, but made others speak as much as they wanted to speak, himself putting in a word or two when he

must. Having known him once I began to watch him closely, for I wanted to know what exactly was the distinctive quality he had that made him the object of universal love and respect. The first and most distinctive among all the qualities he possessed, as I observed, was that he led an organised and well-regulated life. Nothing could happen that would make him deviate from his well-thought out routine which included, among other things, three-hours' meditation in the morning and evening. I also noticed how tip-top everything in his room was. Not only was there not a speck of dust there, but the few articles he had in his room — his clothes, books, bottles of medicines, one or two pieces of furniture, etc., all were well arranged. I also liked the way he dressed. There was a distinctive taste which was unmistakable.

Another striking thing was his disinclination to talk about mundane affairs. He would gladly discuss a religious topic, but if the topic was non-religious, he would probably refrain from making any comments. It was also interesting to note that whenever he talked about religion, he would talk about it from the practical point of view and not so much about its theories. He would make religious experience seem not only the most desirable thing in life, but also a thing easy of attainment, as if even you and I could have it if only we tried. In his religious talks there would always be a fair sprinkling of quotations from popular religious books, specially the *Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna* and anecdotes from the lives of saints of all religions, so that it was always interesting to listen to him. He would disclaim any pretension to being a good speaker, but, in reality, he was a very interesting speaker, always to the point, brief and inspiring. He never made any attempt at oratory; he in fact spoke as if he was talking to a group of friends across the table. He spoke from the heart and his simple words, backed by conviction, appealed to monks and laymen alike.

II

Swami Visuddhananda was born at a village in Hooghly District about 50 miles from Calcutta in the year 1883. Having lost both his parents at an early age he was brought up by the relations of his mother. As a boy he was quiet, introspective and deeply religious. The question that often troubled him was : 'What is the purpose of life?' The question became more and more pressing as he grew in years. When he finished his school education in 1900 he became quite restless looking for an answer to this question. He often spent the whole day at what was then known as the Imperial Library (now known as the National Library) rummaging among books for what he thought might provide the answer he was looking for. The British Librarian, John McFarlane, struck by the young man's seriousness of purpose, often helped him choose the sort of books that would help in his quest. It is not known if he directed him to it, but once Swami Visuddhananda came upon Maxmuller's *Ramakrishna — His Life and Sayings* and this proved a turning point in his life. He went through the book with bated breath. He was elated to discover that Dakshineswar, the place where Shri Ramakrishna lived, was only 4 miles to the north of Calcutta. He lost no time to visit Dakshineswar and kept visiting it again and again. The place, hallowed by its associations with Shri Ramakrishna filled him with inspiration. Every time he went there he spent the whole day thinking of God. He soon came to know Ramlal, Shri Ramakrishna's nephew, who was then the Chief Priest at Dakshineswar. Ramlal's company gave him much impetus in his religious endeavours.

Not long after this he came to know also M, the compiler of the *Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, when the latter came on a visit to Dakshineswar. M, in his inimitable way, talked to him about

Shri Ramakrishna, adding further to the intensity of his longing for God. Previously, he used to have his meals at the temple of Dakshineswar, but M pointed out that it was wrong that he should thus tax the hospitality of the temple authorities. From then on the only food he would have was a one anna worth of meal consisting of some flattened rice mixed with sugar and lemon-juice.

While Swami Visuddhananda was once on a visit to Dakshineswar, Sarat Chakravarty, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda who compiled the book (*Swami-Shishya Samvad*) conversations between Swami and Disciple came there. Ramlal Chatterjee introduced Swami Visuddhananda to Sarat Chakravarty and the latter held him spell-bound by telling him stories about Swamiji. Once while he was thus talking to him, Sarat Chakravarty turned to Ramlal and asked him, 'How is Mother?' This led Swami Visuddhananda to enquire who this Mother was and when he discovered that this was Sarada Devi, he at once resolved to take the earliest opportunity to visit her at Jayrambati to pay his respects to her. So one day, not long after this, he started for Jayrambati following the route via Burdwan, walking most of the way. When, travel-weary and dust-laden, he finally arrived at Jayrambati, Mother received him as if he was her dear child whom she was long expecting. She asked, 'How are you, my child? Has the journey been very difficult?' The warmth with which Mother said these words was a balm to his body and mind.

He had never known Mother's affection, but now he felt as if he had found the Mother he had lost as a child. He spent a happy week with Mother and then returned to Calcutta. Before he left Jayrambati, Mother graciously initiated him.

The initiation increased his longing for God-realization tenfold. It now became an all-consuming passion with him. He

decided to leave home in search of God, but felt he must have Mother's blessings before he did so. He, therefore, returned to Jayrambati for Mother's consent within a few months. This time he walked the whole distance and had two friends with him who later came to be known as Swamis Girijananda and Shantananda. Mother was as warm as before, but when they declared that it was their firm resolve to live the lives of wandering monks depending upon what chance brought them, she firmly ruled it out. At their request, she, however, gave them *ochre* cloth, but directed them to go to Varanasi to have their monastic names from Swami Shivananda who was then there. She handed them a letter introducing them to him and asking him to look after them. This was in 1907.

Armed with her blessings they started for Varanasi walking the whole distance. It took them three months to reach Varanasi. Swami Shivananda welcomed them and they stayed there almost a year. It may be mentioned here that Swami Visuddhananda had his formal monastic vows from Swami Brahmananda at Varanasi in 1921.

Sometime in 1908 he proceeded to Madras to assist Swami Ramakrishnananda in his work. Later he worked at Bangalore also for some years. In 1916 he was transferred to Mayavati where he served for nearly four years. While at Mayavati he was in charge of accounts for some time. Referring to his work as accountant Swami Madhavananda once remarked, 'He had a wonderful power of concentration. He totalled up figures without ever making a mistake; he would get the correct total at the very first attempt. He was so sure of himself that he would not care to check a second time.' After a brief interlude in Calcutta when he lived in close touch with Swami Brahmananda and when he was appointed a member of the Governing Body of the Mission and a trustee, he was again sent to South India for some years. After

a year's stay at Bhuvaneswar as the head of the monastery there, he was posted to Ranchi where he served continuously for a quarter century from 1927 to 1952.

His life at Ranchi was the life of a recluse. He seldom, if ever at all, left the monastery or received visitors. Only one or two select devotees could come once in a while to read with him the *Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*. Most of the time he would keep himself immersed in meditation and study. There are people living who bear witness to the austerity of his life and the state of God-consciousness in which he lived there. Some of them feel blessed that they knew him then and refer to those days with joy and gratitude as if they themselves were privy to the religious experience of this great soul. A road bears his name as a tribute of the people of Ranchi to his memory.

From 1952 onwards a marked change was discernible in Swami Visuddhananda. He was appointed Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and in that capacity, he had many responsibilities, chief of them being to meet people and attend to their spiritual needs. Gone were the happy days of seclusion for him! From now on he spent at least a couple of hours daily meeting people and replying to their religious questions. Hundreds of people came to him, people of all ages and all communities. He was patient to all and his answers were simple, straightforward and convincing. Once a person came to see him he would come back again and again, very often with friends and relations. Soon his reputation as a religious teacher spread. He was in demand all over the country and he in his turn, travelled far and wide ministering to the religious needs of the people. It was at this time that an Indian barrister-at-law who also happens to be an all-India political leader once declared in a public speech, '*I deem Swami Visuddhananda to be the greatest saint in India today.*'

When this was reported to Swami Visuddhananda he was embarrassed and visibly annoyed. He said, '*What does he know of saints?*'

Swami Visuddhananda visited Assam more *times* than any President or Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission before him did. Mentioning this with pride many people in Assam claim that their State occupied a special place in the heart of Swami Visuddhananda. Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that his visits created a religious ferment in both Bengali and Assamese populations, large sections of whom flocked to him as if drawn by a magnet. People who saw him then still remember him as if he was a symbol of a great experience. If there are today a large number of Ramakrishna Ashramas throughout Assam, it may be attributed largely to the influence of Swami Visuddhananda. He set in motion the powerful Ramakrishna Movement which is now sweeping through Assam and its neighbouring States in the Eastern Region.

In the year 1962 Swami Visuddhananda succeeded as President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission following the death of Swami Sankarananda. He was already eighty and his health was indifferent, yet when the call came to him to shoulder the responsibilities of the office of President, he did not demur. As President he stayed mostly at Varanasi where he had begun his monastic career sixty years earlier. He was now at the zenith of his monastic virtues.. As usual he had many visitors every day. However taxing it might be for him to talk to them in his feeble health, he never turned away anybody. He continued to exhort people to try to realize God. So inspiring were his talks and so kind and affectionate he himself was that many people visited Varanasi from Calcutta and other far-off places merely to see him and listen to his talks.

For some years he had been having trouble with his urinary system and doctors had advised an operation. At first he was unwilling to have the operation, but when the trouble persisted he decided in favour of it. He came down to Belur Math and soon entered a nursing home. Before leaving for the nursing home he approached almost everybody at Belur Math with folded hands and begged for forgiveness for any offence he might have given him. The behaviour was unusual, but no one thought that this was his final leave-taking. On June 13, 1962, he had his operation performed by the best surgeons of Calcutta. Contrary to everybody's expectations his condition began to deteriorate from the midnight of the 15th and on the 16th morning he passed away. His lips were seen moving and his hands were joined together across his chest. Even his last moments were marked by his God-awareness.

III

Two incidents may be mentioned here which serve as a pointer to what made Swami Visuddhananda the man he was. Once a vain young man who had atheistic leanings asked him, 'Sir, have you seen God?' Swami Visuddhananda, instead of giving him a direct answer, told him that since religious men of all countries and all ages had claimed that God existed and He could also be seen, it was wrong to have any doubt about His existence. The young man was not satisfied with this, but asked, 'I want to know, Sir, if you yourself have seen Him.' Again Swami Visuddhananda spoke at some length about how God answered one's prayers, if one was earnest enough and how if one sincerely wanted to see Him, one could surely have His vision. Swami Visuddhananda thus parried the question a few times, but the young man was insistent and kept asking if he himself had seen God. At this impertinence of the young man, the atmosphere became tense and people present held their breath, worried about

how Swami Visuddhananda was going to react. As people looked, they were amazed to see a great change slowly come over Swami Visuddhananda; he looked as if a halo surrounded his body. In words ringing with conviction he said, 'I have seen God as I see my own limbs.' A hush fell over the awed audience. The cheeky young man sat speechless. Without a further word, Swami Visuddhananda retired to his room and was not seen for the rest of that evening. People returned home with a sense of having experienced something breathtaking.

The next incident happened when Swami Visuddhananda was staying at Varanasi towards the close of his life. A leading surgeon of the town happened to lose his son, and this so upset the surgeon that he was no longer able to attend to his patients. He, in fact, was so distraught with grief that he was not even his normal self. Everybody in the town felt distressed at this because the surgeon was extremely popular. Also, there was nobody in the town who could match his skill as a surgeon which meant that the entire population in the town felt helpless without his services. Swami Visuddhananda who knew the surgeon felt sorry that the surgeon should thus suffer and with him also the citizens of Varanasi. He was so moved that he declared that he would gladly forgo the fruits of his life-long prayers if that would make the surgeon normal and enable him to serve the community as before. Strangely enough, the surgeon began to show signs of recovery soon after this and within *a* week he was able to resume his work. One day he appeared before Swami Visuddhananda and said, 'Sir, I have just completed *a* very difficult operation and I think it is going to be successful.' He came to give him this news as if he knew that his recovery was due to Swami Visuddhananda. The happiest man on hearing this news was Swami Visuddhananda.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, May 1971-72)

Leaves from an Ashrama: 52 :
Yoga of Work as Beneficial to the Worker
Swami Vidyatmananda

For many Westerners, running over as they do with enthusiasm and enterprise, karma yoga is recommended as a practical way toward perfection. One will gain knowledge through action—selfless action done as worship, performed as an offering to God. By labouring for the Lord, one will come to identify increasingly with Him and more and more lose sight of oneself.

That is the idea. But I am not at all sure that karma yoga works. I tried to follow this path for years. What an amount of labour I gave; what numerous projects I carried out! But it often went wrong. When enterprises succeeded I could not avoid taking the credit. When efforts miscarried I felt disgraced. In both cases it was I who remained prominent, not God.

When this became clear I felt that I was at the end of the line. Enterprise was a trap; the concept of karma yoga was a fraud. The approach I had followed got me nowhere. Yet I did not feel I could withdraw from work. What else but work could I do?

Fortunately new light dawned. I came to realize that no one can contribute anything to God's projects. No one is necessary to the Lord. Whatever talent I may have—He can provide a score of workers with as much ability or more. Whatever efficiency I may manifest—He can easily get better results through other agencies. I cannot really do anything for Him. I am not needed at all.

My attitude now is this: I can contribute nothing to God's world. But I am fortunate if He *lets* me work, or feel that I am working. I am *privileged* if He permits me to think I am doing something for Him. He does not need my help, but He allows me to work, or believe that I am working, as a tangible act of

adoration. He is like a mother who lets her child shell peas—which she could do ever so much better herself—so that the child may love mother by believing he is helping mother.

Seen in this way, perhaps the idea of karma yoga is valid after all. The yoga of work succeeds when we finally know that work itself can never prevail. It operates eventually when work is turned into a gesture of love, when the daily round of our life is transformed into a sacrament.

In removing the emphasis from me and my results, karma yoga rightly followed places emphasis upon Him; and the little efforts we must make, because we can do nothing else.

THIS FAITH OF A CHILD

A Boy named Jatila used to walk to school through the woods, and the journey frightened him. One day he told his mother of his fear.

She replied: "Why should you be afraid? Call Madhusudana." "Mother", asked the boy, "Who is Madhusudana?" The mother said, "He is your Elder Brother."

One day after this, when the boy again felt afraid in the woods, he cried out, "O Brother Madhusudana!" But there was no response. He began to weep aloud: "Where are You, Brother Madhusudana? Come to me. I am afraid."

Then God could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said: "Here I am. Why are you frightened?"

And so saying He took the boy out of the woods and showed him the way to school. When He took leave of the boy, God said: "I will come whenever you call me. Do not be afraid."

One must have this faith of a child, this yearning.

Sri Ramakrishna

Programme for March - April 2016

Sunday discourses begin

at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

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Mar 6	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 9	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar 13	Sri Ramakrishna's Puja	
Mar 20	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 10	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar 27	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 90	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 3	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 91	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 10	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 92	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 17	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 93	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 24	Day Retreat	

Sri Ramakrishna's Puja

Sunday 13th March

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

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda

at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 24th April

from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

Sri Ramakrishna in Russia

There was a young Russian bachelor with a low-paying job. Once, for three nights in succession, he had a vision of an Indian yogi in his room.

Sometime later, he came across a picture of Sri Ramakrishna and recognized him to be the yogi seen in the vision.

He saved money and finally came to Calcutta. He knew virtually no English, and in response to the taxi driver's query, kept repeating, 'Ramakrishna Mission'. The driver, who knew the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta, took him there.

Swami Lokeshwarananda, the then head of the institute, made the Russian feel at home, and later sent him to the Belur Math. Swami Bhuteshananda, who was the president then, was much pleased on listening to the young man's story and graciously initiated him. He was also presented with a large number of books on Sri Ramakrishna literature. Now he is back in Russia.

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First gain God, and then gain wealth; but do not try to do the contrary. If, after acquiring spirituality, you lead a worldly life, you will never lose your peace of mind.

Do you talk of social reform? Well, you may do so after realising God. Remember, the Rishis of old gave up the world in order to attain God. This is the one thing needful. All other things shall be added to you, if indeed you care to have them. First see God, and then talk of lectures and social reforms.

Sri Ramakrishna



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