

Vedanta

401 MAY - JUNE 2018

How to become Divine
Swami Trigunatitananda

What Did Christ Teach
Swami Budhananda



Divine Wisdom

Nirvanastakam

Swami Vivekananda

I am neither the mind, nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor the
mind-stuff;
I am neither the body, nor the changes of the body;
I am neither the senses of hearing, taste, smell, or sight,
Nor am I the ether, the earth, the fire, the air;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute—
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I am neither the Prana, nor the five vital airs;
I am neither the materials of the body, nor the five sheaths;
Neither am I the organs of action, nor object of the senses;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute—
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I have neither aversion nor attachment, neither greed nor
delusion;
Neither egotism nor envy, neither Dharma nor Moksha;
I am neither desire nor objects of desire;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute—
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I am neither sin nor virtue, neither pleasure nor pain;
Nor temple nor worship, nor pilgrimage nor scriptures,
Neither the act of enjoying, the enjoyable nor the enjoyer;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute—
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

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Editorial

Sacrifice

It is said in the Vedas that the Lord (*Purusha*) made a sacrifice of himself for the sake of creation, and he is sustaining it through continual sacrifice; for it is he who is manifest in the form of the sun, the moon, air, water, fire, earth etc.

Creation came out of sacrifice; hence sacrifice is the law of life; Life is a continual act of sacrifice. Willingly or unwillingly everyone is forced to participate in this sacrifice. We receive and we give out. If we do not give we will not be able to receive, we die! Just imagine what happens if you only breathe in but never breathe out! Selfishness is self-destructive really. Lord Krishna tells us in the *Gita* that one who does not live a life of sacrifice lives in vain, that is he remains ignorant and suffers.

One of the most important spiritual qualities is to make life a sacrificial act.

In Vedic times the ancient seers used to light a fire and perform varieties of sacrificial rites. Most of these were performed either for the fulfilment of some personal desires or for the general welfare.

In course of time the Vedic seers acquired a holistic vision. They understood that the whole universe is an integrated whole and that everything depends upon everything else, both the living and the non-living. This understanding gave rise to the concept of the five great sacrifices incumbent upon every householder. Devout study of the scriptures and teaching them to students, worship of the gods, worship of the ancestors, feeding the lower animals, and serving fellow human beings, are the five sacrifices. This is the concept which led Hinduism to deify rivers, mountains, animals etc.

By the time of the *Gita* the term "sacrifice" had acquired new and deeper spiritual connotations. Any act which brings us nearer

to God, helps us to become less selfish, and leads to the welfare of society, came to be considered as a sacrifice. The *Bhagavad Gita* (4th chapter) enumerates twelve types of sacrifices, such as the worship of gods, charity, the study of scriptures, sense-control, food-control, the acquisition of knowledge etc. All these are considered sacrifices because they lead one gradually to the unfoldment of one's divinity. Of these sacrifices *Brahma-Yajna*, seeing Brahman in everything, is considered the best; it is the goal of all spiritual endeavour.

Sacrifice becomes valid only when it entails some amount of loss, pain or inconvenience. If a rich man donates even a large amount of money it cannot really be called a sacrifice since it does not deprive him of much. The widow's mite is a far greater sacrifice. (Perhaps some readers might recall the story of the mongoose in the Mahabharata!)

Spiritual life is an attempt to transform every action into an act of sacrifice. For an act to become a sacrifice it must fulfil four conditions.

1. It must entail some amount of deprivation.
2. It must be done without the expectation of any return.
3. It must be done for pleasing the divine only.
4. It must help reduce selfishness and egotism, and must be done unselfconsciously.

There are, again, four stages through which the sacrificial journey progresses.

The first stage of sacrifice is where we feel enormous gratitude for all that life is providing us, including loss, failure, pain, suffering etc; for pain is a great teacher and leads us Godward.

In the second stage we express our gratefulness in some form of return—charity, service, prayer etc.

In the third stage we feel strongly that the whole world is a manifestation of God and that everything in it really belongs to Him only.

In the last stage one becomes firmly established in this knowledge, and joyously participates in the divine sport.

Swami Vivekananda described Sri Ramakrishna as ‘*pranarpana*’, i.e, one who has offered his life as a sacrifice at the altar of humanity. Christ accepted crucifixion for the sake of mankind. The same may be said of Rama, Krishna, Buddha and every great person. It is through sacrifice that one becomes great and glorious. Greatness is directly proportionate to sacrifice – sacrifice of time, energy, wealth, comforts etc. Giving up of selfishness, self-pity, sloth, pessimism, fault-finding, stubborn false opinions, bearing criticism and calamities calmly, sincerely attempting to reduce one’s ego – all these, are spiritually helpful forms of sacrifice. Complete self-surrender to the divine is the ultimate act of sacrifice.

One of the purposes of an Incarnation of God is to inspire us with this ideal of sacrifice.

“Let us ...give up our whole body and mind and everything as an eternal sacrifice unto the Lord. ...In search of wealth in this world, Thou art the only wealth I have found; I sacrifice myself unto Thee. In search of someone to be loved, Thou art the only one beloved I have found: I sacrifice myself unto Thee. Let us repeat this day and night....

(Swami Vivekananda)

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.*

(H. W. Longfellow)

Swami Dayatmananda

How to become Divine

Swami Trigunatitananda

Introduction

*S*wami Trigunatitananda — or more simply known as Swami Trigunatita — lectured and taught in the United States for more than a decade. Next to Swami Abhedananda, he spent a greater number of years in this country than any other disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, arriving in San Francisco at the beginning of 1903 to succeed Swami Turiyananda, who had returned to India. He brought with him the qualities of austerity, leonine strength, and a perceptive intellect, all of which would be immensely useful in not only sustaining him in a foreign land, but inspiring the hearts of his followers. Swami Trigunatita was born into an aristocratic family of Calcutta in 1865. His pre-monastic name was Sarada Prasanna Mitra. His parents believed that Sarada was born to them through the grace of the Divine Mother, so they named their child after Her. He was brilliant at school, and the family looked forward to raising a scholarly and successful son.

A simple gold watch, however, was to indirectly change his life. Sarada lost the watch, which he greatly treasured, during the second day of his entrance examinations at Calcutta University. The loss so upset him that he performed poorly and passed in the second division only. He grieved for weeks over his low marks.

Like a number of other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada was a student at the Metropolitan Institution, whose headmaster was Mahendranath Gupta (“M”), the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. “M” felt a deep affection for Sarada. Although he knew that the boy had been spoiled by his parents and was acting childishly, his keen intuitive sense alerted him to Sarada’s deeper and greater potential. So instead of scolding

him, he took the boy to Sri Ramakrishna. Sarada immediately felt drawn to the Master. Thereafter, he visited Dakshineswar regularly.

Also like the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada was strongly religious as a child. His father, who was a great devotee, encouraged him in his yearnings. Sarada read the scriptures regularly, and when only a young boy memorized more than a hundred Sanskrit hymns. His meeting with Sri Ramakrishna quickened even more spiritual precociousness.

Sarada's birth into a proud family had caused him to regard all physical work as menial. One hot day, Ramakrishna requested Sarada to fetch some water and wash his feet. The boy flushed with embarrassment, for several of his friends were present and they were looking at him intently. Ramakrishna repeated the request and Sarada had no other choice but to obey. He said later that this incident broke his pride and began his education in the spirit of service.

Despite his reputation as a bright student, Sarada was rapidly losing interest in school. His mind was turning inward more and more. Secular knowledge was growing insipid to him. His parents noticed this and became alarmed. Secretly they arranged his marriage, thereby hoping to draw his mind back to more practical things. When Sarada learned of it, he fled the house on foot and journeyed to the holy city of Puri. Several days later, however, his parents found him in the city and forced him to return home.

His elder brother was in such fear that Sarada would become a monk that he paid a huge sum of money for the performance of a sacrificial ceremony lasting six weeks, hoping to change his mind by supernatural means. But he was unsuccessful.

Finally Sarada joined the monastery at Baranagore and became Swami Trigunatitananda. Although he undertook several pilgrimages, Trigunatita mostly stayed at the Baranagore monastery. In 1897 he organized relief work during a famine in the Dinajpur district, and laboured day and night in distributing food to the starving population. His own requirements regarding food were strange and deserve some mention. He could subsist

for days together on only a few pieces of fruit; then again he could eat enough for four or five people at a sitting. Swami Prabhavananda heard the following story from Swami Brahmananda regarding the eating habits of Trigunatita:

One time Trigunatita was on his way to visit Holy Mother at Jayarambati in the company of a small boy. They both went to a restaurant, and the Swami asked the owner whether the boy would be charged the same price. The man curtly replied that he would. However, said the owner, you may each eat as much as you wish. Thereupon, Trigunatita proceeded to order and consume huge quantities of food. He only stopped when the owner approached him with folded palms. *“Holy Sir, I won’t charge you anything for what you have eaten, but now you must stop, because we have no more food in the house!”*

Shortly after the monastery moved to Alambazar, Vivekananda expressed the desire to start a Bengali journal to disseminate the message of Vedanta. He selected Trigunatita to head the project. With characteristic zeal, the Swami undertook the assignment, and the magazine Udbodhan went to press. Swami Vivekananda was later heard to remark that the herculean effort expended by Trigunatita was only possible for a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna dedicated to the good of humanity.

After Vivekananda’s death in 1902, Trigunatita was asked by Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Order, to take charge immediately of the San Francisco Center. Vivekananda had made this request prior to his passing away. Therefore, he sailed in October of the same year, arriving in January, 1903. He was determined to remain a vegetarian at all costs, and believing in his simplicity that he might be unable to find vegetables in America, was prepared to live on bread and water.

Under the Swami’s supervision, the first Hindu temple in America was built in 1906, shortly before the disastrous earthquake. It survived, however, and still stands to this day.

The Swami lived and worked among a small band of monks and nuns he had organized and infused with the spirit of renunciation. His lessons in the religious life were practical and not always easy to obey, for Trigunatita strongly believed in a disciplined and ordered routine. He was fond of maxims and mottos. Hung on the wall were: "Live like a hermit, but work like a horse." "Do it now," and "Do or die — but you will not die." He also believed in chanting and singing as devotional exercises and would often lead his monks in singing on the roof of the temple or along the shore of the Bay, astonishing the fishermen and passers-by.

Once a year Trigunatita took a selected group of students to Shanti Ashrama, an isolated retreat in the San Antonio Valley, founded earlier by Swami Turiyananda. From 3:45 a.m. to 10 p.m. the group of devotees chanted, read from the scriptures, meditated, listened to lectures by the Swami, and engaged in the necessary work to maintain the ashrama. Most of the visitors found it a profitable and uplifting experience. Swami Trigunatita believed in concentrated work, for he would often say, "a mind which is attached to more than one thing can never reach the goal." Those who visited the ashrama learned the importance of that maxim.

Shortly after Christmas in 1914, Trigunatita was holding a Sunday service when a young man, who was mentally unbalanced, ran into the temple and threw a bomb at the Swami. The explosion killed the young man and badly hurt the Swami, who was immediately removed to a hospital. On the way, the Swami expressed only compassion for his attacker, and inquired about his condition. Two weeks later, after suffering much pain, he passed away.

One final incident should be related concerning the tragic and somewhat unaccountable death of Swami Trigunatita. Only shortly after his death, Swami Brahmananda was sitting with his disciples many thousands of miles away at the Belur Monastery in India. A cable arrived informing those present of the death of Trigunatita. Maharaj looked at the group and said,

"Sarada appeared before me yesterday. I knew then something bad happened to him."

How do we become divine? Even before attempting to answer this question, let us first ask ourselves:

"Are we satisfied with our present condition?" If our reply is "no," only then can we proceed to answer the first question. For if satisfied with our life, we shall certainly have no wish to struggle toward divinity. Only by having this prerequisite, as it were, of dissatisfaction with our present lot will we seek a higher and nobler level of existence.

By stating that man wants to become divine we appear to be suggesting that man is one thing and God another. It is not that. When we speak about "*becoming God*" we are referring to the realization of our real nature, which is Godhood; that is what is really involved in this quest for God. It is not that we are one thing and we want something else. The truth of the matter is that we *are God*, but we have forgotten that we are. We need to recall our divine nature. It is as though we did something years past, something we have forgotten. But when we sit quietly, trying to think of it — at once it comes back to us. For some inexplicable reason, our real nature has been forgotten, and it is this nature, this state we want to remember, that is the process of becoming divine.

Initially, it is important that we thoroughly understand this world. In order to do this, we must study closely. For instance, sit down in a corner of any park. You will observe many persons walking about, apparently quite content and happy. Some are picnicking, others playing; all are engaged in a variety of activities. But there is one thing they share in common — forgetfulness. They have forgotten the *real* thing, while engaging themselves in the unreal. They have forgotten their own real natures. They believe

this world to be a place of happiness; that this body and mind are sources of satisfaction; that this ego is the doer and the enjoyer.

If you have ever loved the world with your whole heart and deeply studied its nature, you have discovered it to be full of bitterness. Outside, the world shines, but within it is poison. And our divine nature, our divine Mother, our divine Father is this very moment calling us away. *“Hurry up! Hurry up! You are in a foreign country. The world is not yours, nor is your body, your ego, nor your mind. You belong elsewhere.”* If you sit quietly, by yourself, something will call to you. Something will softly sound within you. You will find a voice urging you: *“Come home, come home.”* We are to be pitied if we do not listen to this Voice. For if we do not, it will take us longer, more time to return home. Afterwards, it may happen that we will find it too late to improve. Unless we check the movement of our senses toward objects of this world, unless we stop those channels, we will not be able to open the main channel — the one through which we receive the divine Spirit, the divine Force. Life is a matter of spending. And in the world we are spending all our energy. We are not even trying to save a little of this energy for the future. We are spending all our heart, mind, and soul — our most beautiful and valuable possessions — in vain. And we are not even learning a lesson from this.

If you have ever loved a person with your whole heart, you know that this love can never satisfy you, If you have done much for your country, you have found out that neither you nor your country have gained anything from your sacrifice. The result in all these things is misery, unhappiness, wasted time, and wasted energy. Time and energy are invaluable commodities to us. When a moment of our life is spent, it is gone forever.

It will never come back. Every moment we are losing the most valuable of all things — time and energy. If we fail to use them wisely, we will suffer for it. We will have to pay dearly for this love of the world.

So long as we have even a little energy, we should think carefully of our time, our life, and our actions. If we are aware of these things, then we will find a higher object, something of a higher nature to perform. When we become aware of that “*want*,” that spiritual need in us, then we will sense the nothingness, the worthlessness of the world. Of course, some persons think that we must look upon the world as beautiful, and in this way rise higher and higher; but this is a great mistake. Most persons cannot live in the world well; so, in the beginning, we have to sever our connections with it.

Now, do not be afraid. By giving up the world we do not mean an *absolute* giving up, but rather a giving up within the mind. If you embrace the world, keep a few inches of space between — and then embrace it. Do not consider it your own. Do not forget your own nature. Beware of doing good to the world. *The real way to do good to the world is to do good to yourself*; remember that charity begins at home. First understand your own position and then you will understand others.

Last Sunday we said that if we think of beautiful things, we ourselves can become beautiful. Our thoughts, actions, every thing we do, including the company we keep, help to mould our lives. Every thought of ours does something toward shaping our life. If we think good thoughts, these thoughts will be expressed in our face. If we perform a good deed, it too will appear on our face; the same with a wrong deed. If we think of a bad person, by and by we will gradually become bad ourselves. If we think of

good persons, we become good. *If we think of God, we become God.* It is not by hypnotism, but by thought; not by transfer of thought or materialization, but sheer scientific fact that we can become God.

There is no transfer of one thing to another thing; no process of changing into God is involved. It is a matter of realizing the truth that is hidden within us. It is the same as blowing ashes from a fire. We do not transfer one thing to another, but simply discover the thing that is in the ashes. So within our *maya*, within our own nature is hidden the divine Spirit. We must peel away the coverings of this Spirit until it is reached. If we remind ourselves of the worthlessness of the body, mind and ego; if we think each a day of death, of how this life may end the next moment; if we think of these things often and very deeply, then we will begin to notice something within us of real truth. And in time we will come to realize our true nature, our Godhood.

These questions Followed The Lecture:

Q—The Bible mentions that no man has ever known God. Will you comment on that, Swami?

A—Let us examine the meaning of that expression — “No man has known God.” It is really so, because man means, generally speaking, the body, the mind and the little ego taken together; and so long as we identify ourselves with these things, we cannot be expected to know God. No man can know God. It is the divine nature in man that knows him, not the human nature of man, which is mortal and transitory. But if you can evolve the divine nature within yourself, then by that nature you can know God; and when you evolve that divine nature, you are no longer a man, but a divine person. It is that divine person which can know God.

God alone can know God. He himself can know him, nobody else. Unless you become God, you cannot know God.

Q—Do you mean to say that the divine in us is exactly identical with God?

A—Yes, exactly identical.

Q—There is really no difference?

A— No difference. It is forgetfulness, it is the illusion, it is maya, that makes us think differently.

Q—Are we really free agents in life or is there a power which draws us onward in spite of ourselves?

A—In a sense, we are our own agents working towards that goal. Every person, in some way or other, is advancing towards that. Some will arrive later, some sooner. That is the only difference.

Q—But is not the attraction irresistible?

A—Yes, irresistible to some, but not to all. If you notice that there is an attraction which you cannot resist, you will attempt to satisfy the needs of that attraction. And some day you may succeed. On the other hand, if you try again and again to resist that attraction, then a day will come when you will be successful. You know, human power is greater than any force in the world. Man can overcome even the laws of nature. If we try to get rid of our attachment to the world, we can succeed. Do not give up the fight, do not give up. Struggle. Be sure that some day will come when you will be crowned with success. That is the law. Our repeated attempts and untiring perseverance will never go in vain.

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What Did Christ Teach

Swami Budhananda

(I)

“In The beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Now we may say about the teachings of Christ that they are but God become words. Therefore whenever we study his teachings, we abide in God. What did Christ teach?

There was the living Christ of Galilee. There was the dying Christ of the cross. And there is the eternal Christ of resurrection. And the most vibrant sort of teachings have come to us from all these three-in-one, and one-in-three. The power of these teachings is unlimited. As long as hills and mountains stand on the earth, as long as rivers flow to the ocean, these teachings will abide. In living or dying or rising again Christ taught us two things: (a) Ways of God’s manward movement, (b) Ways of man’s Godward movement. And this he did in two ways: by his spoken words and by his conduct.

There is the Hindu idea that the giver of food is indeed a benefactor, for he saves life. But the giver of education to the ignorant is a greater benefactor, for he helps you to win the struggle for existence. But the greatest benefactor is he who brings you knowledge of God.

There is no greater benefactor of men than he who brings us tidings about God and shows us ways of reaching Him. Christ brought us these tidings in their utter simplicity and fullness. Christ is one of the greatest benefactors of men. Christ is *nonpareil*. Christ is wondrous. He is as beautiful as sacrificial fire fed with clarified butter and nourished by the spirit of sacred words. He is *satyam, shivam, sundaram*. He is the truth. He is auspiciousness itself. He, indeed, is beautiful.

(II)

What did Christ teach about God? Through what he did and said Christ impresses upon our soul the fact of God. He teaches that God is: that of all facts in the world, the greatest fact is God. God alone matters in the ultimate analysis. Whatever else matters, it does in and through God. Christ brings

God so livingly to us that you can almost ‘*smell*’ Him as you read the New Testament.

Christ teaches that God is. But this fact of God can be accepted only in the manner of one’s being. That is why Christ speaks of ‘*Father in heaven*’, of the vine and its branches, and the kingdom of heaven within. According to our inner coming up alone we could accept God. To the body-bound man Christ brings the image of Father in heaven. To the mentally evolved man Christ brings the intra-cosmic God. ‘*I and my Father are one.*’ To those who are conscious that they are souls and not bodies Christ reveals the kingdom of God within. These are not three Gods invented by Christ, but three ways of viewing one God according to our spiritual competency.

It could be that God is: yet He might be without meaning for me. No, this cannot be said about the God that Christ brings to us. You cannot say that the God that Christ brings to you has no meaning for you. You will see that. For God not only is, He also loves. And you cannot but be sharer in His love, because He not only loves those who are good, but also those who are not so good, and even those who by all accepted standards are bad. Now you must be somewhere; so you cannot escape love of God. The parable of the prodigal son reveals that for the fallen and the weak God has a very tender feeling, and for his redemption He would do anything.

The God of Christ is not so much the God of law. He is the God of love, a tender, anxious God who watches our steps and sighs for our return when we turn away from Him. He is not a cold God with whom nothing matters. He is the warm-hearted, compassionate God whose eyes glisten and who rejoices when the straying soul returns home.

Then the self-suffering of God through the crucifixion of Christ also holds before us an image of God who would stop nowhere for redeeming souls. Crucifixion is not a human crime, it is a divine abandon. It is not a thing to be ashamed of, but a thing to be thankful for. Vivid glow of the Saviour’s blood is not a thing to be screened off. In it we are given the most convincing testimony that the living God is also the loving God. You can be indifferent even to a living God, but how can you — how can you if you are not a fool — be indifferent to a loving God? In a large way in his time, Christ brought to man a *different* God to whom you cannot be *indifferent*.

But then, if you were such a sinner that you could not venture to return, — you have not the will to return — if you have gone down the slope and

come to the bottom of the pit, what about God there? Could you expect to lift your wan eyes to see a compassionate face brooding on your sorrow? You could. Because the God Christ brings to us is the God of the present. What do those words ‘*God of the present*’ mean?

Meister Eckhart, explaining the concept in one of his sermons says: ‘*God is God of the present; as He finds a man, so He takes him, and accepts him, not for what he has been, but for what he is now.*’ Continuing he says:

‘*Even if your sins were as great in number as all mankind’s put together, still He (God) would not count them against you and would still have as much confidence in you as He ever had in any creature. If only He finds you ready, He will pay no attention to what you were before*’¹

(¹ Meister Eckhart, Harper Brothers, Publishers. New York, p. 18)

Such a God Christ brings to us.

When we stand before God trembling because of our sense of sin and guilt, unable to look at His face, He does not ask for the log-book of our past sins. He lifts us at once and glorifies us and *celebrates* our return.

God is not a moralist. He is the Saviour. But He gives you freedom to go away from Him, to deny Him. That is because He respects you. The given freedom to sin which man enjoys is God’s *salutation* to men. Temptations to which men are led are the hallmarks of God’s faith in man. Otherwise would He like to crush Himself? Is He a mad God? Therefore man’s return is sweet. Such an occasion causes rejoicing in heaven. Heaven is not a sanctimonious exile. It is the covenant between God and man realized. It is there where man has stopped questioning foolishly the *bona fides* of God and because of that found inner certitude. Narrow is the gate to this heaven, as Christ says. Because by all the broad ways of the world you find situated those gala houses of Maya.

This God of Christ *who so very much is*, vivid and vibrant, who loves in such a tremendous manner, who is the God of the present, is an inescapable God too. What do we mean by saying ‘*inescapable God*’?

Of God there are various concepts. Some concepts place you on the run as it were after a continually *receding God*. He is like a mirage in the desert. You are constantly the fool. He is always the conjurer. Whatever you do there

is no end to His fresh demands, which you can never expect to fulfil being what you are. Many of us are just bone-tired running after such a receding God.

But from Christ we receive the inescapable God, the receiving God, the rushing God, the anxious God with out-stretched arms. God whom you cannot escape, for He is the constantly *manward moving God*; in the language of the poet, Thompson, the writer of the '*Hound of Heaven*:'

“down the nights and down the days

“down the arches of the years

“down the labyrinthine ways of your own mind. ...”

You may be moving away, further and further away from God, but *suddenly you confront Him*.

We are constantly confronting this manward moving God. But also we know Him not!

Christ cautions us about this and asks us to be on the alert. In the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel we have some of the grandest teachings of the Bible. The Vedantin is awe-struck to find to what a perfection the principles of Vedanta found exemplification in Christ's life and teachings. In this chapter we find Christ admonishing mankind somewhat in this wise:

‘If you have fed the hungry, if you have given drink to the thirsty, if you have given shelter to the stranger, clothed the naked, nursed the sick, visited the prisoners in the jail, if you have done it unto one of the least of my brethren, you have done it unto me.’

‘In case you have not done it to the least of my brethren, you have not done it unto me’.

Vedanta warns us — and Christ does exactly the same — beware how you behave in this world for God is going about using all sorts of names and forms. It is not that God is nowhere. *God is now here*, here and now, God is everywhere. Whom do you venture to oppress and suppress? Whom do you dare insult and injure? O fool, is there anyone anywhere but living, breathing God going about? Fall on your face and worship.

Very true. No one knows the Father except through the son.

What you love most, even more than one you most love, is your own life. And there is nothing more you can give than your life. Therefore, when you give up your life for someone willingly, you have proved that you have loved him more than yourself. In Christ's crucifixion God's love for mankind was proved. Such is the God Christ's teachings bring to us. How could we have a more living and loving and lovable God?

(III)

In two ways, by his words and by his life, Christ taught the ways of man's Godward movement. Christ brought an increasing purpose, as it were, in the motivations of his inherited faith. He brought about a new demand for manifesting the inner might of men, the revolutionary impact of which blinded the vision of the religious men of vested interests.

If God of Christ's teaching is grand and overpowering, man of Christ's concept is equally so:

- 'The kingdom of heaven is within you
- 'Ye are the light of the world.
- 'Ye are the salt of the earth.
- 'Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.
- 'Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.
- 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.'

All these teachings bring before us an image of man who is not the grovelling man of the dust but the soaring man of the empyrean. For the man of Christ's conception salvation is imminent, kingdom of God is there within him. Christ's man, being violent, can take the kingdom of heaven by force. Such is his pent up power that his asking is answered by the Most High. If he would knock the secret door, all divine mystery will be open. If he will seek, nothing will remain unfound.

All the daring of his thought, the might of his blazing purity, and the infinitude of his love — by manifesting all this in himself — Christ also got embodied in his image of man.

Such was Christ's faith in man's might that he even taught freely to all and sundry, '*resist not evil*'. Who can do that? Only Christ-like men, and to Christ, to incomparable Christ, all were Christ-like. For were not all men made in the image of God? Therefore, he asks us to live in the manner of his own thinking, not thinking of the morrow. Who can do that? Only the man

who lives in the eternity. He asks us to give away everything; to take up the cross and follow him. Who can do that? He alone for whom pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, life and death — and all the pairs of opposites — mean nothing, who is established in the *Atman*. Christ believes man can do all that and much more.

If today we dare not think that Christ's teachings are practical, it is not because Christ was wrong in any sense, but because Christ was son of man and we are shopkeepers, counting without end little things of profit and loss. We have thoughtlessly thrown away all our powers by identifying ourselves with our least embellishment, and are crying for redress. But we would not dare see our own faces in the mirror of self-realization.

There is so much sin-talk in the church, but how little did he talk of sin! Christ talked all the time of man's imminent redemption, possible perfection, and of the exploding kingdom of God from within and the disappearance of all that is unmanly and ungodly. While Christ retained all his blasts and thunder — he could be very harsh indeed for the hypocrites — he did not strike the sinners even with a flower. He melted on them in infinite compassion and lifted them in tenderest of manners. Look at the sweet way he regarded Mary Magdalene. Look at the manner he saved the fallen woman from being stoned to death. How can a son of God be harsh to sinners? Which mother has not a special affection and special prayer for the child at home who is lying in the sick bed? Sin and be sure God is by your side. If even human mothers are ashamed of the invalid children they bear, will not God have some good sense about sinners? So Christ said: *Be not worried, repent and sin no more*. That is all you have to do about your sin; and forget all about it. Then go on asking, knocking, and seeking as hard as you can.

Now when this man of God moved God-ward — for that can be his only direction of movement — how does he do it? Christ taught men to feel the *immediacy* of God and His utter responsiveness. Then he taught us that simple Lord's Prayer. God knows even without our asking what we need. Yet Christ taught us to ask in the simplest way for it pleases God to hear this lispings. Christ, as a part of discipline for inner growth, taught us to develop our social sense on the basis of our relation with the common Father. If he asked us to treat our neighbour as ourselves, it is because if we do not serve God who is going about, we can never be sure about where we are going, spiritually speaking.

That love which does not flow to God but only to man is ignorance. That love which does not flow to man but only to one's concept of God is ignorance too. For God abstracted from His creatures is not God, but only *a concept of God*. It is one thing to worship God. It is totally a different thing to worship a concept of God. If we are seeking to worship God, but not merely our concept of God then we must follow this precept of Christ:

'Therefore if thou bringest thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

'Leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift'

And remember, when a child walks over the snows in a distant land leaving trails of blood flowing from the bare cracked feet; and when a mother has nothing wherewith to clothe her babe, or feed it; when a man bent with age and disfigured by pain cannot have medical treatment — and in uncountable other ways men and women suffer — these are cases for everyone to do something about before we go to the altar. And everything will have to be done humbly and with love, in the way He washed the feet of His disciples.

How much should we do for others? The most powerful teaching of Christ, not so much through words as through his life, is: *for others everything will have to be given*. Perfect self-immolation is the ideal that befits man. For that is the highest law in the universe. By making this law operative in one's life one attains the highest. Therefore all the way through his teachings Christ taught that through sacrificial living man first reaches his manhood, and transcending his manhood, then reaches Godhood.

And Christ taught, *'You cannot serve both God and mammon.'* Simple truth. Obvious fact. But we find it difficult to believe in this simple truth because we do not love God. In the light of the teachings of Christ it is possible to entirely live for God. If we do not live for God *entirely*, we do not live for God yet. There is nothing like qualified chastity.

Christ therefore teaches absolutism of faith and surrender. His path is that of heroic *bhakti*. And this is perfectly commensurate with his concept of man. Mighty men must practise mighty *bhakti*. No living for anything else in the body. Christ says: *'The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be*

single, thy whole body shall be full of light.’ Our eye will be single when we see only God here, now and hereafter.

This then is what Christ teaches: *God is. God loves. God loves all.* God is anxious for every single one of us. God is God of the present. Man is more than what he imagines himself to be. In Christ’s words: *God can be seen. Man can be as perfect as the heavenly Father.*

Will not this concept of a living and loving God, this all-giving and all-forgiving God, this anxious and responding God, and this image of man whose salvation is at hand and perfection is workable — will not these have any meaning for us?

To those who have come to Sri Ramakrishna, Christ has come in a special way; reunified, as it were, in his own glory and power, in his love and anxiety.

Think of this great experience of Sri Ramakrishna. Christ, whatever the non-believers may say, is a spiritual fact. Sri Ramakrishna saw Christ vividly. He saw his features clearly. He even said Christ’s long nose was a little flat. Christ appeared before Sri Ramakrishna and got entirely merged in him. This mystic merger of the two emanations of the Supreme Spirit has spiritual meaning for the entire humanity. In any case it has a unique meaning for us. Those who have come to Sri Ramakrishna have received in him Christ anew in a new way. You cannot meditate on Sri Ramakrishna and not feel Christ’s grace in your heart. This is why all the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna are also devotees of Christ even if they are Hindus. This is why even those who come to Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna from the Christian background rediscover their spiritual relationship with Christ in Sri Ramakrishna in a new way. They experience in their hearts a new fulfilment of their own.

We who have had the infinite grace of God in receiving Christ through Sri Ramakrishna, have a special duty to the world. In our life we must show that we are the fortunate recipients of reinforced grace of God. This is a special privilege. This is a special responsibility, for with us is a new promise for mankind.

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Self-surrender

De Caussade

(We present to our readers portions of the celebrated treatise on Self-surrender to the Divine Will, by the 17th century teacher Jean-Pierre De Caussade. This work consists mostly of De Caussade's discourses to the company of nuns of the Visitation at Nancy, France, and has in view the counselling of souls well advanced in spiritual practice. As such, they are 'counsels of perfection'. Nevertheless, we believe all may profit by hearing of that high condition which is the goal of spiritual aspiration. The following extracts have been translated from the French by Buddha Chaitanya)

God still speaks today as he spoke to our fathers, when there were neither directors nor 'methods'. Faithfulness to the will of God was the whole of spirituality; but it was not reduced to an art, explaining in so sublime and detailed a manner, and containing so many precepts, instructions and maxims. Our present requirements demand it, no doubt.

It was not so in former times, when there was more guilelessness and simplicity. It used to be that every moment brought its duty which had to be fulfilled with fidelity; that was enough for the aspirants of those days. All their attention would be concentrated on that continuously, like the hands of a clock which marks the hours and which covers in each minute the space which it must run. Their minds, ceaselessly activated by the divine impulse, was unconsciously directed toward the new object which presented itself to them, through God, at each hour of the day.

Such were the hidden springs of the behaviour of Mary, the simplest and most surrendered to God of all beings. The reply which she gave to the angel, when she was content to tell him: *'let it be unto me according to thy word'*, expresses the entire mystical theology of her forbears. Everything was reduced, as it is even today, to the purest, simplest surrender of the soul to the will of God, under whatever form it presented itself.

That fine and noble disposition which was the very foundation of Mary's soul is beautifully demonstrated in those utterly simple words, '*let it be unto me*'. Notice their perfect agreement with what Our Lord wants us to have constantly on our lips and in our heart: '*Thy will be done*'. It is true that what was being demanded of Mary, in that celebrated moment, was something very glorious for her. But all the splendour of that glory would not have made the slightest impression on her, had not the will of God, to which alone she was susceptible, fixed its gaze upon her.

It was that divine will which commanded her in everything. Whether her tasks were ordinary or exalted, they were in her eyes only shadows, sometimes dark, sometimes bright, in which she found equally something in which to glorify God, in which to recognize the operations of the All-Powerful.

Her mind, filled with joy, looked upon everything she had to do or suffer, at every moment, as a gift from him who fills with bounty the hearts which nourish themselves on him alone, and not on multiplicity or created appearances.

All these things are, in fact, only shadows, like those to which we give this name in the natural order, and which are spread over sense-objects like a veil hiding them from us. Just so, in the moral and supernatural order, do the duties of each moment, under their dark appearances, conceal the fact of a divine will, which alone deserves our attention. Moreover these shadows flitting past all her senses, far from deluding her, reinforce her faith in him who is ever the same. Withdraw now, Archangel, you too are a shadow; your moment flies, and you disappear. Mary surpasses you, and will always go before; you will henceforth be far away from her; but the Holy Spirit which has just entered into her, in the guise of this mission, will abandon her never.

There are few extraordinary features in the outward life of the Holy Virgin. At least no mention of them is made in the scripture. Her life is represented as very simple and ordinary on the surface. She does and experiences what persons of her estate do and experience. She goes to

visit her cousin Elizabeth; other parents do likewise. She repairs to a stable; it is of a piece with her poverty. She returns to Nazareth: the persecution of Herod had parted her from it. There with her are Jesus and Joseph, living by their labour. That is the daily bread of the Holy Family. But on what bread does the faith of Mary and Joseph feed? What is the sacrament of all their sacred moments? What do they discover under the common appearance of the events which fill their days? The visible element there is the same as that which comes to everyone else; but the invisible, which faith discovers there and disengages, is nothing less than God. working his great works. O bread of the angels, heavenly manna, O sacrament of the present moment! You present God under appearances so lowly as the cradle, the hay, and the straw! But to whom do you present him? *'It is the hungry you fill with good things'*. God reveals himself to the lowly in the smallest of things, while the lordly, taking only the husk, do not discover him even in great things.

O harken, all you who strive for perfection and who are tempted to be discouraged at the sight of what you read in the life of the saints and what certain books on piety prescribe! O you, who overwhelm yourselves by the frightening ideas of perfection which you form in your minds; it is for your consolation that God wishes me to write this. Learn what you seem to be unaware of. This gracious Lord has made easy for us all the necessary and usual things of the natural order, such as air, water, and earth. There is nothing more necessary than breathing, sunlight, and food; but likewise there is nothing more easy. Love and fidelity are no less necessary in the supernatural order; so the difficulty of acquiring them must not be so great as it is represented. Look at your life, in what does it consist? In a mass of actions of very little consequence. Now it is with these very things of so little importance that God likes to satisfy himself. This is the part which the soul owes in the work of perfection. He explains it himself, too clearly for anyone to doubt it: *'Fear God and obey his commandments; for that is the whole man'*. That is to say, that is all the man has to do on his part; his active faithfulness consists in that. Let him fulfil his portion. God will do the rest. Grace will take hold of him. and the miracles it will work pass all the understanding of man. For ear

hath not heard, eye hath not seen, nor the heart felt what God conceives in his mind, resolves in his will, and works by his power, in souls who resign themselves to him.

The passive side of holiness is easier still, since it consists only in accepting what usually cannot be brushed aside, and in enduring with love, that is, with consolation and calmness, what one too often suffers with resentment and boredom.

Once again, that is the whole of saintliness. That is the mustard-seed from which we gather no harvest simply because it is too small for us to recognize. That is the silver coin, the treasure we do not find because we suppose it to be too far away to look for.

Do not ask me for the secret of finding this treasure. There is no secret about it at all. This treasure is everywhere, it is available to all, at all times, in all places. All beings, friends or foes, are passing it out by the handful and pouring it into all the faculties of our body and soul, right in to the centre of our heart. We have only to open our mouths and we shall be filled. Divine action is flooding the universe; it pervades all creatures, it floats above them all; wherever they are it is there; it precedes them, accompanies them, follows them; we have only to let ourselves be carried by the waves.

God's command, his divine will, received with simplicity by a faithful soul, does its divine work in her without her knowing it, as a prescription taken obediently brings about health in a patient, who neither knows nor has any means of knowing the medicine. As it is fire which warms, and not the philosophy or knowledge of that element and its effects, so it is with the will of God; it is his will which brings about holiness in our soul, and not curious speculation about this principle and that expression. In order to quench our thirst we must leave books which explain things, and drink. Curiosity to know only serves to make us thirstier. Likewise, when one is thirsty for holiness, curiosity for knowledge only serves to put it farther from him. One must let speculation go, and simply drink all that the will of God offers in action and suffering. What comes to us

at each moment by the will of God is what is holiest, best and most exalted for us.

Our whole study consists in knowing this rule of the present moment. All reading which is done other than by the command of God is detrimental; it is the will of God and his command which is grace, and which operates in the depths of our hearts, through our reading as well as all our other deeds. Without him, reading is only a kind of vain appearance, which is for us devoid of the quickening quality of God's rule, serving only to empty the heart by the very fullness with which it stuffs the mind.

It is not this nor that which produces happy effects, it is the will of God at the present moment. What was best for the moment just past is so no longer, because it is devoid of the will of God, which passes under other appearances, in order to bring to birth the duty of the present moment; and it is this duty, whatever appearance it may have, which is just now the thing most sanctifying for the soul.

All that we see is but vanity and a lie, the truth of things being in God. What a difference there is between God's view and our illusions! How can it be that, although we are warned again and again that everything that happens in the world is only a shadow, a figure, a mystery of belief, still we behave in the human fashion, according to the interpretation of the senses—which can only prove to be an enigma? Like fools we fall into the snare, without raising our eyes and tracing back to the principle, the source and origin of things, where everything has another name and another quality; where all is above nature, divine, purifying, where everything is a part of the plenitude of Jesus Christ; where everything is a stone of the heavenly Jerusalem, where everything is a passageway into that marvellous temple. Alas, we live just as we see and feel, and render useless that light of faith which could lead us so surely through the labyrinth of so many shadows and spectres, amongst which we lose our way like imbeciles. He whom faith enlightens, on the other hand, wants nothing but God and what is God's, and lives always in him, leaving and passing over the form.

O beloved divine will. I shall no longer indicate to you the hours or the ways of your approach; you will always be welcome. It appears to me, O divine action, that you have disclosed to me your immensity I will no longer seek you between the narrow covers of a book, or in the life of a Saint, or some sublime idea. These are mere drops in that ocean which I see spread over all creatures. They are mere atoms which disappear in that abyss. I will no longer seek that action in the thoughts of spiritual persons. I will no longer beg my bread from door to door; I will no longer pay court to created things.

In the state of perfection one is like a musician who would join in one long exercise a perfect knowledge of music; he would be so full of his art that, without his thinking about it. everything he did in the range of his art would have his perfection; and if you went to examine his compositions afterward, you would find in them a perfect conformity to what the rules prescribe. You would be convinced that he could never succeed better than when he acted without constraint, free of the rules which fetter genius when followed too scrupulously; and his improvisations would be admired by connoisseurs as so many masterpieces.

When the soul is in a good state, everything is in a good state; for what is of God. i.e., his part and his action, is, so to speak, the repercussion of the faithfulness of the soul. It is like the top side of a material which is worked up something like the superb tapestries made stitch by stitch from the reverse side. The craftsman employed sees only his stitch and his needle; and all the stitches fill out successively the magnificent figures, which appear only when all the parts are completed and the good side is exposed to the light. But during the time of labour all that is beautiful and lovely is hidden.

It is the same with the surrendered soul; she sees only God and her duty. The accomplishment of the task is, at each moment, only like an imperceptible stitch added to the work; yet it is with these stitches that God works his miracles, the full picture of which is seen only in eternity.

O ye who are thirsty, know that you need not search far off for the source of the living water; it bubbles up very close to you. in this very moment; so hurry up and run to it. Why do you, having the source so near, tire yourselves by running after the brooks? Brooks only make you more thirsty, and measure out the water to you; it is only the source which is inexhaustible. If you want to think, write, and live like the Prophets, the Apostles, and the Saints, abandon yourselves, like them, to the inspiration divine.

O Unknown Love! It would seem that your miracles are over, and that there is nothing left but to copy your works of olden times, and quote your past discourses! And alas, we do not see that your unfailing action is an infinite source of new thoughts, new austerities, new deeds, new Patriarchs, new Prophets, new Apostles, new Saints who have no need to copy either the life or writings of any of these, but only to live in perpetual surrender to your hidden workings! Endlessly we hear it said, '*Ah, those first centuries! The time of the Saints!*' What a way to talk! Are not all times the succession of the effects of the working of the divine, which flows over all moments, filling them, sanctifying them, utterly transforming them? Was there some ancient method of surrendering oneself to this operation which is now out of date? Did the Saints of former days have some other secret than that of becoming, from moment to moment, what that divine action wishes them to be? And will that action cease to pour out till the end of time, its grace upon those souls who surrender themselves to it without reservation?

O, Dear Heart! Adorable, eternal! And eternally fruitful, marvellous always! Power of my God, you are my book, my doctrine, my science; in you are my thoughts, my words, my deeds, my convictions. It is not by looking into your other operations that I may become what you would like me to be; it is in receiving you in all things via that single royal road of my fathers: I will think, I will be illumined, I will speak, as they; it is thus that I wish to imitate them, quote them, copy them all.

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Buddha Sankara Vivekananda

P. Sankaranarayanan

On the eve of the celebration of the two thousand five hundredth anniversary of the *Parinirvana* i.e., *nirvana-after-death* of Gautama the Buddha, it may contribute to a proper assessment of his personality and his great teachings if he is compared with two other world teachers who came after him: Sri Sankaracarya and Swami Vivekananda. All these three personages were intellectuals of super-eminent order. They were master minds who thought relentlessly piercing into the core of things and attained to a comprehension of the highest truth. After achieving it, impelled by an overpowering compassion, they devoted the rest of their lives, a fairly long period in the case of the Buddha, but alas! too short in the case of the other two, to teach their fellowmen and rescue them from sorrow and suffering born of ignorance. Highest expressions of the Hindu genius that they were, by the ascetic way of life that they adopted, they showed that India was a *Punya-bhumi* (Sacred Land) because it was *Tyagabhumi* (land of renunciation) and they affirmed in themselves the ancient declaration that by renunciation alone could one attain immortality. An incisive intellect added by an intense fervour invested them all with a spiritual profundity in such measure that each one of them constituted an epoch in the religious history of our land and blazed a trail of enduring glory. It is significant that all of them established monastic orders which continue to this day to preserve their spiritual lineage.

Buddha, Sri Sankara and Swami Vivekananda belong to the common tradition of Hindu idealism, which sprang from the ancient Upanishads. It is the fashion in some quarters to believe

and to propagate that the Buddha broke away from his native faith and founded a new religion; but the Buddha never said in so many words that he was the prophet of a new faith. That he would not accept tradition on trust does not brand him a heretic, for he strove to discover by his austerities, intense intellectual concentration, the very truths which that tradition affirmed in the manner that they appeared to his vision and appealed to his heart. His teaching did not indicate a breakaway from the established faith. It was an offshoot of it which served to call attention to the *substance* of religion hidden in the accretions of superficial ceremonial. The doctrine of karma and rebirth so cardinal to Hinduism was also an axiomatic truth to the Buddha. He was firmly convinced that one ultimate Principle was the source, the sustenance and also the sanctuary of the universe. The Principle which the Upanishads call *Brahman* the Buddha called *Dharma*. He emphasized that salvation lay in realizing this principle and exemplified in himself the possibility of that realization. He insisted that everyone should feel the longing to realize it, must burn with the passion for emancipation from the transiency of the empirical to the permanence of the transcendental. Every mortal must be a *mumukshu*, a seeker of liberation. As in the Hindu way, he also prescribed discrimination and detachment, moral austerity aided by intense contemplation leading to the plenial experience of *Nirvana* which like Upanishadic Brahman was ineffable and so indescribable.

The particular pattern of the Buddha's philosophy and of the religion that was based on it is to be traced to the context which was the original occasion for it. His very first acquaintance with the external world came in the form of his encountering the very things which motivate humanity's plaintive cry to be released

from its bonds. The decay of the flesh which old age signified, the suffering pictured in sickness and the dread of annihilation eloquently uttered by the parted lips of the dead carried on the shoulders of the dying set the future Buddha to reflect on the cause and cure of these woes, and, possibly, he asked himself if they were inevitable or if they were avoidable. The fourth sight that he saw, the ascetic who came after the depressing procession of decay, disease and death, gave him the clue to the remedy that he sought for these ills. Realizing that life is full of 'suffering' and tracing the source of suffering to *Tanha*, desire for material possession and enjoyment, he saw in renunciation the key to the problems of suffering and sorrow. These afflictions so overpowered his heart and so violently agitated his mind that he could not be at peace with himself till he could find a way out which had both an individual and a social significance. The more one is in the world and of the world, the more is one enmeshed by it. The only way to emancipation is to starve all desires, to banish them from one's being, to live in the region of the mind and to engage in continuous contemplation of the Eternal Law which makes for the procession of the flux. Such contemplation would make for detachment from the pursuit of worldly goods and for a serenity with which to face the trials and tribulations of life and attain final liberation. On the social side, it will exhibit itself in acts of benevolence and kindness born of the sameness which ensues from enlightenment. Here too, as in the case of every perfected seer, the vertical height of self-realization translated itself into the horizontal dimension of *loka-sangraha* i.e., good of the world. The renunciation that begot realization made easily for service, for social welfare. The Buddha's main preoccupation was the removal of suffering for his fellowmen

and, telling them by his Noble Truths that attachment is the cause of affliction, he bade them in his Noble Path to follow the true Dharma of their being to root-out the cause of sorrow.

The New Way of life which the Buddha distilled out of the Upanishads differed from that in vogue at that time in some essential features. To him religious life was an adventure, not an acceptance. Extraneous aids like ceremonials or a benevolent God were discarded as not making for the dignity of man. Rite and ritual imply a commerce in spirituality. Petition and prayer substitute dependence on grace for earnestness of endeavour. There can be no barter or beggary in spiritual life. Salvation is an achievement, not a gift. Endeavour following enlightenment constitutes the dynamics of spiritual life and its consummation is a stillness and serenity, a release from the world's unceasing flux and change. The Buddha was so impressed with this fleeting flow that he took it as a fact to be contented with and liquidated. He refused to bother himself with its origin. His one thought was to know how to stop this incessant empirical river and attain an abiding restfulness and supreme repose. Problems of cosmology and eschatology had no meaning for him in the face of this urgent crisis in human life. He did not pause to ask 'who' ultimately it was that suffered, if there was such a 'who' at all, and what his nature was. In a sense, it may be said that *suffering as a fact* was what bothered him more than the *sufferer as a person*. May it not be that his silence regarding the nature of the Atman was due to this preoccupation of his mind?

The Buddha tried to wean away his countrymen from the sacerdotalism prevalent in his time and prescribed for them a

way of life which was more self-reliant based on self-discipline and was more self-fulfilling in acts of social sympathy.

Realizing, as he must have done, that everyone could not go through the travails of his austerities under the Bodhi tree and achieve Nirvana in the manner that he did, he gave the world a religion that they could understand and practise, simple in its formulation, yet profound in its observance.

Sri Sankaracarya who appeared about fifteen centuries after the Buddha had to face a similar situation in the posture of Hindu society. Vedic ceremonialism made men forget the wood in the trees, to cling to the form while the substance oozed through the fingers that lifted the oblations. Buddhism denied God; ritualism had no use for Him, Buddhist salvation appeared to be a contentless void. The ritualist of the Veda hoped to be lifted on the smoke-cloud of his enjoyment which defeats satiety. Though not non-vedic like the Buddhist way, the ceremonialism of Veda was calculated to make life mechanical prescribing forms of commerce with the unseen powers of the universe. It was Sri Sankara's purpose to rescue men's lives as the Buddha sought to do, from the welter of works, from whirling *for ever* in the merry-go-round of unceasing ritual, from purchasing a passage to heaven and travelling with a ticket in which there was a return— half to speed them back to earth on the exhaustion of their merit. The manner of the rescue adopted by Sri Sankara was essentially different from the Buddha's. The latter gave an ethical prescription to the ills that afflict mankind. But Sri Sankara offered a metaphysical solution. Agreeing with the Buddha that sorrow is the result of wrong attachment, he set about to detail the source of this wrong attachment in wrong apprehension.

Sri Sankara's was an intellectual approach to the problem while the Buddha's was an emotional and moral approach. Failing to find *that which changes* back of the changing course of cosmic phenomena, the Buddha could not lay his hand on anything trans-empirical. Sri Sankara, however, saw the eternal and abiding behind the fleeting and the transient, and traced man's sorrows to the self-wrought confusion between the real Atman and the unreal *anatman* (non-self). This wrong identification of the true with the false, this mistaking of the false for the true lets loose a series of delusions, which work havoc in man's being. To this end, like the Buddha, Sri Sankara too prescribed discrimination and detachment to be followed by a rigorously disciplined life to fulfil the desire for salvation. The *sadhana-chatustaya* (the four-fold requisites of the path of knowledge) has much in common with the Noble Path prescribed by the Buddha. Sri Sankara ought to have felt that a mere prescription of moral duties was only a surface remedy for a disease which was deep rooted in the delusion of men's minds. He addressed himself to attacking the malady at its root and helped to effect an isolation of the *anatman* (non-self) from the Atman and uttered a warning against confusing the two. If it is realized that the real nature of human personality lies in the Atman and that in the last resort, this Atman is not what makes for division between man and man, but is the same in all, universal and all-pervasive, that will make for a greater unifying force in the ethical realm than would be possible in a religion which cannot posit an underlying identity of nature. The activities *for the good of the world*, in the case of an Advaitic *jivanmukta* (Liberated soul) are calculated to be more spontaneous and natural than the acts of benevolence made from

a position of externality however laudable the motives may be. Sri Sankara provided the sure foundation for an effective ethics by restoring the Upanishadic Atman to its proper place in the consciousness of men. In his dislike of the ceremonialism prevalent in his day and in his violent onslaught against it, the Buddha threw out the baby along with the water and he had no use for a soul or for a God. This was so much against the nature of the people among whom he preached that though his teachings acquired a measure of contemporary acceptance by the grace of his countenance and the force of his austerity, his posterity reverted to the doctrine of the Atman and of *Ishvara*, the creator. A religion which did not grant a striving soul or a saving God meant nothing significant. The agnostic approach of the Buddha which gave no room for emotional fervour could not appeal to the masses. Though Buddhist ethics was unexceptional, it was based on a wrong psychology and a defective metaphysics. It lacked a vital foundation and a proper orientation. To invest their faith with a religious content, the Buddhists had later to adopt the very practices which the Buddha condemned; they deified him in a manner that he did not intend and worshipped his relics in contravention of what he intimated. Taking the Buddha's silence about the Atman to mean his denial of it and cutting themselves away from his Vedantic roots, they banished themselves from his native soil and got transplanted in lands which had no Vedic affiliations.

The way of Self-knowledge which Sri Sankara prescribed for achieving liberation has been criticized as being intellectualistic in the extreme, that it aims at purely personal salvation and is not concerned with social service. It has been said that like Buddhistic Nirvana, Sri Sankara's Brahman is a vacuous void in

which personality is lost. He has also been accused of presumption for claiming to identify man with God. Critics see in Sri Sankara's Advaita many elements in common with later day Buddhism and they do not hesitate to accuse him as being a hidden-Bauddha (Follower of Buddha). Sri Sankara too like the Buddha has been ciiticized for making no room for a Personal God so essential for the climate of religion. Much of all this attack made against Advaita is the result of wrong understanding of the fundamentals of that position. It might appear that Sri Sankara emphasized the head at the expense of the heart. The truth, however, is that if the head is trained to a correct apprehension, the heart will follow suit. A truly informed mind alone will make for an inclusive heart.

And, this is exactly what happened in the case of Swami Vivekananda who was, in a manner of speaking, *the modern English edition of the medieval Sanskrit original that was Sri Sankaracarya*. Pleading passionately for a glorious combination of Sri Sankara's head with the Buddha's heart, he had both of them in his person and re-oriented the Vedantic way to suit the demands of modern times. Like the Buddha, Swami Vivekananda too was appalled by the dirt and squalor, the poverty and privation, the sorrow and suffering which he saw around him in his native land. Like Sri Sankara he insisted on Self-knowledge, on acquiring the habit by seeing all beings as one Self. The Upanishads had taught him the identity of all jivas as they were aspects of the same Paramatman. Initiated by his Guru and instructed by his own deep and extensive reading of the scriptures, he had a true insight into the real nature of man. Realizing in the periods of his nirvikalpa samadhi his identity with Brahman, he saw that *every jiva is Siva* and translated that

intuition into accordant oneness with all human beings. Self-knowledge and compassion towards all were so wonderfully blended in him that he has been able to galvanize his followers to dedicated life of supreme sacrifice and service calculated to bring about personal salvation on the one hand and general well-being on the other. Ritual is not the essence of religion said the Buddha. Ritual does not exhaust religion said Sri Sankara. Ritual must not be a denial of religion said Swami Vivekananda, who learnt his religion from a perfected soul whose realization affirmed itself through the practice of that ritual.

Like Sri Sankara and Swami Vivekananda, the Buddha was a child of our soil. His spiritual roots belong to India's ancient religion though the mighty tree that grew from them has leaned away from the walls of its native gardens to other countries far and near, and other people live under its shade and relish its fruits. We, however, count him among the avatars of our land and worship him as such. We may criticize Buddhism for its metaphysics; we may differ from the Buddhists in their professions; but we adore the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Along with Sri Sankara and Swami Vivekananda, he holds a pre-eminent place in the galaxy of the world's immortals. Sri Sankara came between the Buddha and Swami Vivekananda to affirm the eternal spirit that is India which each of them articulated in his characteristic manner. Is it a mere accident that Swami Vivekananda carried Sri Sankara's philosophical religion to the countries of the West while the followers of the Buddha carried the ethical religion to the lands of the East?

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, May 1956)

Spiritual Direction

Daniel Considine

It is both inspiring and refreshing to confront in religious writings a simple, unaffected faith in God. All too often our tendency is to weigh down religion with a cloak of learning, forgetting that saints are rarely doctors of theology. If, indeed, the ultimate nature of Truth is unity, then complexity and diversity are of the nature of the world, not spirit. Therefore the seeker after God is enjoined to simplify and purify both his external and internal life.

In his own simple approach to God, Father Daniel Considine, an English Jesuit of this century, certainly reflects more of the saint than the theologian. He stresses religious life, surrender, love, and, above all, joy in the thought and service of God. *“The spiritual life,”* he writes, *“is the easiest, sweetest, and happiest thing in the world.”* Although Father Considine is a member of a renowned teaching order, he has none of its intellectualism. Instead, he possesses something of the trusting faith of a Brother Lawrence, a spiritual quality much needed now, in an age when people are pressed by doubt and fear—and faith, tragically enough, has apparently become foreign to the temper of the times.

Distractions and tediousness in prayer do not matter at all so long as your heart is with the Lord. You must humble yourself as much as you can. God loves humble souls and gives his graces to them.

Do not worry about recalling the thought of the presence of God at special times. He lives in your heart; keep a calm liberty of spirit. Don't be narrow or strait-laced in any way.

God does not want our spiritual life to be a constant stress, uneasy, foggy, stormy. He loves peace and joy and spiritual gaiety. We often offend other people without meaning to do so. But God knows us through and through and understands what we mean.

The more we abandon ourselves to God, the more he can make of us, and we are never so much under his government as when we trust least to ourselves.

The spiritual life is the easiest, sweetest and happiest thing in the world—to love God and be loved by him.

There are few invariable rules in the spiritual life, but this is one: Pray in the way you like best.

Try to think more of Him, and less of the human element in things. He is really behind everything that happens to you. You must try to realize this, and it will make everything easier and happier.

Just love him, trust him, and be happy with him, and your faults will fall away of themselves. If you have been unfaithful, don't have a fuss about it. Turn to him lovingly and trustingly, and begin at once to be more faithful without further ado. Never be sad or dismal. It does not become one whom our Lord loves. Be quite simple, free, and happy in his love.

Sometimes the best prayer you can make is just to think that God reads your heart.

So many books give a wrong idea of mortification. They fix all the attention on the things that are given up instead of on God. When a mother goes to the nursery door and calls her child, do you think the child says to himself, "*I will mortify myself by leaving all my toys and go to my mother*"? Certainly not. In the joy of seeing her he forgets all about his toys, throws them down, and runs into her arms.

God shows such wonderful courtesy in dealing with us. Very often he asks some small sacrifice of us merely as an excuse to make it the occasion of giving us a magnificent grace.

It is a mistake to say that you would be better if some person or some circumstance in your life were removed. God arranges all these things with the greatest care, to bring out what is best in you. The fault is in you, not in circumstances. When a person with weak lungs goes out in fine warm weather he often thinks that he is better. The improvement is in the weather, not in himself. The disease remains there though he does not feel it, and it will show itself again as soon as the weather is less favourable.

After all, what is a saint? Only one whose will is united to God's in all things; not one who does extraordinary things. You need not do anything more than you do now to be a saint. Ecstasies are not necessary. You have only to do his will all day long because it is his will. The first point is arranged for you by obedience; the second point lies with yourself, and is not difficult. It does not mean that you must *think* about God all the time. That is not possible, and he does not require it. He only wants your *will* to be fixed in his.

You often see on the bureau of a businessman or a doctor the photographs of his wife and children. He is not thinking of them—he could not do his work properly if he were; but his heart is with them and he is working for their sakes. That is a good illustration of the way we ought to do our work. God does not want us to be on our knees when we ought to be teaching children or cooking the dinner.

Sometimes kneel before our Lord in silence and ask him to speak to you. That kind of prayer will transform you.

Forget whether you have been slack or not and give yourself up altogether to loving God.

God is always perfectly consistent. He is infinitely powerful, and he knows perfectly well the weaknesses and limitations of our nature. He will never ask us to do anything which he is not most ready to help us do. It is as easy for God to give us a thousand graces as it is for him to give us one grace. Our trust is the only thing wanting.

Let your spiritual life be as simple as possible, and do away with any apparatus in it that does not help you to come easily and happily into communication with God. Say to him quite simply whatever is in your heart. He does not wish you to stand on ceremony with him. God himself is more simple than we can understand. He is more like a little child than a man of the world.

Fortunately, in the things of Eternity, time does not count. It is the intensity of our acts that counts, and it is possible, with God's grace, to make extraordinary progress in a very short time.

If God is your Lover, how foolish to worry about anything!

The best way to meet temptation is to ignore it and go quietly on with what you are doing. If you are doing God's work, your heart is in his hands. Just go on quietly and God will take care of you.

Don't be guided by spiritual books in your intercourse with our Lord, if in any way they cramp your loving, reverent freedom of intercourse with him, or tend to sow the least distrust of him in your soul. Ask him to teach you himself what he is like.

The call to religious life is a call to be a saint. You cannot abandon yourself too completely to his love.

If you do so, he is bound to honour to take great care of you, and you may be sure he will do so.

God wants the spiritual life to be a life of great supernatural happiness, and so it is to those persons who are generous and refuse nothing to God. And, after all, what are the things that God asks you to give up? Are they not things that you are really ashamed of, that lower you even naturally in your own estimation?

No one ought to be able to offend you, because your one endeavour ought always to be to humble yourself in everything.

There is nothing small or narrow or rigid about God. Even our faults can make him love us more tenderly, as he heals us, and the forgiveness makes another bond between us. God does not endure us. He loves us passionately, if I may use such a word—more than we can understand.

If you want God, he will come to you.

Give up schemes and regulations about the spiritual life, and abandon yourself to the guidance of God, living from moment to moment in His presence and trying each moment to give Him all He wants.

The less you think about the food the better. Don't think of it beforehand. When the time comes, simply take what is reasonable, keeping your mind off it, and then do not recur to the subject again. It is not of sufficient importance. Many people waste a great deal of time worrying about rules for mortification in food. If you try to love our Lord more and more, and put all your strength into that, the details will gradually correct themselves.

Many books are fond of warning people about the higher graces of prayer, because [they say] there is great danger of pride. The truth is that these graces humble the soul. She understands that God is doing everything, not she herself. It is like a master guiding the hand of a little child to write. The child knows that she could not write by herself, and so she is not vain about it.

It is not good for you to go with great detail into the causes of particular faults, or to set yourself to think much about them or give accounts of them. What you need is to love our Lord more and more, and keep near Him more and more, and get closer to Him, and run to Him for everything. His love is the great motive-power. That is what you need. Go to Him for comfort and help and strength and love, and ask Him to supply all your needs, and then, just as a mother loves her little child

to depend upon her for everything, so He will gladly take care of and provide for you.

We please Him and win His love in the same way as we please and win an earthly friend.

If you have done wrong, go to Him and say, "*Dear Lord, I am extremely sorry for having been such a naughty child. Now we must begin again.*" And then begin at once to love our Lord more than before, and don't be upset or worried. Very often such distress is really only wounded pride seeking to find some excuse for self.

God does not love you as a community, but separately and individually. Every soul is like a separate world to Him.

One of the best proofs of advance is the facility of finding God everywhere and in everything where, indeed, as we know, He always is and is always working.

Ask our Lord to impress upon your soul the thoughts of confidence that help you, and He will do so. When in trouble or temptation, realize that God is allowing this in His love, to train and prepare your soul for greater graces.

Whatever we ask of God trustfully, He will do for us, if there is good reason for it. Go especially to God the Father. Call Him your Father and ask Him to help His child. That touches His heart.

You are too jerky in spiritual life; you go by fits and starts. As you get nearer to God you will go as fast, but more steadily. You have plenty of time—indeed, time does not count with God. He can give you in one moment enough graces to make you a

saint. When you love a person, you don't go by starts—loving him in the morning and disliking him in the afternoon. You must have the same confidence in God always, and be sweet and loving to Him always.

Depend on Him, not on yourself. There are two things needed to make a saint: absolute confidence in God, and complete distrust of yourself. The more you confide in God, the more He will do for you. God wants us to feel that we can do nothing of ourselves. Then he can come to us, and then we trust to Him for everything.

You are consecrated to God, so your body is His and your soul is His. Look upon both as entrusted to you by God, and thus by taking care of your body you will be doing a service to God. You must treat it as a sick child.

You will not progress by your own action, but by Gods action on your soul. So don't trouble about the distractions, but confide in God. In your relations with others, remember thoughts and feelings do not matter, but only actions and words.

Little children are simple and direct. They say exactly what they think without pose or affectation. Do you say things exactly as they are to God? He loves straight-forwardness and simplicity.

Don't trust in your own strength or wisdom or judgment any more than a tiny child does, but say, "*The Lord rules me, and I shall want for nothing.*"

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, issues, 193 and 195)

Leaves from an Ashrama 62

The Incarnation as all Things to all Men

Swami Vidyatmananda

Today I had a discussion with K. He has been saying that the main thrust of the Vedanta societies should be to promote the *“cult of Ramakrishna”*. Just as, for example, Franciscans devote themselves exclusively to the veneration of Christ, and the followers of Sri Chaitanya stress the adoration of Radha-Krishna, so Vedantists should take the Master as their chosen ideal and recommend him as the chosen ideal for all comers. Says K. in defence of his position: *“Sri Ramakrishna is so obviously the avatar of this age – why should we not vigorously favour him?”*

I feel that K. is on the wrong track. In fact, I think his eagerness to advance Vedanta will instead do it harm. Fortunately, the Ramakrishna Order does not share his viewpoint. There are many serious devotees who would be hurt by K.'s policy. People come to Vedanta because it does not insist that they must follow this or that particular path.

And to stress the Master too exclusively is to go against the very truths which Sri Ramakrishna himself taught. An avatar does not come to set at naught the spirituality which preceded him. He comes, as I understand it, to awaken people to the spirituality which is available but has been forgotten. Christ said that he had come not to destroy but to fulfil. Surely mere man should not claim more for these sons of God than they claimed for themselves.

Can Ramakrishna help us to find God without our necessarily accepting him as our chosen ideal? I believe so. He is the door, opened in this modern age, through which we may enter the realm of spiritual religion. On the other side of the door also we shall find him; and we shall find other representatives of God besides. As we listen to the Master and study his actions we cannot help but glimpse and love many approaches to the Divine. His experiences verified all paths, all avatars. Though I had spent thousands of hours in Christian churches, it was Sri Ramakrishna who gave me for the first time a genuine appreciation of Jesus. I had read Zen for years, but it was the Master who helped me to understand a little of who Buddha was and what he taught. Ramakrishna has helped me understand a bit who the Virgin Mary was, and Krishna, and Kali, and Jagannath, and Shiva, and the Impersonal, and more.

The one potent new idea which has entered the world in the past thousand years is Ramakrishna's realization that all religions are true and all avatars are saying the same thing. This marvellous principle of reconciliation is capable of resolving conflicts within individuals and between individuals, and giving men and women everywhere a hope and a way. To form a cult and become a cultist is easy. To try to make Ramakrishna great by becoming exclusive in his behalf is, instead, to lessen him. Let us love and emulate him better than that.

Programme for May - June 2018

Sunday discourses begin at the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 p.m.
Tel: 01628 526464 www.vedantauk.com

May 6	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 5	Swami Sarvasthananda
May 13	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 6	Swami Sarvasthananda
May 20	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 7	Swami Sarvasthananda
May 27	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 8	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jun 3	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 9	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jun 10	Day Retreat	
Jun 17	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 21	Swami Shivarupananda
Jun 24	Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 10	Swami Sarvasthananda

Day Retreat

**With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Sarvasthananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 10th June
from 10:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.**

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

I have neither death nor fear of death, nor caste;
Nor was I ever born, nor had I parents, friends, and relations;
I have neither Guru, nor disciple;
I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute—
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

I am untouched by the senses, I am neither Mukti nor knowable;
I am without form, without limit, beyond space, beyond time;
I am in everything; I am the basis of the universe; everywhere
am I.

I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute—
I am He, I am He. (Shivoham, Shivoham).

(Swami Vivekananda)

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We have lost faith in ourselves. Therefore, to preach the Advaita aspect of the Vedanta is necessary to rouse up the hearts of men, to show them the glory of their souls. Whether dualistic, qualified monistic, or monistic, they all firmly believe that everything is in the soul itself; it has only to come out and manifest itself. Therefore, this Shraddha is what I want, and what all of us here want, this faith in ourselves, and before you is the great task to get that faith. Be strong and have this Shraddha, and everything else is bound to follow.

Losing faith in one's self means losing faith in God. Do you believe in that Infinite, good Providence working in and through you? If you believe that this Omnipresent One is present in every atom, is through and through, Ota-Prota, as the Sanskrit word goes, penetrating your body, mind, and soul, how can you lose heart?

Swami Vivekananda



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