

# Vedanta

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394 MARCH - APRIL 2017

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**Glimpses of Sister Nivedita**

*Swami Tathagatananda*

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**The Divine Name**

*Swami Adbhutananda*

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## Divine Wisdom

### Sufi wisdom

Hasan Basri used to say:

*“I have been startled by the sayings of four persons: 1) a drunkard, 2) a debauchee, 3) a child, and 4) a woman. One day I saw a drunkard staggering in the midst of the mire. I said to him, ‘Try and walk so as not to stumble.’”*

*‘O Hasan’, the drunkard replied, ‘inspite of all your efforts, do you walk firmly in the way of God? Tell me, yes or no. If I fall in the mire no great harm is done. I can get rid of it by washing, but if you fall into the pit of self-conceit, you will never emerge clean and your eternal welfare will be entirely ruined.’* These words pierced me to the heart.

Again, as I passed once close to a man of infamous character, I drew my robes close about me lest they should touch him.

*‘O Hasan,’ he said, ‘why draw thy robes away from contact with me? Only the Most High knows what will be the end of each.’*

Another time I saw a child coming towards me holding a lighted torch in his hand.

*‘Where have you brought this light from?’* I asked him.

He immediately blew it out and said to me, *‘O Hasan, tell me where it is gone, and I will tell you whence I fetched it.’*

One day a beautiful woman, with her face unveiled, came to me. She had just been quarrelling with her husband, and no sooner had she met me than she began reporting his words.

*‘O woman,’* I said, *‘first cover thy face and then speak.’*

*‘O Hasan,’* she answered, *‘in my excitement I lost reason, and I did not even know that my face was uncovered. If you had not told me I should have gone thus into the bazaar.’*

*But you who with so great zeal cultivate the friendship of the Most High, ought you not to curb your eye, so as not to see whether my face was uncovered or not?’* Her words sank deeply into my heart.”

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## Contents

<b>49</b>	<b>Editorial</b> <b>Worship of the Divine Mother - 9</b>
<b>53</b>	<b>Glimpses of Sister Nivedita</b> <i>Swami Tathagatananda</i>
<b>61</b>	<b>The Divine Name</b> Swami Adbhutananda
<b>65</b>	<b>Sri Ramakrishna and the Upanishads</b>
<b>78</b>	<b>Thoughts on Vedanta</b> <i>Swami Turiyananda</i>
<b>82</b>	<b>Guru Nanak and the Siddhas (Yogis)</b> <i>Prof. Gurbachan Singh</i>
<b>87</b>	<b>Illuminating Dialogues from Indian Lore</b> <i>(Gargi and Yajnavalkya)</i> <i>Swami Tadrupananda</i>
<b>91</b>	<b>Eckhartian Dialogue</b>
<b>92</b>	<b>Programme</b>

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# Editorial

## Worship of the Divine Mother -9

(Continued from the last issue)

**I**n our last issue we dwelt briefly on *Samanyarghya sthapana*.

Before we proceed further we need to keep a few points in mind.

1. Worshipping any God or Goddess in Hinduism follows the same exact pattern differing only in the *Mantras* uttered according to the names of differing deities; the meditations also differ accordingly.

2. According to Hinduism the world is nothing but *Brahman*, Pure Consciousness, appearing with name and form. In other words *Brahman* perceived with name and form is the world; and the world without name and form is *Brahman*.

3. It is not that Brahman has become the world but appears as the world because of our ignorance. Once the ignorance is removed there remains only Brahman.

4. The purpose of Puja or worship is to remove this ignorance.

5. Hence Hinduism advises all the spiritual aspirants to deify every object as God or Brahman. This act of visualizing everything as sacred is not hypnotising ourselves but perceiving everything as it really is i.e., as Brahman through the removal of ignorance. Puja's function is to help us remove this ignorance through the act of sacralizing everything in this world as God.

6. For the worshipper every religious ritual is a sacrament. A sacrament is the act of transforming or perceiving every object as God or Brahman.

7. Mantras are not human inventions. These are revealed to the Rishies in the depths of meditation.

(These points must always be kept in mind)

Says Swami Vivekananda:

*“The idea that the goal is far off, far beyond nature, attracting us all towards it, has to be brought nearer and nearer, without degrading or degenerating it.*

*“The God of heaven becomes the God in nature, and the God in nature becomes the God who is nature, and the God who is nature becomes the God within this temple of the body, and the God dwelling in the temple of the body at last becomes the temple itself, becomes the soul and man — and there it reaches the last words it can teach.*

*“He whom the sages have been seeking in all these places is in our own hearts.”*

### Continuing with Samanyarghya

After establishing water in a cone shaped vessel the worshipper invokes all the seven sacred rivers of India. For Hindus every object in this world –living as well as non-living is sacred. Hence Hindus deify all the rivers, mountains, plants etc., as gods and goddesses. This is not to be confused with polytheism; It is an attempt to perceive reality as it is.

Worship of the deities presiding over the doors (*Dwara devata puja*)

*Dwara* means a door. It is easy and pleasant to enter a house through the doors. Hindus believe that the doors leading to the *sanctum sanctorum* of any temple is guarded by powerful forces. Unless one is pure and pleases the deities, these forces would prevent a devotee from entering. Hence they must be appeased.

*Dwara* also means a sense-organ. (The body is compared to a house with nine doors) The idea is that all the sense organs must be purified and controlled so that they can lead an aspirant to God. Uncontrolled senses can and do create obstructions leading to the disturbance of the mind. But if one pleases God who is the creator and controller of the world, through His grace the path to spiritual progress becomes clear. The very senses which so long have been drowning the mind in worldliness, the same purified senses now help an aspirant approach God. This is possible only through the grace of God.

The worshipper prays to God, who is the controller of both the senses and the sense objects, to save him from the distractions caused by these so that his mind may be pure and revel only in God. This is the symbolism of worshipping the presiding deities of the doors.

#### Removal of obstacles (*Vighnapasaranam*)

There are many malevolent spirits in this world ready to harm and put obstacles in the path of aspirants. This is a mantra to remove all such obstacles.

#### Control of the Five Elements (*Bhutapasarpnam*)

According to Hindu cosmology the entire world that we experience is made up of five basic elements: Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. In turn these five elements are the manifestations of the Brahman, Pure Consciousness.

*Bhutapasarpna* means ‘driving away all ideas of material nature’. It simply means looking at the world with a spiritual eye.

#### Purification of the seat (*Asana shuddhi*)

This act is meant to remind us of the substratum of all the universe, which is God Himself. The worshipper reminds himself that God is the only and final support of the world. The mantra directs our attention to God.

#### Purification of the flowers (*Pushpa shuddhi*)

The flowers and all other articles of worship are themselves honoured as the abode of God and are purified with the waters of Faith (*Sraddha*). The flowers also symbolize the various virtues one need to acquire.

#### Imagining a wall of fire (*Vahni prakara chinta*)

Now one should sprinkle water all around with the mantra ‘*rang*’, and all the ten directions are to be thought of as encircled by a wall of fire and that everything is made of *Chinmaya Jyoti*, (the light of consciousness).

Here it is worth noting the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna when he was worshipping the Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna said that at the time of performing *Anganyasa*, *Karanyasa*, etc., he actually saw the letters of the Mantras in bright colours set in his body. He also saw the Coiled Power (*Kundalini*) going up in the form of a snake through the *Sushumna* to the *Sahasrara*. He felt that the parts of his body left behind by that power, at once became still and insensitive and dead to all appearance.

Again, when according to the prescribed method of worship, he uttered the Mantra “*Rang*”, sprinkled water all round himself and imagined a wall of fire existing around the place of worship, he actually saw an impassable wall of fire with hundreds of tongues spread out, protecting the place of worship from all obstacles.

Hriday said that other Brahmins, seeing his mind quite absorbed and body shining all over with a resplendent lustre, said to one another, “*It is as if Vishnu Himself has assumed a human body and sat down to worship.*”

#### Salutations to the lineage of Gurus (*Guru Pranam*)

Next is Guru-puja. A Guru is considered as the human representative of God on earth; he is to be meditated upon as God Himself seated in the thousand petalled lotus (*Sahasrara*).

This is followed by saluting one’s Guru and his Guru etc., till we trace the lineage to God. This salutation is both an act of reverence and gratefulness as well as a reminder that we are not lowly creatures but belong to the spiritual lineage coming from God Himself.

This is also an act of total surrender. Surrender signifies true dedication of body and mind at the feet of the Guru. It indicates that our goal is the realization of God and we will never deviate from the path shown to us by our Guru.

(To be continued)

## Glimpses of Sister Nivedita

Swami Tathagatananda

Facts are stranger than fiction. It was sometime in March, 1910, when Sister Nivedita, Sister Christine and Lady Minto (wife of the then Viceroy, Lord Minto) were on the Ganges in a country boat on their way back from a visit to the temple at Dakshineswar. In the boat itself, tea was served to Lady Minto in a perfectly Swadeshi style. Everything was Swadeshi — biscuits, tea, sugar, cups and saucers. To Nivedita the vow of Swadeshi was an austerity and a Dharma. And she was truly Swadeshi in principle and practice. The promotion of the cause of Indian nationality was to Nivedita a mission and a passion. Lady Minto once came incognito to see the Sister in Bosepara Lane in a corner of the city. She also went to visit Belur Math in the same manner. During the plague of Calcutta in the year 1899 an uncommon spectacle was witnessed. Dr. R. G. Kar has recorded : *'During this calamity the compassionate figure of Sister Nivedita was seen in every slum of the Baghbazar locality. She helped others with money without giving a thought to her own condition. At one time when her diet consisted only of milk and fruits, she gave up milk, to meet the medical expenses of a patient. Having discussed with her the possibilities of hygienic nursing in the slums of the poor people I asked her to take precautions. When I went to visit the patient again in the afternoon I saw Sister Nivedita sitting with the child in her lap in the damp and weather-beaten hut in that unhealthy locality. Day in and day out, night after night, she remained engaged in nursing the child in that hut, having abandoned her own house. When the hut was to be disinfected she took a small ladder and began white-washing the walls herself. Her nursing never slackened even when death was a certainty. After two days, the child lay in Eternal Sleep in the affectionate lap of that merciful lady.'*

We shall do well to remember that only a year before, had she come to India—a world of blasted hopes, of despair, of dejection and of disillusionment. The locality with its uneducated masses with their hideous slums and hereditary poverty was a forbidden path to the educated gentry, and what to speak of rendering social service in that area! By that time Nivedita had undergone a complete metamorphosis and had identified herself with the welfare of the people in a way unthinkable even today. While nursing the sick child not a shade of bitterness marked the corner of her face, not a murmur of self-pity crept into the words she used. She was the picture of an edifying spectacle stamped with the zeal of an archangel, a veritable princess of social service.

The people of Calcutta saw Nivedita busy in fighting the plague. She was made the Secretary of the Plague Committee by Swami Vivekananda. One day, due to shortage of volunteers, she herself started cleaning the affected area. Her steady flame of devotion had no room in it for the slightest fluctuation or distaste. Her dedicated service, soaked in the spirit of the message of Swamiji, was a saga of fortitude and rock-like faith in her Master. Her noble example was a light of hope in the grey cold morning of our country's awakening.

People conversant with the spirit of Swami Vivekananda were aware of his programmes of national reconstruction. He wanted to uplift the masses and spread education among women also. He passionately appealed to the men and the women of the country to help the most sacred cause of the country's betterment with all sincerity. Unfortunately he received no encouraging response from the people of our land. He wanted to rouse and awaken our people and this task required the wholehearted service

of dynamic workers with a deep devotion to the great heritage of our culture. It should be remembered that he never wanted mere social workers so-called to flock to his banner. So while inviting the Sister to come over to India he had written to her : *'What was wanted was not a man but a woman; a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially. India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted.'* Speaking very clearly to her about the uncongenial atmosphere prevailing in India, the Swami had said : *'You must think well before you plunge in, and after work if you fail in this or get disgusted, on my part I promise you I will stand by you unto death whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it.'*

With the passage of time, she fully realized the magnanimity of the Swami as a master in granting her a blank cheque. He always believed in freedom for the individual. But it should not be thought that the life of the Sister was all smooth sailing. To become a mantle-bearer of the Swami required a special mettle. After her initiation into Brahmacharya the Swami held up as a model before his disciple the ideal of *'an orthodox Hindu Brahmin Brahmacharini.'* He gave the model in these words : *'You have to set yourself to Hinduise your thoughts, your needs, your conceptions, and your habits; your life, internal and external, has to become all that an orthodox Hindu Brahmin Brahmacharini's ought to be. The method will come to you, if only you desire it sufficiently. But you have to forget your own past, and to cause it to be forgotten. You have to lose even its memory.'*

She had a great task to fulfil and as such the Swami gave her his best attention in order to mould her into the desired pattern. She was subjected to a constant and unrelaxing discipline, more

than Spartan in severity. Because it was wholly mental and the time was very short, she had to pass through the treadmill of discipline with high courage and tireless energy. Her patience never flagged, her enthusiasm never waned. The Sister had a keen intellect. She carefully and critically read the book of the life of the Swami. Its pages were stained with the life-blood of the martyr, wet with the tears of the saint. Soul-stirring romance of spiritual chivalry — the most moving tragedies of human life and action along with spiritual ecstasies of the highest order were scattered in the pages of that great book. In that book she found her eternal fountain of inspiration in life, her strength in peril and her support in death. She successfully passed through the ordeal and became a fit instrument for the task entrusted to her. Religion identified with ideas of social welfare was a new thing to Indians at that time.

Awakening of manhood, Vivekananda felt, would clear the cobwebs of an inferiority complex from the brains of the people and drive away fear and weakness. A proper understanding of the absolute nature of the soul, he believed, would by itself be a great education. The Swami wanted Indians to worship God in man. He urged them to keep the world in touch with God and bring it back to Him. Only in a re-orientation of our outlook, he felt, in a deifying of the world's concerns was there some hope for the nation. The Sister's school at Bosepara Lane was a monument to her nobility of head and heart and her resolve to implement Swamiji's ideals. She gave her pupils excellent teaching of a humane and expanding character. A more solemn dedication of a woman of foreign origin to the cause of Indian education cannot be imagined. Everything about the school became to her sacred. The gospel of divinity of the individual soul, the reverence for life and the sense of

sacredness of life were behind her dedication to the cause of the school.

The Swami always spoke highly of Indian women—Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, Maitreyi, Khana, Lilavati, Ubhayabharati. He also eulogised the chivalry of Rajput and other women of recent history—Padmini, Chand Sultana, Laxmibai, Durgabai, Ahalyabhai, Rani Bhavani and others. The Swami knew that education was the real key to the revolutionising of the attitudes of Indian women. Through education, rightly imparted, the nation would be revitalised. Ideals of self-respect, self-restraint, self-sacrifice had to be made a living part of life if the highest manhood or womanhood was to be attained. National education and national endeavour should be so moulded as to bring about the glorious consummation of a thorough national regeneration. Transforming knowledge into character was the supreme task before India. This glorious picture of a great race, Nivedita always kept before her eyes. By opening a school for girls in the heart of an orthodox area she inevitably invited a cross-fire of uncharitable criticism. She had no funds. Sometimes she had to go from door to door for requesting the guardians to allow their students to join the school. The guardians met all the warmth of her feeling with the frost of their stubborn indifference, nay, even hostility. It was not an age of a spacious intellectual horizon, a noble endeavour and a bright aspiration. Hence was there the indispensable need of supreme sacrifice from 'the earth's bravest and best for the good of the many.' The selfless devotion of the Sister and her genuine love for the school made all obstacles soon give way. Matter can be, the Swami says, changed into spirit by the force of love. This is the gist of Vedanta. Surely Nivedita by her zeal made the dream of the Swamiji get fulfilled. She was dedicated to the superhuman

task of salvaging a ship-wrecked people condemned to intellectual morbidity of the soul. She did splendid spade work to clear the debris, as if she had been called forth by the peculiar exigencies of the times to work for India's salvation. She embodied in her own being the life-saving ideas of God and Love. Indeed she was a brilliant star that illumined the educational sky of the period in Bengal, if not in India.

The great Swadeshi Movement which came in the wake of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 roused the nation. Bengal at that period was like a sea broken by waves of revolutionary passion. The first mutterings of the storm began to make themselves heard with the launching of a vigorous boycott movement. The Sister played a very great role in this movement. Not many others had the efficiency and the vision of the Sister. She should never be equated with mere political leaders. Her education, experience, efficiency and above all her training under the Swami gave her a unique position. She was a great intellectual and moral force behind the movement. She was an ardent patriot, a dynamic philosopher and a Karma-yogi of the Vivekananda brand—all in one. Masculine-minded and masculine-willed was she at all times. While paying a glowing tribute after her death, Rash Behari Ghosh said that if the dry bones were stirred in India it was because Sister Nivedita breathed life into them. She was indeed a nationalist of nationalists. Here is a beautiful pen-picture of her character by Nevinson. He says : *'It is as vain to try to describe Sister Nivedita as to reduce fire to a formula and call it knowledge. There was, indeed, something flame-like about her, and not only her language but her whole vital personality often reminded me of fire. Like fire, and like Shiva, Kali and other Indian powers of the spirit, she was at once destructive and creative, terrible and beneficent. No one ever called her gentle; but of all nobly sympathetic natures, she was amongst the finest.'*

Nivedita had a very sweet relationship with the Holy Mother. She was, in all her movements and behaviour, just a little child to the Holy Mother. Even on the blessed day in 1899 when Nivedita first saw the Holy Mother her heart was drawn to her. It was, really speaking, the Holy Mother's blessing and kindness that gave Nivedita a chance to live the orthodox Hindu life. The Holy Mother showered every mark of tenderest affection on Khooki, as Nivedita used to be called by the Mother. This sweet relationship was maintained throughout Nivedita's life. To Nivedita, the Holy Mother was the very embodiment of ideal Indian womanhood.

Nivedita had also a profound respect for Gopaler-Ma—the old devotee of Sri Ramakrishna at Kamarhati. Nivedita along with Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Bull went to see the old lady in 1898. Gopaler-Ma accepted them, to their surprise, as her own children. She spent her last days in Bosepara Lane with Nivedita. In the midst of her busy life, Nivedita used to spend some time, in rendering some service to the saintly woman. After her passing away, Nivedita treasured the rosary of beads on which Gopaler-Ma had become a saint, and took it to London and gave it to her mother.

Nivedita thoroughly soaked herself in Vivekananda and thereby in India. Her breadth of outlook, curiosity, courage, self-discipline and enthusiasm were without a parallel. Her travels gave her breadth of vision and depth of love and lifted her above any insularity. Her training under Swami Vivekananda gave her a new vision of life as well as a new lease of life. Her stay in India enabled her to steep her soul in the outer and inner glories of India. Her nature was gentle and loving and her books on Indian culture contain numerous personal touches bearing ample testimony to the sweetness of her soul, the strength of her nature, and the

courage of her convictions. The book *'The Master as I saw him'* — her magnum opus — is sure to go down in history as a rare type of biography. It was her insight into the true glory of Indian culture and her sense of the immemorial greatness, serenity and refinement of the Indian race that gave her the impetus to dedicate her life to India. Her books reflect the very soul of India. She completely identified herself with the people and served the nation in various ways, in teaching, social reform, nationalism, relief work, journalism, art and architecture. She was looked upon as a luminous elder, leader and pioneer. The idea of becoming a powerful instrument by suffering and resignation, and of triumphing over hostile forces through sanctity, purity and holiness made her a true heroine. She dominated the times as much by her character as by her genius.

Tagore called her a *'Mother of the people.'* He says:

*'He who has seen her has seen the essential form of man, the form of the spirit. It is a piece of great good fortune to be able to see how the inner being of man reveals itself with unobstructed and undiminished energy and effulgence, nullifying the obstruction of all outer material coatings or impediments. We have been blessed in that we have witnessed that unconquered nobility of man in Sister Nivedita. The respect with which she would greet some ordinary Muslim woman dwelling in a hut in a village is not possible for an ordinary individual; for the Vision that enables one to see the greatness of humanity in a humble individual is a very uncommon gift. It was because this vision was so natural to her that she did not lose her respect for India, in spite of the nearness of her life to the life of the people of India for so long a time. She is to be respected not because she was a Hindu but because she was great. She is to be honoured not because she was like us, but because she was greater than us.'*

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari,, November, 1967-68)

## The Divine Name

Swami Adbhutananda

A Devotee : ‘Maharaj, monks preach renunciation of lust and gold, but how is it possible for householders like us to give up such desires? The cravings are, as it were, besieging our minds. There is no possibility of giving battle to them there. How can we fight them? The desires will defeat and drive away whatever we shall confront them with, and will never allow it to secure a foothold in the mind. You ask us to repeat the Divine Name, but we find that we do not feel inclined to do so thanks to the pull of desires. You ask us to discriminate; even here we find that the cravings surge up in all their restless fury by paralysing our discrimination. Now please tell us how could you manage to create the urge for Divine Name and discrimination in the mind in the midst of these cravings?’

Swami Adbhutananda : ‘You make the same eternal complaint—how can we repeat the Divine Name? Know that the Divine Name plants itself in the mind through repetition. The mind is running restlessly intoxicated by desires. The cravings are leading it by a rope through its nose. What can be more mischievous than they?’

This was the complaint of Arjuna to Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna admitted that the mind is wicked, but added, “*O Arjuna! Cultivate detachment towards the cravings and be always practising. By constant practice the mind will gradually quiet down*”. The more the mind runs after worldly objects, the more should you reason that the objects are fleeting, existing today and disappearing tomorrow. Be content with just what you have need of these

fleeting things. Why should you have more? There will be no room for the Eternal if you overburden yourself with fleeting objects. The Eternal is not created by the adding of fleeting objects. The Eternal is One; It is Brahman. Know that everything else except Brahman to be unreal. Teach your mind in this way. You will find that discrimination has awakened after repeated efforts like this.

‘Do you know the story of the pearl necklace which Sri Rama presented to Hanuman in his court? Hanuman turned over the beads scrutinizingly and even cut open one with his teeth. As soon as he saw that the name of Rama was not found in it he threw it away at once. Lakshmana became angry at this and said, *“He is a monkey after all; what does he know about the worth of pearls? He has spoiled such a beautiful pearl necklace by cutting it with his teeth”*.

Noticing Lakshmana’s regret Rama told him, *“Why not ask him why he has done so?”*

On being queried Hanuman replied, *“I was seeing whether or not it contained the name of Rama!”* This is the way one should discriminate between things. To keep alive the spirit of discrimination is the hardest *tapasya* (austerity). One who knows how to discriminate is ever battling with impulses. Wake up the spirit of renunciation and discrimination; then alone will you be able to fight your desires. How will you check them unless the discrimination between what is true and what is false develops.

First of all clean the dirt that is entering the house of the mind through the outside windows. Discriminate and put up the notice of “No admission” in front of the windows, i.e. the senses. Hand over all the dirt that will enter within, to the policeman i.e. *viveka*

(discrimination). With the help of *viveka*, the mind will be battling with the mind. Thus the field of the mind will be cleared, and you will be able to install God there. Until you can install God there, you will not be able to conquer your desires.

You doubtless know that the seed of desire is in the mind. That seed is being watered by the sense-organs within and the objects outside. This watering is producing a luxuriant crop. All that crop must be cut down and the seeds destroyed. After that you have to sow the seed of God's name there. Then alone the Divine Name will bear a crop. Now there is the crop of desires. The Master used to say, "*Where there is lust, there is no Rama, and where Rama is, there is no lust.*"

A Devotee : 'Maharaj, I have a little doubt. Are you advising us to repeat the Divine Name after controlling the senses first'?

The Swami : 'That can also be done. But the Divine Name has such a power that it can burn up the seed of desire. The Master used to say, "*Repulse the attack of lust by wearing the armour of Name.*"

A Devotee : 'Maharaj, how can Name conquer lust?

Swami : 'Lust cannot come near the Name. The Divine Name has such a pull that once the mind yields to it, lust does not find an opportunity to arise. For Name is true and real. Falsehood cannot find a hold in the mind which is meditating on Truth'.

A Devotee : 'This may be possible in the waking state. But desires continue their attacks even when a person is asleep. How

can he save himself from such attacks? How can the mind save itself from desires in the dream and in sleep?’

The Swami : ‘The Divine Name can save the mind even from such attacks. I tell you truly that if you repeat the Name properly, its power will be active even in sleep. One who knows how to repeat the Name goes on doing so either in sleep, or in the waking state. As physical functions like breathing go on even in sleep, even so the activity of the Name continues in the mind. It does not allow dreams to arise in the mind, and even if they begin to arise, the Name saves the spiritual aspirant by waking him up. Thus the power of the Divine Name continues to save the sadhakas day and night.

‘You will not understand the meaning of such simple statements! Desires have made a permanent home in the mind. Sometimes they float on the surface of the mind, and sometimes they lie so submerged that a person is not even aware if ever such desires existed in him. The more you will approach Him, the more will you perceive the knots of lust and desires. The more the body and the mind will get purified, the more the submerged dirt, the hidden dispositions acquired in thousands of incarnations before, will come to the top. And coming out, they will be fighting with the Divine Name. The fire of the Divine Name which brings them to the surface—the same fire will force them to abandon the fortress of the mind. How can they cope with the power of the Divine Name?’

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, September 1948)

## **Sri Ramakrishna and the Upanishads**

**Prabuddha Bharata Editorial**

### **Embodiment Of The Spirit Of The Upanishads**

**O**f the many religious renaissance movements witnessed by history, one of the mightiest began in India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In its power and sweep it very well bids to rival the renaissance ushered in by the Buddha. The originator of this renaissance is Sri Ramakrishna, who in his short span of fifty years relived the religious life of all humanity, particularly that of the Hindu people. Vedanta philosophy, based on the spiritual truths embodied in the Upanishads, not only forms the basis of Hinduism, with its numerous sects and denominations, but also contains the core-principles of all other religions. Through his unparalleled spiritual struggles and realizations, Sri Ramakrishna became a living representation of the spirit of the Upanishads. Not that he had studied these texts or was instructed in them with their various Sanskrit commentaries, in the traditional way. He had little to do with book learning. Just as the seers and sages of the Upanishads had realized those spiritual principles and truths, Sri Ramakrishna experienced them within himself through his self-discipline, concentration, purity, and the resulting super-consciousness. Vedantic scholars who listened to his enlightening talks—or merely came into his presence— marvelled at his spiritual insights and wisdom. His own youthful disciples, some of whom had deep acquaintance with the Upanishads and their commentaries, equally marvelled at the Vedantic wisdom of their Great Master. Swami Vivekananda, the chief among the disciples and easily the most learned of them all in the philosophies of East and West, found in Sri Ramakrishna the soul of the Upanishads, the key to the understanding of the harmony underlying the apparently divergent teachings thereof :

*'I, through the grace of God, had the great good fortune to sit at the feet of one whose whole life was such an interpretation, whose life, a thousandfold more than whose teaching, was a living commentary on the texts of the Upanishads, was in fact the spirit of the Upanishads living in a human form.'*<sup>1</sup>

Swami Turiyananda, another great monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was from his early boyhood given to an orthodox life of discipline and study of the Gita, the Upanishads, and the works of Sankara. He loved this study so much that he once even began to think that visits to his Master were a distraction! Sri Ramakrishna came to know of this and at the next opportunity revealed thus to Turiyananda the true spirit of Vedanta :

*'Well, I hear you are now given much to the discussion of the Vedanta. That is very good. But does it not amount to this—Brahman is real, the world unreal? Or is it anything else?'* <sup>2</sup>

These simple words, spoken directly from the Master's personal experience of Vedantic truths, took away the breath of Turiyananda, who had been labouring under the impression that to understand Vedanta—what to speak of winning liberation—one had to study the difficult Vedantic texts and other related subjects. Now he came to know that the essential thing about Vedanta was to get a firm conviction about the reality of Brahman and the impermanence of the phenomenal world, and to make that conviction a fact of experience through meditation. Swami Turiyananda later said that that was '*a turning-point in my life*'.

### **A Dhira of The Upanishadic Type**

*Dhira*, as used in the Upanishads, denotes the man of discrimination, of one-pointed resolution, and ultimate wisdom. He is the spiritual pioneer who sets out in search of the treasure of the immortal Atman and successfully completes the search. From first to last, the *Dhira* is characterized especially by the quality of spiritual

discrimination. At the beginning, he discriminates between the pleasant and the ephemeral, and the good and the eternal, and chooses only the latter.<sup>3</sup> Seeing impermanence and death all around, he seeks the permanent and the immortal.<sup>4</sup> This is sought within his own self, by the control of the senses, by purification and concentration of mind. During this inward search, his power of discrimination becomes even sharper, so that by its strength he is able to separate the Atman, the 'smokeless light', from its coverings of ego, intelligence, thoughts, and body—'as the central stalk from a blade of grass'.<sup>5</sup> When he is able to identify himself with the Atman, he becomes freed from ignorance, bondage, and death. '*Such dhiras (persons of discrimination), ever devoted to the Self, behold everywhere the omnipresent Brahman and in the end enter into It, which is all this*'.<sup>6</sup>

If one carefully studies the course of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual search from the beginning to its fulfilment, one cannot fail to note the full manifestation of the *dhira's* qualities in him. His discriminative mind very early determined that God alone is the permanent Substance and the world with its pleasures and possessions is impermanent. So he resolved to seek only God, and not to rest till he had realized Him in full. He had a brilliant intellect, but, perceiving at an early age the hollowness of a formal education, he turned away from it. The worldly scheme of education which only helps in earning of money or honour, he called a mere '*bread-winning education*'. When he was pressed by his elder brother to give serious attention to his studies, he incisively replied: '*I do not want to learn the art of "bundling rice and plantain". What I do want is to achieve that which produces right knowledge and enables man to attain the aim of his life.*' Though he most probably had not then heard or read about what the Upanishad calls the 'higher knowledge' (*para-vidya*)<sup>7</sup> which enables one to attain the Imperishable—that is, Brahman—clearly, his discriminative mind and hankering for liberation were guiding him towards that.

Thus, as he entered upon his long series of rigorous spiritual disciplines, he kept unsheathed, as it were, the shining sword of discrimination. He cut off one by one from his mind, all attachments to passion and possessions, which he saw were obstacles in the path of his divine realization.

He renounced money and the joys of the flesh altogether. When he saw that without overcoming the pride of caste and egoism he could not have the divine vision, he went to the extent of stripping himself of the sacred thread—the emblem of his *Brahmanahood*; and later he quietly started cleaning the toilet of a scavenger's family. As a result of such austere practices, he could, when he sat for meditation, very easily detach his consciousness from sense-impressions and other distractions. And after a long struggle, through such disciplines and with the consuming yearning for God—which the Vedanta texts call *mumukshutvam*, the desire for liberation—, he had the first vision of the Divine Mother, the Goal of all these spiritual practices, in Her impersonal aspect. He perceived and got merged into an all-pervading ocean of light and consciousness.

In later days when disciples gathered round him and sought spiritual guidance, he asked them to cultivate discrimination thus:

*'...you must practise discrimination. "Woman and gold" is impermanent. God is the only Eternal Substance. What does a man get with money? Food, clothes, and a dwelling-place—nothing more. You cannot realize God with its help. Therefore money can never be the Foal of life...'*

*'Consider—what is there in money or in a beautiful body? Discriminate and you will find that even the body consists of bones, flesh, fat, and other disagreeable things. Why should a man give up God and direct his attention to such things? Why should a man forget God for their sake?'*<sup>8</sup>

### **Satyakama's story re-enacted**

Sri Ramakrishna, as the readers of his biography will have noticed, yearned and struggled and attained the vision of the Divine

Mother without the help or guidance of any guru whatsoever. Even for four or five years after he became a regular priest at the Kali Temple, he was still, as it were, guided completely from within. In this respect his life closely resembles the spiritual quest and fulfilment of Satyakama, a Upanishadic sage.<sup>9</sup>

Satyakama, as a young lad, wishing to go and study the Vedas under a teacher, wanted to learn from his mother about his ancestry. But his mother said : *'I do not know, my child, of what ancestry you are. In my youth I was preoccupied with many household duties and with attending on guests when I conceived you. I do not therefore know your ancestry. I am Jabala by name and you are Satyakama. So you may speak of yourself as Satyakama Jabala.'*

So the young boy went to a sage, Haridrumata Gautama, and requested him to teach him the Vedas. When Gautama asked Satyakama about his ancestry he repeated frankly what his mother had told him, though it meant the imminent risk of his being rejected by the guru. But on the contrary, Gautama was greatly pleased at the truthfulness of the boy and said : *'None but a Brahmana could speak such a damaging truth about himself. You are, surely, a Brahmana and I will initiate you and teach you. You have not swerved from truth.'*

The story goes on, that Gautama gave Satyakama four hundred lean and weak cows to care for and return only after they multiplied into one thousand. The disciple took them to the forest. He said to himself that he would not return until they had increased to a thousand. Then he spent many years in the forest with the herd. One day the bull of the herd said to him that their strength had now reached a thousand, so he should take them back to the teacher. Further, Satyakama received instruction from the bull about one aspect of Brahman. He was, on subsequent days, taught by the fire, a swan, and a diver bird about the other aspects of Brahman. When he finally returned to the teacher, the latter was struck by his very

appearance and greeted him thus : *'Satyakama, dear boy, you shine like a knower of Brahman. Who has taught you?'* *'Beings other than men,'* replied the boy. *'But I wish, revered Sir, that you alone should teach me. For I have heard from persons like you that knowledge which is learnt from a teacher alone leads to the highest good.'* Of course Gautama taught him, but it was the same knowledge, and *'nothing whatsoever was omitted'*.

Though Satyakama doubtless thought he was taught the knowledge of Brahman by a bull, fire, etc., and not by any man, yet the real fact seems to lie elsewhere. According to deeper psychological and spiritual laws, we know it was Satyakama's *own pure mind* which had become his teacher.

Great spiritual teachers point out that the *'higher mind'* in pure aspirants becomes their teacher. It is no wonder that such a phenomenon occurred in Sri Ramakrishna, whose mind was firmly set on realizing God and who was pure as purity itself. Sri Ramakrishna later thus revealed to his devotees this spiritual marvel:

*'The figure of a young Sannyasin looking like me used to come out again and again from within me and instruct me on all matters; when he emerged, sometimes I had a little consciousness and, at other times, lost it altogether and lay inert, only seeing and hearing his actions and words; when afterwards he entered this gross body, I regained full consciousness. The Brahmani, Tota Puri and others came and taught me afterwards what I had heard from him previously—they taught me what I had already known. It seems from this that they came as Gurus in my life in order that the authority of the scriptures, such as the Vedas, might be maintained by my honouring their injunctions.'*<sup>10</sup>

### **Monasticism Fortified**

Renunciation is one of the most basic teachings of the Upanishads, to which they return again and again. In its perfect form it is represented by the monastic ideal in them. Since it is not possible to attain the highest knowledge without perfect renunciation—

without renouncing all desires and enjoyments, here and hereafter— therefore the spirit of renunciation is so much emphasized. *'Not by work nor by progeny nor by wealth',* says the Kaivalya-Upanishad, *but by renunciation alone some attained immortality.'*

Says Yajnavalkya, a great Upanishadic sage:

*'The knowers of Brahman of olden times did not wish for offspring, thinking, "What shall we do with offspring—we who have attained this Self, this World (of the Atman)?" They gave up their desire for sons, for wealth, and for the worlds, and led the life of religious mendicants. That which is the desire for sons is the desire for wealth, and that which is the desire for wealth is the desire for the worlds; for both these, indeed, are but desires.'* *'Therefore he who knows It (Brahman) as such becomes self-controlled, calm, withdrawn into himself, patient, and collected; he sees the Self in his own self; he sees all as the Self.'* <sup>11</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna represents in his life, in this age, the highest ideal of renunciation upheld by the Upanishads. In him the desire for wealth and social security, name and glory, was rooted out. By looking upon all women as the images of the Divine Mother and by directing all the love in his human heart towards God as Mother, Sri Ramakrishna completely conquered the sex-instinct. Thus he had become a perfect *sanyasin* in spirit. Still, when his Vedantic teacher Tota Puri came to Dakshineswar, and offered to initiate him into *sanyasa* in the traditional way, he readily agreed. After the performance of the *viraja-homa* (ceremony of taking monastic vows), he received the vows of complete renunciation with the ochre robe and thus came to uphold the institution of monasticism as well as its spirit.<sup>12</sup> *'Renunciation',* says Swami Vivekananda, *'is the very soul of the Upanishads.'* Sri Ramakrishna was an embodiment of renunciation. Having been established in the knowledge of the all-pervading Brahman, he maintained a relationship with his wife which was entirely spiritual. He saw in her—as in all—the blissful Brahman alone.

Thus came to be realized in his life the truth contained in the following verse of the Upanishad:

*'Thou art woman, Thou art man; Thou art youth and maiden too. Thou as an old man totterest along on a staff; it is Thou alone who, when born, assumest diverse forms.'* <sup>13</sup>

Swami Vivekananda, in the course of a dialogue with one of his disciples, once revealed how Sri Ramakrishna used especially to inculcate this spirit of uncompromising renunciation and dispassion in his young disciples who were to become monks:

*'When he used to instruct his Sannyasin disciples, he would rise from his seat and look about to see if any householder disciple was coming that way or not. If he found none, then in glowing words he would depict the glory of renunciation and austerity. As a result of the rousing power of that fiery dispassion, we have renounced the world and become averse to worldliness.'* <sup>14</sup>

Further interpreting the deep significance for humanity of Sri Ramakrishna's burning spirit of renunciation, Swamiji said:

*'That man [Sri Ramakrishna] was the embodiment of renunciation... He was a triumphant example, a living realization of the complete conquest of lust and desire for money. He was beyond all ideas of either, and such men are necessary for this century. Such renunciation is necessary in these days when men have begun to think that they cannot live a month without what they call "necessities", and which they are increasing out of all proportion.*

*It is necessary in a time like this that a man should arise to demonstrate to the sceptics of the world that there yet breathes a man who does not care a straw for all the gold or all the fame that is in the universe. Yet there are such men.'* <sup>15</sup>

### **Truthfulness, the means to the Highest**

*'Speak the truth...do not swerve from truth'—is a typical commandment of one Upanishad to all spiritual seekers.<sup>16</sup> 'He who speaks*

*untruth*', says another Upanishad, *'withers to the very root.'* <sup>17</sup> Because truth is the basis of the individual's character as well as of social intercourse. Truthfulness in the sense of *'giving utterance to what is actually perceived, without hypocrisy or intent to injure others'* is a basic virtue. But truthfulness has a higher value and a deeper significance when it becomes one of the most powerful means of realizing the divine Truth. The *Kena-Upanishad* declares that *'truth is the abode of the Upanishad.'* <sup>18</sup> Here truth, as Sankara explains, means freedom from deceit and crookedness in speech, mind, and action, for the wisdom taught in the Upanishads abides in those who are free from deceit and who are holy, and not in those who are devilish in nature and deceitful. The importance of truthfulness for realizing the highest Reality is declared thus in the *Mundaka-upanishad*:

*'Truth alone prevails, not falsehood. By truth the path is laid out, the Way of the Gods, on which the seers, whose every desire is satisfied, proceed to the highest Abode of the True.'* <sup>19</sup>

From his early boyhood Sri Ramakrishna showed a remarkable devotion to truth. Partly he seems to have inherited this quality from his father, who was ardently devoted to truth and refused to deviate from it even under most trying circumstances. Sri Ramakrishna's sharp power of discernment early revealed to him that if he was to realize God, the embodiment of absolute truth, he could not deviate even by a hair's breadth from relative truth. Naturally, then, he brought about a perfect conformity between his thoughts, words, and actions. Being guileless and straightforward, he remained an utter stranger to crookedness and deceit. Truthfulness became so natural in his life that even unconsciously he could not commit a wrong. Regarding his devotion to truth, Sri Ramakrishna used to say:

*'After my vision of the Divine Mother, I prayed to Her, taking a flower in my hands: "Mother, here is Thy knowledge and here is Thy ignorance. Take them both, and give me only pure love. Here is Thy holiness and here*

is Thy unholiness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thy evil. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy righteousness and here is Thy unrighteousness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love." I mentioned all these, but I could not say : "Mother, here is Thy truth and here is Thy falsehood. Take them both." I gave up everything at Her feet but could not bring myself to give up truth.'<sup>20</sup>

He often advised his devotees and disciples, both householders and would-be monks, to stick to truth, for '*truthfulness constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kaliyuga*'. 'If a man clings tenaciously to truth,' he assured, '*he ultimately realizes God*.'

### **Self-Realization And Jivanmukti**

The *Atman* (*Brahman*) is the unchangeable truth behind all phenomena, individual and cosmic. The Upanishads not only teach thus the reality of the *Atman*, but also point the way for Its realization. '*This Atman is to be realized*' — after hearing Its truth from a competent teacher, and pondering over it, one must meditate on Its real nature. Through the process of '*neti, neti*' ('not this, not this'), the spiritual aspirant has to divest the *Atman*, the Substrate-Truth, of all superimpositions. Even the very ego is to be negated in this process. Then is realized the truth of the statement *Tat tvam asi* (That thou art)—the *Atman* is identical with *Brahman*, Existence-consciousness-bliss Absolute. Realizing this, one becomes liberated. '*Whosoever departs from this world,*' says Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad, '*without knowing this Imperishable, is miserable. But he who departs from this world after knowing the Imperishable is a knower of Brahman.*'<sup>21</sup> The sage in the *Kena-upanishad* declares:

*'If a man knows the Atman here, he then attains the true goal of life. if he does not know It here, a great destruction awaits him. Having realized the Self in every being, the wise relinquish the world and become immortal.'*<sup>22</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna, under the guidance of his Vedantic guru, Tota Puri, realized this knowledge of the identity of Atman with Brahman, by merging his ego completely in the Absolute. As Sri Ramakrishna himself later said, he found it at first impossible to free the mind from the blissful form of the Divine Mother. But Tota was not an easy-going type of guru. He scolded the disciple severely for his 'weakness' and, pressing the pointed end of a broken piece of glass between his eyebrows, told him to concentrate on that point and free the mind of all forms and modifications. Sri Ramakrishna tried hard again. As the form of the Divine Mother re-appeared in his mind, he—the *dhira* that he was—severed it in two '*with the sword of Knowledge*'. He at the same time, we must note, merged in Brahman his own *child-of-God ego* which was the only remaining 'obstacle' in the path to *nirvikalpa-samadhi*. Thus the last hurdle being crossed, Sri Ramakrishna merged into the state of perfect union with Brahman, the highest state of consciousness spoken of by Vedantic sages. When his mind finally came back to ordinary consciousness, he discovered that '*Brahman indeed is all this*'—the so-called phenomenal universe. When he had ascended to the level of *nirvikalpa-samadhi*, he had followed the process of '*neti, neti*'; but now when he came down to the normal waking consciousness, he began to perceive that the same Brahman had become everything '*iti*' '*iti*', '*this*', '*this*'). As he once explained it to a young disciple:

*'You see, in one form He is the Absolute and in another He is the Relative. What does Vedanta teach? Brahman alone is real and the world illusory, isn't that so? But as long as God keeps the "ego of a devotee" in a man, the Relative is also real. When He completely effaces the ego, then what is remains. That cannot be described by the tongue. But as long as God keeps the ego, one must accept all. By removing the outer sheaths of the plantain-tree, you reach the inner pith. As long as the tree contains sheaths, it also contains pith. So too, as long as it contains pith, it also contains sheaths. The pith goes with the sheaths, and the sheaths go with the pith. In the same way,*

*when you speak of the Nitya, it is understood that the Lila also exists; and when you speak of the Lila, it is understood that the Nitya also exists. `It is He alone who has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. When He is actionless, I call Him Brahman; when He creates, preserves, and destroys, I call Him Sakti. Brahman and Sakti are not different from each other. Water is water, whether it is still or moving.`<sup>23</sup>*

The goal of *jivanmukti* (liberation in life), placed before humanity by the Upanishadic sages, was once again demonstrated by Sri Ramakrishna to be practical. By realizing his identity with the Infinite, he had shattered all bodily and psychological bonds, in short, all bondage that maya can bind a soul with. Living in the body, yet he was not of it. Disease or death held no terrors for him. Having attained the Infinite, he went beyond the 'gravitational field' of earthly desires and temptations. Boundless was his bliss, and limitless his wisdom. A great pundit, who was inspired by Sri Ramakrishna's example to renounce all for God-realization, had this feeling when he witnessed the Master's state of *Jivanmukti* : *`Ah, how free from anxiety he lives, knowing what one should know and understand in life! Even death has been conquered by him; it can no longer hold before him the horrible shadow of the "night of destruction"?'`*<sup>24</sup>

'M', the author of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, has recorded his impression at the end of a visit to Dakshineswar, when he came back to ask the Master something before finally taking his leave. 'M' says, *`In the dim light the Master, all alone, was pacing the hall, rejoicing in the self—as the lion lives and roams alone in the forest.`*

Referring to the greatest knowers of *Brahman*, the Mundaka-upanishad says: *`The wise man who knows Him does not babble. Revelling in the Self, delighting in the Self, performing actions [for the good of others], he is the foremost among the knowers of Brahman.`*<sup>25</sup>

## The Fulfilment Of The Indian Sages

Renounce, conquer the lower self, attain the knowledge of the true self, the Atman — this is the essential message of the Upanishadic sages. This is the message that India needs most today for her own survival. And this is the message that India has to give to the whole world for its survival. '*Renunciation and spirituality*', said Swami Vivekananda once, '*are the two great ideas of India, and it is because India clings to these ideas that all her mistakes count for so little.*'<sup>26</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna, '*the fulfilment of the Indian sages*' — as Swamiji referred to him once — has made these two ideas living vibrant realities, and thereby proved in these modern times the validity of the truths taught in the Upanishads.

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## Thoughts on Vedanta

Swami Turiyananda

On a certain occasion, as Sri Rama was sitting in his court attended by sages and seers, he saw Hanuman before him, and with a view to gratifying all kinds of his devotees asked the latter, "*Hanuman, how do you look upon me?*" Hanuman, "*the best among the intelligent.*" thought within himself that there must be some great purpose behind such a query from the Lord, the inner controller, to whom nothing was unknown. Revolving thus Hanuman replied. "*When I am identified with the body I consider myself as Thy servant; when I regard myself as the individual soul, I am part of Thee, and when I look upon myself as the Self I am verily Thee—this is my firm conviction.*"

Hanuman has here revealed the attitudes of all worshippers. This is the final view of all the schools of Vedanta. It gives nobody any cause for despair; on the contrary it assigns to everybody his right place. The attitude of the servant—*Thou art the Lord and I am Thy servant*—is for those who have not been able to rise above the body idea. Those who look upon themselves as individual souls and have risen above the body idea without fully realizing it—for them is the attitude of part and whole—"*Thou art the whole and I am Thy part.*"

And those who have realized their Selfhood take up the attitude of identity—I am Thee. Thou and I are one—there is no difference there. These are the three attitudes—dualistic, qualified non-dualistic, and non-dualistic. Sri Ramachandra made Hanuman, the crest-jewel among devotees, declare the final truth about the three attitudes in order to please all the devotees present

in his court. This is the final commentary on the ultimate truth of the *Vedanta*.

None need despair. Everybody is worshipping *That One* alone and is related to Him whatever may be the state he is in.

*"I am centered in the hearts of all: memory and perception as well as their loss come from Me. I am verily that which has to be known by all the Vedas. I indeed am the Author of the Vedanta, and the knower of the Veda am I."* Bhagavad Gita . XV—1 5.

The One conscious Existent, the Supreme Person, the all in all, pervades and permeates everything. He is verily that which has to be known by all the Vedas, He indeed is the author of the Vedanta, and the Knower of the Veda. To know this is to know Vedanta. Further without this realization none can know the real truth of Vedanta even if he swallows the whole literature of Vedanta. I have understood it to be so.

And further I have taken the Master's saying, *"My Mother and I . . . not to relate to anything conscient or inconscient. It is all Consciousness that he has meant — "The object of worship is conscient, the worshipper too is conscient. It is the attitude of the child. The child cares for nothing except the mother, its love is undivided."* He is all in all.

*"Or what avails thee to know all this diversity, O Arjuna? (Know thou this, that) I exist, supporting this whole world by a portion of Myself."* Gita. X—42.

He pervades the whole world by one part of Him, while the rest is always free and beyond everything. The Vedas too have sung:—*"The entire world of being is a quarter of Him, while the three-quarters are the immortal heaven."*

So much with regard to Brahman. And as regards the individual, if he has the body idea, God becomes the Lord and he the servant. If he feels himself to be the individual self, God becomes the whole and the individual the part. And when the individual feels himself to be the Self, there is no more any feeling of difference. Then he becomes one with the Supreme Self and says: "*I am but Thee.*" That is the finale of the individual's effort. This is the Vedantic wisdom recognized by all. He is all in all. There is no knowledge, no object of knowledge and knower other than He. He is all—the Self, the individual and the world. There is nothing except He. He who says that there is an other is not yet free from delusion. He "*mutters incoherently like one asleep.*" He is like one who is not aware of what he is talking in the haze of sleep.

*"The Unmanifested manifests Itself through superimposition and misapprehension."* It is in this sense that the Scripture has said, '*Akasha has been born of this Atman*' etc., and not in the sense of real creation. "*There is neither dissolution nor origin; there is none bound, none aspiring; there are none desiring freedom, and none free— this is the ultimate truth.*" (Gaudapada's Karika on M. U., V. P. 32.)

This is the final truth. What more will Shankara say about freedom in association with the Lord or in nearness to the Lord. You indeed know that the Lord has proclaimed the desirelessness of His devotee in the *Bhagavata* saying, "*He does not accept (freedom) even if it is offered.*" No one says study, repetition of His name, austerities, meditation, concentration or *samadhi* to be the Goal.

*"It is by knowing Him alone that immortality is attained; there is no other way."*

This is the word of Vedanta. And the Lord has said:

*"All the worlds, O Arjuna, including the realm of Brahma, are subject to return, but after attaining Me, O son of Kunti, there is no rebirth."* Gita, VIII—16.

*"I am the Self, O Gudakesha, existent in the heart of all beings; I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings."* Gita, X—20.

*"The Goal, the Supporter, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Refuge, the Friend, the Origin, the Dissolution, the Substratum, the Storehouse, the Seed immutable."* Gita. IX—18.

So it is hardly necessary to emphasize that He is the all- in-all of the individual soul. It is right to eat mangoes when you have come for it. What more need is there for any other information? They who will be made preachers by the Lord will alone take care of others and decide what paths will be harmful or beneficial to them. We shall be fortunate indeed if we can just eat mangoes. My earnest prayer to the Lord is that He may introduce you to the owner of the garden.

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A leading scholar of Basra visited Rabi'a al-Adawiyya while she was ill. Sttting beside her pillow, the scholar spoke about how terrible the world was. In reply, Rabi`a told him:

*"You love the world very dearly. If you did not love the world, you would not mention it so much. It is always the purchaser who first disparages what he wants to buy. If you were done with the world, you would not mention it either for good or evil. As it is, you keep mentioning it because, as the proverb says, whoever loves a thing mentions it frequently."*

*"May Allah steal from you All that steals you from Him".*

*"The real work is in the Heart: Wake up your Heart! Because when the heart is completely awake, Then it needs no Friend.*

Rabia

## Guru Nanak and the Siddhas (Yogis)

Prof. Gurbachan Singh

**I**n his Pilgrimage of Truth to spread the holy Name of God among the people of India, divided into innumerable creeds and sub-creeds, Guru Nanak came upon a great center of Yoga in the northern parts of what is now called Uttar Pradesh. This was called, after Gorakhnath, the famous teacher of *Hatha-yoga*, *Gorakh-Matha* (Centre of Gorakh's Creed). It was located in the lower ranges of the Himalayas, above Pilibhit. Upon arriving at this center, Guru Nanak found the Yogis engaged in the cultivation of occult skills and the pursuit of miraculous powers, as enjoined by the practice of Tantra. They remained cut off from the life of the vast Indian humanity suffering under corrupt social systems and the depredation of tyrants, both Hindu and Muslim. These Yogis sought the miraculous powers said to be derived from arousing the *Kundalini* (the mysterious serpent-power) and practice of magic through the ritual of Tantra. Here the Guru brought the creed of the Holy Name, meditation, and pure life.

As the Guru appeared on their mound, the Yogis queried:  
*'Tell us, Novice, whose disciple are thou? Who hath initiated thee?'*

The Guru, whose spiritual state transcended creeds and form, called the minds of the Yogis to the infinite mystery of the Creator, the vision which is the ultimate end of Yoga.

Replied the Guru :

*"Where are the scales and who the weighman and who the gold-tester to comprehend Thee?*

*Where is the Master to whom I may supplicate for initiation?*

*Who may measure Thy worth, Oh Lord?*

*My Beloved, what do know I of Thy extent?  
Thou fillest the oceans and the continents with Thy Presence.  
Thou mayst be valued in the scales of the mind, by the weighman's  
soul;  
devotion to Thee the gold-tester;  
After weighing the Beloved in the heart, may my mind find rest.  
He alone is the scales and balance;  
He alone the weighman;  
He alone the buyer and seller; He, the sole merchant;  
Sealed in the blindness of ignorance,  
Among lowest of the lowly, and stranger to Him,  
Shaken by every whiff of desire —  
Such is Nanak's company—how may he in stubborn ignorance  
find the Lord?"*

One of the Yogis, Charpat, asked: *"The ocean of the world is stated to be impossible to cross; how to find its other shore?"*

The Guru's reply was:

*"As is the lotus untouched by the water; or the duck by the stream;  
So man, fixing his mind on the Eternal, may cross the ocean of the  
world—thus doth Nanak state the Truth;*

*Man must find the seclusion of absorption in the One, and  
maintain indifference amidst the attractions of the world."*

Another of the Yogis, Loharippa, said, *"Spiritual illumination comes by living away from towns and the human concourse, by partaking of wild roots and performing ablutions at sacred bathing-places."* This, he said, is the true Yoga-practice.

To this statement of what true Yoga is, the Guru gave the following reply:

*“One sheds not the slumber of ignorance while living away from human concourse, and outgrows not temptation to lust after woman;*

*Without absorption in God neither does the mind find rest nor is desire stilled;*

*The Lord hath created for me seclusion and loneliness in my own heart:*

*In following the Eternal, amid the normal life lies true commerce with God.*

*Nanak, with sleep abridged and spare diet, man may contemplate the Essence....*

*Yoga lies not in the begging-pouch, or in carrying a staff;*

*Nor in smearing the body with ashes.*

*Yoga lies not in ear-rings or in cropping the head, or in blowing the horn.*

*To live immaculate amidst the impurities of the world: This is the true yoga-practice.*

*Make contentment thy ear-rings; righteous endeavour thy begging bowl and pouch, and contemplation thy ashes;*

*Let all mankind be thy sect; conquering thus thyself, mayst thou be great among men.*

*Let thy diet be enlightenment;*

*Compassion thy dispenser of charities;*

*Let divine music resound in each heart.”*

The Yogis, then, began to display their miraculous powers, created thunder and lightning, and raised terrifying cries as of

howling beasts. Stones began to fly, and a commotion as of the world falling to pieces was produced. All through, the Guru sat unperturbed, composed. After the Yogis had finished with the display of their occult powers, he spoke in a calm voice, rising from the depth of his soul:

*“Reverend Sirs, I have little to show in the way of the marvels practiced by you. My sole support is the Word of God and holy company.*

*What are miracles worth?*

*Were I to wear the vesture of fire,*

*Lodge in a house of snow and feed on iron;*

*Were I to drink at a gulp all the suffering of mankind;*

*Were I to drive the earth about;*

*Were my will omnipotent and bind the  
universe in obedience; what even then?*

*God’s greatest gift is not such powers;*

*Great is one in whom is devotion to His Name.”*

After this he spoke to them, in a voice vibrating with the deep sense of mankind's suffering, and called upon them to betake themselves from their retreat to the world of men, to relieve suffering and teach true religion. Said he:

*“Reverend Sirs, the moon of righteousness lies hidden under the darkness of iniquity;*

*The dark night of evil hath covered the earth;*

*I have set out to find the light of Truth;*

*Those like you who are holy, have hidden themselves in mountain caves;*

*Who might then save the world?*

*Ignorant mendicants know little besides smearing themselves with ashes.*

*The whole world is in the grip of ruin for lack of a guide."*

Guru Nanak's spiritual-moral teaching disarmed the Yogis, who acknowledged the superiority of his way, in which the spiritual life led man to the path of service and compassion. The Yogic Centre, Gorakh-Matha came, in commemoration of Guru Nanak's visit, to be called *Nanak-Matha* (Centre of Nanak's Teaching) which name it bears till this day.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, August 1971)

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Someone asked Rabi'a one day, "*Whence comest thou?*"

*"From the other world."* was her reply.

*"And whither goest thou?"*

*"Into the other world."*

*"And what doest thou in this world?"*

*"I jest with it by eating its bread and doing the works of the other world in it."*

*"O Rabi'a,"* said another to her, "*dost thou love the Lord?*"

*"Truly,"* she replied, "*I love Him."*

*"And dost thou regard the Evil One as an enemy?"*

*"I love the Lord so much,"* she answered, "*that I do not trouble myself about the enmity of the Evil One."*

*"O my Lord, whatever share of this world You have bestowed on me, bestow it to my enemies, and whatever share of the next world You have for me, give it to my friends. You are enough for me".*

*"O God! if I worship Thee in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not thine everlasting beauty".*

Rabia

## illuminating Dialogues from Indian Lore

(Gargi and Yajnavalkya)

Swami Tadrupananda

The country of Videha was ruled by the great King Janaka. Once he performed a sacrifice in which plenty of gifts were given away to scholars and pious men. Erudite Brahmins from Kuru and Panchala, the famous seats of learning, were assembled there either on invitation or as spectators. At the sight of that large gathering of Vedic scholars, a desire arose in the mind of King Janaka to know who was the most erudite among them. He had a thousand young cows with horns adorned with gold brought near the place where the sacrifice was being conducted. Then, addressing the assembly, he declared, *'Respected sires, let him, the greatest Vedic scholar among you, take away these cows home.'*

Silence prevailed for a time, for none dared to claim that supreme honour for himself. Then Yajnavalkya rose and ordered his disciple to drive the cows to his home. But then a number of Brahmins sprang to their feet and challenged Yajnavalkya's tacit declaration of his own supremacy in scholarship. Volleys of questions were shot at him, to all of which he gave convincing replies. When one by one the scholars were silenced, there rose Gargi, the daughter of Vachaknu, to engage Yajnavalkya in a scholarly dispute. What followed is one of the most famous of Upanishadic dialogues.

Gar: 'If all that is composed of earth is pervaded within and without by water, what pervades water?'

Yaj: 'Air pervades water.'

Gar: 'What pervades air?'

Yaj: 'Sky pervades air.'

Gar: 'What pervades the sky?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of the *Gandharvas* (celestial minstrels) pervade the sky.'

Gar: 'What pervades the worlds of the Gandharvas?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of the sun pervade the worlds of the Gandharvas.'

Gar: 'What pervades the worlds of the sun?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of the moon pervade those of the sun.'

Gar: 'What pervades the worlds of the moon.'

Yaj: 'The worlds of the stars pervade those of the moon.'

Gar: 'What pervades the worlds of the stars?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of the Gods pervade those of the stars.'

Gar: 'What pervades the worlds of the Gods?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of Indra pervade those of the Gods.'

Gar: 'What pervades the worlds of Indra?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of Virat pervade those of Indra.'

Gar: 'What pervades the worlds of Virat?'

Yaj: 'The worlds of Hiranyagarbha pervade those of Virat.'

Gar: 'What pervades the worlds of Hiranyagarbha?'

At this stage Yajnavalkya realized that his illustrious interlocutor was going too far. The Reality which is beyond *Hiranyagarbha* (the Cosmic mind) cannot be known by the ordinary mind, much less described in words. Mind and speech turn backwards unable to reach the Supreme Reality which can be known only through direct intuitive experience.

Therefore, Yajnavalkya told Gargi, '*Do not, O Gargi, endeavour to go further in your attempt to know the Supreme Reality that pervades*

*Hiranyagarbha and, for that matter, pervades all the worlds previously mentioned. If you persist, your head may fall off!*

Thus admonished Gargi desisted from further questioning. Then Uddalaka, the son of Aruna, rose and put a series of brilliant questions to which Yajnavalkya gave luminous answers.

When Uddalaka sat down, Gargi again got up, this time with two more questions which she wanted to shoot, like arrows, at Yajnavalkya. But before asking those questions she asked for the permission of the erudite assembly. The consent was given and Gargi straightway held forth :

Gar: 'As water pervades the elemental earth, so what pervades the *Sutra* which is above heaven and below the earth, which embraces heaven and earth as well as the region between them and which according to the scriptures is timeless?'

Yaj: 'O Gargi, it is the unmanifested ether that pervades the *Sutra* thus and which is timeless.'

Gar : 'Salutation to you, Yajnavalkya. I am satisfied with your answer. But now, my second question.'

Yaj: 'Ask, O Gargi.'

Gar : 'What pervades the unmanifested ether?'

Yaj: 'O Gargi, the knowers of Brahman describe It as undecaying and unchanging. They say *Brahman* has no dimensions nor has it any colour. It is utterly unlike earth, water, air, fire or ether. It is partless, is neither internal nor external. Unlike the body and mind It has no organs.'

Thus indicating the attributeless nature of Brahman, Yajnavalkya proceeded to say how it nevertheless is the support and substratum of the entire manifested universe.

Said he, *'By the supreme command of this imperishable Being the sun and the moon keep their courses, the earth and sky remain apart, the illusion of time in all its subtle divisions is experienced, the rivers maintain their courses and the mountains tower over everything else. All beings, O Gargi, even the departed souls, depend on Brahman for their sustenance.'*

Yajnavalkya then exhorted Gargi to know the truth of Brahman by praising it : *'O Gargi, the merits derived by the performance of sacrifices are evanescent, Brahman alone is imperishable. One who leaves this world after gaining the knowledge of Brahman, he alone is a blessed soul, the others are all miserable slaves.'*

But the knowledge of Brahman cannot be gained for the asking. It is extremely subtle. To impress this fact on Gargi's mind, Yajnavalkya says next, *'O Gargi, this Immutable One is not the object of sight, of hearing, of the mind or of the intellect; It Itself is the Seer, the Hearer, the Thinker and the Knower. It is Consciousness itself. It is all-pervading and sees through all eyes, hears through all ears, thinks through all minds, knows through all intellects. Indeed, It pervades all elements from the earth to the unmanifested ether'.*

The above words so authoritatively spoken by the great sage had removed all the doubts of Gargi. And with that magnanimity that characterises great minds, she concluded her debate with the following words:

*'O Venerable Brahmanas, you should consider it a great Blessing if you can get away by saluting Yajnavalkya. I am convinced that he stands supreme amongst you all in the knowledge of Brahman.'*

So saying the daughter of Vachaknu ceased talking.

Source: (Chapter III, sections 6 and 8 of *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.)

## Eckhartian Dialogue

Philip L. Griggs

(Continued from the last issue)

Q. Do you mean to say that a man can, in this body, reach a state where he is incapable of sin?

A. Now on this point, the seers debate; the best authorities say, 'Yes,' alluding to souls so perfectly disciplined, outwardly and inwardly, that they have no propensity to sin.

Q. Can a man fall, so to speak, from the state of divine union, back into sin?

A. I believe — no I am sure — that the man who is established in this state can in no way at any time be separated from God. I hold that he can in no way lapse into mortal sin. He would rather suffer the most shameful death, as the saints have done before him, than commit the least of mortal sins. I hold that he cannot willingly commit, nor yet consent to, even a lesser sin, whether in himself or in another. So strongly is he drawn to this way, so much is he habituated to it, that he could never turn to any other; to this way all his senses and powers are directed.

Q. Some say, "To do God's will is the highest state." Do you think there is a higher?

A. There is, and I have just been speaking of it. Because, you see, in the abstract Godhead there is no activity. The soul is not perfectly beatified until it casts itself into the desolate Deity where neither act nor form exists, and there, merged in the void, loses itself: as self it perishes, but is alive in God.

Q. Sir, there is much debate: does this power to realize God lie in God or in the soul?

A. I say the power lies in the soul; or better, the energy is in God, and the capacity is in the soul. If I were wholly what I am I should be God; there would be for me neither time nor place nor change. There is nothing so easy to me, so possible, as to be God, to remain what I really am.

Q. How can we please God? In what is he made most happy?

A. In self-perception. All God wants of us is for us to go out of ourselves with respect to our creatureliness, and let God be God in us.

Q. What is needful to attain love of God?

A. Four things: first, a real dispassion toward creatures; second, the right sort of active life; third, the right sort of contemplative life; fourth, an aspiring heart.

Q. Why don't we taste God's love?

A. Because our tongue is furred with the slime of created things, and does not possess the salt of divine affection. If we had Godly love we should savour God and all the works of God, and should receive all things from him, and be doing the same work as he does.

Q. You speak of doing his work; why is it the saints seem so anxious to serve only the Lord at every moment? What is the great incentive?

A. You see, it is because they have tasted God, and it would be strange indeed if, once tasting and enjoying God, the soul could stomach anything else! As one saint says, once the soul tries God, she finds the things that are not God repugnant and distasteful.

Q. What is God's love for us like?

A. Will you understand if I tell you it is an arrow, sped without anger, and received without pain? You do not need to seek him here or there. He is no further off than at the door of your heart; there he stands lingering, awaiting whoever is ready to open and let him in. You do not need to call to him far off. He waits much more impatiently than you for you to open to him. He longs for you a thousand times more urgently than you for him.

Q. What does Christ mean by being "poor in spirit"?

A. He means those who will nothing, know nothing, have nothing. Being poor in spirit means being poor of all particular knowledge. As long as it can be said of a man that it is his will to do the will of God, he has not this poverty; he should be empty of will and desire. A man should be as free of his own knowledge as he was when he did not exist, free even of the knowledge of God's work in him. Finally a man should be so poor that he has no place in him for God to work. To preserve place is to preserve distinction. Now I say more: I pray God to rid me even of God! How can I say such a thing? Because conditionless being is above God and above distinction; it was in this that I became myself, herein I willed myself and knew myself to make this man I call "I," and in this sense I am my own cause. For this am I born, and as to my birth which is eternal, I can never die. In my eternal mode of birth I have always been, am now, and shall remain eternally. What I am in time shall die, for it is of the day and passes with the day. In my birth all things were born, and I was the cause of mine own self and all things, and had I willed it, I would never have been, nor any thing, and if I had not been, then God would not have been either.

I see you have not followed me. You do not have to understand this. Never mind; until you are like this truth you will not see my argument, for it is the naked truth straight from the heart of God.

Q. But how can we possibly be "perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect"?

A. You are thinking of an accumulation of virtuous qualities. But my child, perfection means fulfilment. Imperfection means time. When time drops from you, your time is fulfilled. Time ends when there is no before and after, when you see at a glance all that has ever happened and will ever happen. In this immediate vision you will possess all things. This is the perfection of time, and there you are perfect, and are truly the only son of God, and Christ.

Q. What do you understand by "the kingdom of God," of which Christ speaks so often?

A. God's kingdom means the soul being full of God, and nothing of itself. God's kingdom is himself, and his perfect nature. There, there is neither time nor space, before nor after, but everything present is one new, fresh-springing now where millenniums last longer than the twinkling of an eye. There every spirit rejoices in the joy of every other, relishing it each in his degree; every inhabitant of the kingdom of heaven is, knows, and loves in God, in his own self, and in every other spirit. Again, as you know, Christ has said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you."

Q. Why did our Lord say, "I, if I be lifted up, shall draw all men unto me"?

A. I believe he meant that when he dawns upon our heart and understanding, he gathers us up into himself. In this sense all creatures are one man, and that man is God. In this sense man is all things. For he has the nature of all beings, and souls joined to Christ are in this sense one man with him. And like Christ, loving yourself you love all men as yourself. So long as you love anyone less than your own self, you do not truly love yourself! Love all men in one man who is both God and man.

(To be continued)

## **Programme for March - April 2017**

Sunday discourses begin at the  
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 p.m.  
Tel: 01628 526464 [www.vedantauk.com](http://www.vedantauk.com)

Mar 5	Jnana Yoga 6	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar 12	Jnana Yoga 7	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar 19	Jnana Yoga 8	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar 26	Jnana Yoga 9	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 2	Jnana Yoga 10	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 9	Jnana Yoga 11	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 16	Jnana Yoga 12	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 23	Jnana Yoga 13	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr 30	Day Retreat	

### **Day Retreat**

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda  
at the Vedanta Centre,  
on 30<sup>th</sup> April from 10:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.  
Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

An Arab visiting Hasan Basri asked for a definition of patience. Hasan answered:

“There are two kinds of patience: one kind consists in bearing afflictions and calamities bravely and in abstaining from what the Most High has forbidden, the other kind consists in never lending an ear to the suggestions of the Evil One.”

“As for me,” said the Arab, “I have never seen anyone more retiring from the world and more patient than thy self.”

“Alas,” answered Hasan, “my renunciation of the world and my patience count as nothing.”

“Why dost thou say so?” exclaimed the Arab.

“Because if I practice renouncement it is only from dread of punishment, and if I keep patient it is only because I hope to get my reward. Now that man alone deserves to be taken into account who, without self-regarding motives practices patience for the sake of the Most High, and whose renouncement of the world has not any reward for its object, but only the desire to please God. Such a way of acting is a manifest sign of sincerity of heart.”

Sufi wisdom

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## Vedanta

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*Editor:* Swami Dayatmananda

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Hasan Basri once asked the great Sufi Saint Rabi'a if she ever thought of marrying.

She answered, *"The marriage contract can be entered into by those who have possession of their free-will. As for me, I have no will to dispose of. I belong to the Lord, and I rest in the shadow of His commandment, counting myself as nothing."*

*"But,"* said Hasan, *"how have you arrived at such a degree of piety?"*

*"By annihilating myself completely."*

Someone asked Rabi'a one day, *"Whence comest thou?"* "

*"From the other world."* was her reply.

*"And whither goest thou?"*

*"Into the other world."*

(Rabia)

