

Vedanta

411 JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2020

The Spiritual Significance of Death - 2

Swami Ashokananda

The Lord's Devotee Will Not Perish

Swami Budhananda



Divine Wisdom

Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 8



The Tiger That Lurks behind Worldly Joys

GOD is like the wish-yielding tree of the celestial world (Kalpataru), which gives whatever one asks of it. So, one should be careful to give up all worldly desires when one's mind has been purified by religious exercises.

Just listen to a story: A certain traveller came to a large plain in the course of his travels. As he had been walking in the sun for many hours, he was thoroughly exhausted and heavily perspiring, so he sat down in the shade of a tree to rest a little. Presently, he began to think what a comfort it would be if he could but get a soft bed there to sleep on. He was not aware that he was sitting under the celestial tree. As soon as the above thought rose in his mind, he found a nice bed by his side. He felt much astonished, but all the same stretched himself on it. Now he thought to himself, how pleasant it would be, were a young damsel to come there and gently stroke his legs. No sooner did the thought arise in his mind

Continued on the inside back cover

Vedanta

411 JANUARY -FEBRUARY 2020

Contents

2	Editorial
4	The Spiritual Significance of Death - 2 <i>Swami Ashokananda</i>
13	The Lord's Devotee Will Not Perish <i>Swami Budhananda</i>
29	Man as He Is in All the 24 Hours of the Day <i>Swami Ghanananda</i>
37	See God with open eyes: Meditation on Ramakrishna <i>Book review</i>
46	Leaves from an Ashrama - 70 <i>Swami Vidyatmananda</i>
48	Programme

ISSN 1355 - 6436

Editorial

A Dialogue with Death

The first thing that strikes us as we read the Katha Upanishad is the wonderful character of the student, Nachiketa. The Upanishad glorifies the unique quality of *Shraddha* or faith that entered the heart of Nachiketa, who was still a young boy. It was this faith which made this bold aspirant knock at the portals of Death to seek the Highest Wisdom and which kept him unruffled amidst the tempting offers made by the teacher, Yama. He remained unperturbed, like the serene depths of the ocean, thus exemplifying the stage of steady wisdom or *Sthitaprajna* as described in the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita.

Shraddha or faith in the Eternal nature of the Soul is the very basis of man's intuitive understanding. It is this implicit faith to meditate on an Entity which is intuitively believed to be truly Real that produces a yearning to attain Immortality. Swami Vivekananda says, "One must have tremendous faith in religion and God.... If a man sincerely believes that there is that immense, infinite mine of Bliss, and that It can be reached, would not that man go mad in his struggle to reach it? Strong faith in God and the consequent eagerness to reach Him constitute Shraddha." (C.W. 1:407)

The Katha Upanishad says that the Atman can be realized only by affirming the Eternal Atman. In contrast, non-believers state that there exists no such thing as Atman, and it is this negative, atheistic attitude, which holds on to the gross world as real, that results in the birth of desire which binds us to the world. Yama also says that seeing diversity leads to desires and they are verily 'the net of widespread death'. The notion of diversity leads to shortsighted vision, immediate gratification of desires and death.

The Upanishad declares that the Reality is indeed present in all but is revealed only to a trained, and pure and concentrated *buddhi*. It deals with this wisdom right at the beginning of Yama's discourse by stating that only such a *dhira* (man of steady wisdom) can distinguish between the really good and the apparently pleasant. Further, this wisdom alone can

strengthen a man's will to renounce the pleasurable and turn the senses inward. It enables a man to distinguish the permanent among the impermanent and gives him the will to renounce the latter. Thus wisdom (*viveka* or *buddhi*) and will (*vairagya* or *dhriti*) go together.

The Katha Upanishad is the tale of a young boy who, anguished by his father's insincerity, is cursed inadvertently by the latter when the boy tries to correct him. This leads the boy to Yama, the King of Death, who praises him above himself! The teacher gives in a nutshell the whole of *Brahmavidya* (Knowledge of Brahman) in the first discourse itself, and follows it up with details in the remaining four discourses of the Upanishad.

Through the chariot imagery, Yama gives a sort of summary of the spiritual struggles of man. A sincere aspirant must keep his intellect alert and mind strong so that the horses of sense organs tread only along those sense experiences that are conducive to spiritual growth. This spiritual evolution is mainly internal, which is also graphically depicted in the Upanishad. And finally a rousing call is given by Yama to all aspirants to seek their own inner Reality: "Arise! Awake! Approach the great and learn."

The Upanishad then enumerates the ascending subtlety of categories up to the Purusha or the Supreme Soul. A practical approach is also given in another famous imagery—the tree imagery—which is described as Brahman itself.

The Katha Upanishad ends with this mantra: "Having received this wisdom (*Brahmavidya*) taught by the King of Death, and the entire process of Yoga, Nachiketa became free from impurities and death and attained Brahman. Thus it will be also with any other who knows, in this manner, the inmost Self." It describes Yoga chiefly in the context of meditation: "This, the firm control of the senses, is what is called Yoga ..."

Deepening of consciousness leading to perception of the inmost Self is possible with increasing detachment of the senses from likes and dislikes, as mentioned also in the Gita. All such struggles culminate in an intense longing to know the Atman as has been described early in the Upanishad. Sri Ramakrishna declares that aspiration is the chief means to realize God or the Atman.

The Spiritual Significance of Death -2

Swami Ashokananda

Picture existence to yourself. Consider how the soul moves from birth to childhood, manhood, old age, and death. Hindus have a term for this movement—samsara. It means continuous movement, transmigration. Each of us must assimilate the truth of samsara. Do you think anyone should resist this continuous movement and change? Should I expect my childhood to return, or hold forever to my present condition of being? If I am intelligent I shall not attempt to cling to anything. I shall let everything move, change, and pass away; only I shall try to extract the best from every moment. The continuous movement signifying that the soul is passing through many stages does not cease with death but continues to an ultimate end. What is this destination? Our limited personal experience may not always disclose its nature, but we have the knowers of God and the scriptures to enlighten us.

Our ultimate end is conceivable only in terms of the Absolute, for nothing limited and relative can be permanent. To attain our destiny, we have to realize the state of infinitude beyond all time and conditions, and to reach that state we must undergo disciplines to break our bondage to the finite. Our present life has justification only to the extent that it succeeds in breaking it.

The basic cause of bondage is ignorance, the belief that we are limited mortal beings, rather than the free, self-fulfilled Spirit. Our bondage is composed of the many attachments we have formed, of the many cravings we have for worldly possessions and joys. We rid ourselves of our attachments and cravings partly by satisfying them and learning the emptiness of such satisfaction, and partly by reasoning, through which we become convinced of their unreality. Understanding gradually dawns and grows clearer, until we realize

that we are pure Spirit. It is thus that we solve the problems of life. The soul goes on moving from incarnation to incarnation until it realizes that it requires no further experience, because everything to be known it has found within itself.

This is the general picture of the journey of the soul, a journey which is punctuated not only by the ceaseless and comparatively small changes in our lives, but by the recurrent and revolutionary change called death. As we would not resist the little changes, so we should not resist the profound change of death, because it is urgently needed in the long journey undertaken by the soul.

Why is death urgently needed? After the soul has lived here in the flesh for a long time, the mind and body tire of activities and decline sets in, so that we no longer assimilate further experience, and forget even what we once knew. At this time rest is, of course, called for, and death is a wise provision. Is it not better to depart for a period of repose and come back to learn anew? Death is indeed a most welcome friend when it comes at the proper hour.

When life is comprehended as part of a larger scheme of existence and attainment, it at once becomes truly purposeful. Then we grow aware of an eternal fulfilment toward which we are moving. This eternal end does not belong to any particular time or space, but, being eternal and infinite in nature, is forever existent and therefore inherent in our life, perceivable here and now. We do not perceive it because our present mode of perception is distorted by our partial recognition of reality, by our identification with superficial life, and by our complete ignoring of death.

If we could with an equal mind welcome the two aspects of the long journey of the soul, that is, both life and death, our perception would become clarified and the truth would be immediately recognized. It is to bring to our consciousness the need of such equanimity that death always follows life, that even through life it

comes in disguise almost every day. Is not life really another name for death? Our present is reared upon the extinction of our past. Anything that happens can happen only because what preceded it is gone. Thus, we are continually accompanied by the shadow of death through the twenty-four hours of every day, although we may fail to recognize it.

In falling asleep, do we not really enter into death? Every night nature separates us from the waking world, the only world that is real to us. We become virtually dead. We do not see, hear or perceive anything; we are not aware of our near and dear ones: we become unconscious of all the relationships of earthly life. Every night we are made to pass through this experience, but we simply call it sleep and do not try to understand it in any deeper sense.

If we study ourselves, we shall notice that we exercise most of our deeper faculties unconsciously and instinctively. We do many remarkable things. We have great power of self-withdrawal, but it is unconscious. We separate from this life, from this body, and even from the mind; we actually attain the transcendental Self every day, but we do so unconsciously. If we could affect all this consciously, it would at once disclose profound meaning to us. Death is indeed a withdrawal, a separation from superficial life, but it is involuntary.

When we can die, that is, withdraw and separate from life, consciously and deliberately, we shall perceive death differently and succeed in balancing life and death in one single perception—and we shall become free from the bondage of life. This is what is meant by combining life and death. We should practice this combination in everything we do. We should learn to die deliberately.

I have already mentioned what death means subjectively, that is, to the one who dies; but we are now ready to consider it further. Suppose I died a moment ago. What do you think is the state of my

consciousness now? What am I thinking and feeling? I discover that the preoccupations of the life I have just left behind are no longer valid. Whatever I possessed in that life is now beyond my reach and useless to me. All the relative things that harassed me have entirely lost significance. The world I knew when endowed with a body and a limited number of senses has changed its character, and another world is appearing before me. Many things which I did while living and thought worthwhile seem meaningless now, and I find that I wasted my time.

Such being the implications of death, let us say to ourselves as we deliberately practice dying while living: "We shall hold to that alone which is immortal." What is it that survives death? Should we give up all human relationships? No, that is not my meaning. We can know any man in terms of impermanence or of permanence. We can relate ourselves to him as a temporal or as an eternal being. If we want to include death in our scheme of life, we shall wisely relate ourselves to the eternal rather than to the temporal in him. We shall give recognition only to what will survive change, destruction and death. We shall pay attention not to the changeable, but to the unchangeable alone.

Here some of you may say, "We admit an eternal element in every thing and every being, but how about the infinite number of duties that have to be done? We must earn our living, help others, and share and fulfil the common responsibilities of life, and these concerns do not pertain to the eternal. How then can we combine life and death in our existence?" You are justified in asking this, for our usual activities apparently have no eternal meaning. But when even these are done in the right spirit, they partake of the character of the eternal.

If I prepare a meal to satisfy my own hunger or because I am fond of delicacies, the act is earthly and binding. But if I do it as an

offering to the Lord who dwells within me and also in the heart of the hungry man to whom I may offer it, then it takes on the character of a sacrament. Everything can be done in the sacramental spirit. I am aware that even when our daily activities are done in this spirit, they are still not absolutely eternal, but they are very close to the eternal and therefore much less binding.

If a man works eight or nine hours a day in order to earn two hundred dollars a month, little time or strength remains for spiritual practice. But if he earns this money thinking not of self-gratification or enjoyment but of learning to manifest his soul and to help others to work out their spiritual destiny, and if he devotes whatever he can spare to charity, then the earning of the money becomes an act of worship.

To illustrate this point further, let me say that although speaking to you of spiritual truths is a spiritual action, even that becomes unspiritual if I do not maintain true ideas about you and this action of mine. If I fail to perceive the eternal in you, whatever I do will have only temporary value, will belong to death, and death will claim it; it will not prove eternal. But if I have the right attitude, this action will not be an obstruction to the realization of the eternal consciousness.

So, we try continually to reach the eternal in everything we know or do, and in this way gradually become detached from the superficialities of life. Do you understand what a spiritual man does? He not only conquers life here but also conquers death here. He dies while yet in this world. I mean that he consciously and deliberately experiences here and now what occurs at death, and that he thereby transcends death.

We have seen that the process of dying means complete separation from the body, from attachments to the outside world, and from the allurements of life. Any of us can deliberately

accomplish such separation now. If we are not attached to this body, it dies, as it were, even while we are yet living in it.

You may ask, "Should we refuse to breathe? Should we prevent the body from functioning?" Yes, if you could do so as a master, that would certainly be a conquest of the body and of life, and the body and life would trouble you no more, nor would this be suicide. But since very few can do so as a master, what I suggest is this: conquer the body that it may cease to clamour for anything. Then even when hungry, it will not trouble you. However, hunger is less pernicious than some of the other bodily cravings which hold one down to life and consequently to death, and which completely obstruct spirituality. All obstructions, whether small or large, have to be eradicated.

You can indeed overcome all obstructions now, and when separation from the body is achieved—yes, friends, by gradual degrees one at last comes to feel distinct from it every moment—you will know that you are the Infinite One, that you are pure Spirit, master of both life and death. Your mind will stand still: and though apparently continuing to live on earth, though apparently continuing to work, to feel and to know, you will nevertheless perceive the great Silence—the formless transcendental Being and Consciousness underlying all superficial activities.

When such detachment and separation are realized, death reveals to us a yet more profound aspect. Neither the dying nor those left behind understand this aspect unless they have already acquired spiritual vision, unless they have incorporated death in life and thereby corrected distorted perception. Having done so, they are at last in a position to perceive death at its deepest.

Our infinite experience is marked by infinite changes, many of which we cannot even perceive at the time of their occurrence.

When one state is followed by another state, there is between them an unnoticeable interval. What is the nature of this hiatus? What is the nature of the indefinable moment which is neither this state nor the one that follows? Of the long series of intervals, I should like to picture the particular interval when this life has ceased to be, and the next life has not yet begun. What is that indefinable interval?

Let us say that I have been separated from earthly existence by death. The relative life and the consciousness connected with it fall away from me. I no longer feel that every Sunday morning and Wednesday evening I must appear on the platform or that I must sleep, eat, work, meet people—all these infinite temporal details have entirely disappeared. Of course, if I have not already attained the Eternal, another life with similar details is lying in wait for me. But the moment between these two lives—what is it?

Often, we think of death as a long peaceful sleep, a cessation of all experience and activity. Such thought certainly does not infer a deep understanding of death. Nevertheless, even such an understanding contains a fragment of a truth which often eludes us: the truth that the real nature of death is the complete negation of this life and all that pertains to it; that in death nothing remains. Buddha recognized this truth. That is why he called the full realization of it nirvana, by which he meant both extinction and illumination.

The subtle nature of death that we have tried to understand as the moment between two changes or the moment between two lives completely eludes a mind devoid of subtle perception. But when death is understood in this true way, it is the same as the realization of pure Spirit, because in that, too, all forms are extinct.

Do you know when the highest truth is revealed to us? In that one moment. In it the Transcendental flashes, but before we are aware of it, another life seems to overshadow it. That moment

of non-existence, that moment of death, contains the essence of truth. Have you ever noticed how the hum of conversation in a crowded room can lapse suddenly for a moment into absolute silence, which is shattered the next moment by resumed conversation? That moment of silence illustrates death as we are now trying to understand it—death which is of the nature of the Supreme Divinity. We have a name for God—Mahakala, the Great Death. Do not think that such a name is indicative of morbidity. It shows a very profound understanding of Divine nature.

The word Mahakala also means the Great Time. Have you ever tried to perceive pure time? As we cognize it, time is like a stream, the surface of which is so covered with floating things that we are unable to see the stream itself. Events crowd and hide time, so that it is never revealed to us in its true nature; but if events were eliminated, we should know pure time, pure duration. We would then find time or duration to be the same as eternity, the same as death. Death in its essential nature is not an event; it is therefore realizable at any time and is far more fundamental than life as we know it.

Life is like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. As the leaf floats above the pool, drops of water sometimes splash upon it, shine and tremble with the passing breeze, and then fall into the pool again. If the drop of water on the lotus leaf is life, the water in the pool is death. Life slips into death. Falling into the pool and mingling with its water does not mean loss and destruction to the drop, but a realization of and release into infinity. True death is really a most wonderful revelation. Infinite peace is there, infinite joy and fulfilment. As a mother takes her child to her breast in deep affection, so the Great Death gathers us into its arms, and in that embrace, we feel loving union with the Eternal.

In Paris, a young man came to Swami Vivekananda and sought to become his disciple. The Swami said, "You want to follow me? Then

you will have to embrace death. I teach death!" The young man grew frightened and went away, but later he came to America and told this story to one of our Swamis, saying that now he understood what Swamiji meant and that he would follow him if he were yet here.

How true it is that neither life nor death is what we ordinarily think it to be! To understand life, we must transcend the life of the body and the lower mind and try to perceive reality in the higher consciousness, which is truer and more certain than our so-called normal consciousness. We who are left behind can never really know death by observing it from the outside. If we ourselves were to die this moment, even then we should not understand it, unless we were properly prepared. But if we dive deep into this life, then indeed we shall be able to perceive profound meaning in death.

Let me reiterate the facts concerning the true nature of death. It reveals to us the great truth that reality is not on the surface. In a more intimate revelation, it is seen by us as identical with the Eternal, the Highest Consciousness, the Great Death, the Great Time. In it time and eternity are one; in it life and absence of life are one.

This is the one truth, the only truth. If we want to understand death in this way and conquer both life and death, the practical thing is to unite death and life here and now. Make room for death in the scheme of your life, not in a morbid way, by sleeping in coffins or wearing long faces, but in a heroic way, with knowledge and understanding. You will find there is nothing more stimulating in life than death.

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, Nov-Dec 1962)

The Lord's Devotee Will Not Perish

Swami Budhananda

I

Are you a devotee of the Lord? Are you, really? Then you have a reason to rejoice in this gloomy world. You have a reason to be fearless in this world stricken with fear. You have a reason to be unworried in a world possessed by consuming fear. And this is not a small reason squeezed out of a little human brain. It is not a fleeting reason, true today, false tomorrow. It is a great reason proceeding from the most High, a permanent reason, eternally true. What is that great reason? It is the solemn personal declaration of the Lord that His devotee will not perish. It is this security bond guaranteeing your imperishability, signed by the Lord Himself, which is the reason for your rejoicing, for being fearless and not worrying at all in the world. And do you realize that it is not once that the Lord has vouched for the imperishability of His devotee? He has done so as Sri Krishna; He has done so as Jesus Christ; He has done so as Sri Ramakrishna. And the Lord has always been as good as His word. There are testimonies to show that. The world may get pulverized, but His words will not, for before the world, there was the Word. That was the Truth; and

Truth stays when everything else decays. The words of the Lord are not the prattling of a human tongue, but the vibrations of eternal verity.

II

What did the Lord, as Sri Krishna, say about the imperishability of His devotee? With all its spiritual implications, Sri Krishna makes this categorical declaration in the Gita (9.30-31): "Even the most sinful man, if he worships Me with unswerving devotion,

must be regarded as righteous; for he has formed the right resolution. He soon becomes deeply spiritual and attains eternal peace. Proclaim it boldly, O son of Kunti, that My devotee never perishes."

This divine declaration is reiterated in quite a few other statements of Sri Krishna in the Gita. In the fourth chapter (verse 8), the Lord says one of the reasons why He incarnates Himself in the world is for the protection of the righteous. And the righteous are none but the devotees of the Lord.

In the sixth chapter (verses 37-40), Arjuna asks Krishna:

"What happens to that aspirant who though endowed with faith and devotion, is unable to control himself and is carried away from the path of Yoga by his wandering mind, and thus fails to gain perfection in Yoga?

"What happens to him, O Krishna?

"Does he not, fallen from both, perish, without support, like a riven cloud?"

The answer Sri Krishna gave to this question deserves to be cherished by every struggling aspirant as the most precious testimony of the Lord's infinite compassion for and loyalty to His devotee.

The blessed Lord said: "O Arjuna, know it for certain, there is no destruction for him, here or hereafter. For the doer of good, my son, never comes to grief."

Who is so pure that never an impure thought crosses his mind? Who does not stumble on the way? Who slips on the slippery path? Is everything lost because we have slipped once, twice, or thrice? Spiritual life is nothing but the incessant struggle against one's own lower nature for the permanent establishment of the

sovereignty of our higher nature. In this struggle, once in a while, the battle goes on, the enemy may get the upper hand: but the ultimate victory of the devotee is certain, for the Lord Himself is his ally.

God is not a puritan. He is all compassion. He knows how terrific is the power of His own maya which deludes men and women. Therefore, He is not hard on them. It is society that crushes a sinner in order to save its skin, but the Saviour melts in compassion for the erring soul and saves him.

God's loyalty is so unswerving to the devotee that even when he is fallen, He remembers him only as *kalyanakrit*, doer of good, and not as *akalyanakrit*, doer of evil.

Struggling souls that we are, we are bound to make occasional mistakes. Once in a while we are apt to get involved in the wrong movements of the mind. In such situations, let us remember that it is not the end of the game, but only a phase. And the Lord is ever watchful, ever ready to help and save. If we have the earnestness and sincerity, if we do not lose enthusiasm for spiritual life, we shall come out, by the grace of the Lord, from the grip of this error with augmented strength, with firmer resolution.

In one sense, it may be said, sin is the Saviour's strategy. But let us not have sin on that account! Poison can once in a while act as a medicine, but if you deliberately take poison, you deserve to die to have a chance to be reborn with a better understanding. In the ninth chapter of the Gita (verse 22), the Lord describes Himself as His devotee's keeper: "Those persons who worship Me, meditate on their identity with Me, and are ever devoted to Me—to them I carry what they lack and for them I preserve what they already have." These words have been time and again testified to be true in the lives of devotees.

Then in the twelfth chapter (verses 6-7), we find, in another touching declaration, the Lord evincing divine anxiety to save His devotee from the death-fraught ocean of the world: "Those devotees who consecrate all their actions to Me, regarding Me as the supreme goal, and who worship Me, meditating on Me with single-minded concentration—to them, whose minds are thus absorbed in Me, verily I become ere long the Saviour from the death-fraught ocean of the world." He says explicitly, mark His great words: "I become their Saviour from the death-fraught ocean of the world." And that too, *nachirat*, without delay, before long.

Then the Lord, not Himself satisfied with this declaration, comes with the solicitude of the mother step by step down to us, wherever we may be on the ladder of devotion, to take us firmly by the hands. Even before we ask, He provides us with means commensurate with our degree of strength, His only thought being that His devotee should not perish. With what touching tenderness and full understanding of our situation he speaks (12.8): "Fix your mind on Me alone, rest your thought on Me alone, and in Me alone you will live hereafter. Of this there is no doubt."

Then a second thought occurs to Him: suppose a devotee cannot follow that hard path of constant concentration. Will he perish because of that? That is unbearable to the Lord and He quickly suggests an alternative (12.9): "If you are unable to fix your mind steadily on Me, O Dhananjaya, then seek to reach me by the Yoga of constant practice."

Then a third thought occurs to the Lord: suppose a devotee failed also in this Yoga of constant practice—to which category most of us would belong—will he perish for that reason? The Lord shudders as it were at the thought and bending lower in compassion at once says (12.10): "If you are incapable of constant

practice, then devote yourself to My service. For even by rendering service to Me, you will attain perfection."

The Lord was not satisfied even with that. Apprehending that there could be devotees who could not rise even to this modest height, He bent lower in compassion to reach those who stood on the lowest level and said in extreme indulgence (12.11) : "If you are unable even to do this, then be self-controlled, surrender the fruits of all action, and take refuge in Me."

Could the Lord have gone further in His compassion? Well, believe it or not, He did go further. In the eighteenth chapter (verse 63), after finishing His entire discourse to Arjuna, the Lord says: "Thus has wisdom more profound than all profundities been declared to you by Me. Reflect upon it fully and act as you will."

These could very well be the closing words of the Gita, but they are not. The Incarnation is not a cold philosopher but a Saviour in flesh and blood; so He again melts in compassion. He is not satisfied with what He has given: He wants to give His utmost, His everything. Drawing nearer to the devotee He says (18.64-65) with a deep personal touch in His voice:

"Listen again to My supreme word, the profoundest of all. You are My beloved; therefore, I shall tell you what is for your good."

"Fix your heart on Me, give your love to Me, worship Me, bow down before Me: so, shall you come to Me. This is My pledge to you, for you are dear to Me!"

Ah! What words are these! Are these mere words? These are the very blood of the Lord's heart. The Lord asks: "Give your love to Me." He is literally begging for your love. Why? For your sake, for your salvation. Then He says: "Bow down before Me!" What does it matter to Him, the Lord of the universe, whether you bow down before Him or not. It is only to show you the easiest path to

eternal security, that the Lord says almost shamelessly, "Bow down before Me". What must be the pangs of His heart!

By giving Him your heart, your love, your worship, you are united with the Lord, the Imperishable. And that is how you stand—saved and delivered.

Even that does not satisfy the Lord. His anxiety to save the devotee is so agonizingly great! He now goes to the extreme point and utters (18.66) His supreme words: "Abandon all forms of righteousness and come to me alone for shelter. I will deliver you from all sins. Do not grieve."

Where do you seek shelter? Underground? Remember, that is not your shelter: that is your grave, dug by your own hands. The only shelter of the devotee is the Lord, where no enemy missile can ever penetrate. Whatever else you accept as your shelter is verily your grave; because through that acceptance you take yourself away from the Lord's protection and become vulnerable to the power of the enemy's thrust.

Why on earth should you take pains to become perishable, when the Lord has worked out such an elaborate scheme to make you imperishable? Without being sure that He had made provision for the salvation of every devotee, the Lord could not and would not have said (9.31) to Arjuna in that categorical fashion: "O son of Kunti, declare it boldly. My devotee will never perish."

III

Sri Ramakrishna says: "The Avatar, the Incarnation of God, is one and the same. Having plunged into the ocean of life, the one God rises up at one point and is known as Krishna, and then, after another plunge, He rises up at another point and is known as Christ." (Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1960, p. 705)

This explains why incarnations, though appearing millenniums apart, somehow speak the same language. We have explained at some length what Sri Krishna said about the imperishability of the devotee. We shall now indicate briefly what He said, rising at another point as Christ. In the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, Jesus Christ says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you. I am the door of the sheep, I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

Again, we find the Lord declaring in the sixth chapter of the same Gospel: "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die."

The supreme sacrifice which Christ made of Himself on the cross cannot leave anyone unconvinced of the extent to which God incarnate on earth was ready to go in order to redeem His devotees.

IV

Again, rising in the ocean of life at another point, the Lord, as Sri Ramakrishna, makes this solemn declaration: "God's devotees have nothing to fear. They are His own. He always stands by them."

Once a disciple said to the Holy Mother: "Yesterday I thought: How can I fight with my mind unless God assures me of his protection? No sooner does one desire disappear than another crops up." The Mother replied: "So long as the ego exists desires also undoubtedly remain; but those desires will not injure you: The Master will be your protector."

Then in an animated voice the Holy Mother, taking up the cause of the devotees, added: "It will be a heinous sin on the part of the Master if He does not protect those who have taken shelter at His feet, who have taken refuge in Him renouncing all, and who want to lead a good life. You must live depending upon Him. Let Him do good to you if He so desires or let Him drown you if that be His wish. But you are to do only what is righteous, and that also according to the power He has given you." This pledge of the Lord that His devotee will not perish has been found fulfilled time and again in the lives of the true devotees everywhere in the world.

There is a classical story in Hindu mythology, which vividly portrays the present theme. It is the story of Prahlada, narrated in the Srimad Bhagvatam:

Prahlada was the son of Hiranyakashipu, the king of the demons. The demons, though born of the same parentage as the gods, were always at war with the latter. They could, however, say that they had a legitimate grudge, the gods having monopolized all the oblations and offerings of mankind, and the government of the world also. But the tide of fortune changed between the gods and the demons; and once the mighty demons drove out the gods from heaven. It was only with the help of the omnipotent Lord Vishnu that the gods somehow regained their position. After a long time, however, the fortune of the gods was almost totally eclipsed. The mighty king of the demons,

Hiranyakashipu, not only drove away the gods from heaven but also became the sovereign emperor of the three worlds. This, however, was not the limit of his ambition. He proclaimed that he alone was the god of the whole universe, and that therefore all worship was to be done to him alone. Moreover, he strictly enjoined that henceforth no one in the three worlds should offer any worship to Vishnu.

Prahlada, the little son of the big demon Hiranyakashipu, by a stratagem of destiny happened to be born with devotion to Vishnu. Now to his utter dismay Hiranyakashipu discovered that the evil which he had sought to drive out of the three worlds had cropped up right in his own family, in his own son. He thought hard and decided that only education could cure the boy of his devotion to Vishnu. (And those of you who are connected with education will agree that, as far as theory goes, the demon king was not far wrong in thinking that education would cure his son of devotion!) Therefore, he consigned his son to the care of two teachers, Shanda and Amarka, known as stern disciplinarians, with strict orders that Prahlada was never to hear the name of Vishnu.

Prahlada was taken to the teachers' home where he was to live with the commoners and learn. Soon, however, it was noticed that Prahlada was not anxious to learn anything. He was all the time teaching his fellow students how to worship Vishnu. Prahlada was asked to stop that. But worship of the Lord was so much a part of his nature, that he may as well have been asked to live without breathing. The two teachers, when they found all efforts to dissuade him had failed, thought fearfully that it would be wiser to keep their records straight.

They came and reported to the king the fact that Prahlada was not only an incurable devotee of Vishnu, but he was also a

corrupting influence among good boys, who had never thought of worshipping God before.

The inflamed king at once ordered the son to be brought to his presence. First, he tried persuasion; then indoctrination—that his father the king alone was the only God to be worshipped. But Prahlada, though so small, fearlessly and repeatedly declared, in

the face of his terrible father, that Vishnu the Lord of the universe alone was to be worshipped. Then he gave his big father a piece of much-needed advice; he said: "If one has not conquered one's passions, of little use is one's conquest of the whole universe. The mind that is not controlled is our worst enemy. The greatest conquest is the conquest of our own minds."

This was indeed too much for the proud father to take from his son. With his anger hitting the ceiling, he ordered the instantaneous death of the boy. But wonder of wonders, when the ever-ready demons struck the boy with sharp weapons, he felt nothing, so lost was he in thought of Vishnu. This really frightened the king but did not deter him from his resolution. He adopted other methods. He ordered the boy to be trampled under the feet of an elephant, but the elephant could not crush the little boy's small body. Then many other methods were tried, like throwing him down a precipice, poisoning, putting him into a blazing fire, throwing him into a well, starvation, enchantment, etc. But nothing could do the boy any harm. At last he was tied to a huge serpent and cast to the bottom of the sea, and mountain-high rocks were piled on him to be sure that eventually he should die.

While passing through these ordeals, Prahlada's faith in Vishnu only deepened all the more. Now, lying at the bottom of the sea, as he meditated on the Lord, he felt the Lord was within his very soul, nay, that the Lord was identical with him: that He was in

everything and everywhere. As soon as he had this spiritual experience his snake-bond snapped: he was lifted above the waves and carried safely ashore. As he stood on the shore, to his great joy he saw God permeating everything within and without.

When the king came to know that Prahlada survived his last attempt at murder also, he did some vehement rethinking. (Laundering of that stuff in the head, which you call 'brain-Washing'), was practiced much earlier in history than you suppose!) Hiranyakashipu had the boy brought before him and tried the persuasive method of brain-washing—which failed hopelessly. For from Prahlada's brain and heart Vishnu could not be washed any more than blackness can be washed from charcoal. He made the same sort of reply as before.

Finding by now that Prahlada could not be killed, the king again wanted to see whether or not he could be healed. He thought that age and education might cure the boy of his strong obstinacy; so he again sent the boy to Shanda and Amarka with the specific instruction that he should be taught the duties of a king. But Prahlada showed little enthusiasm for study, all his time and energy being devoted to telling his little group of friends how to practice devotion to Vishnu. Soon the disconcerting report again came to the king. Mad with anger, the king began to vilify Vishnu in the blackest language as soon as Prahlada was brought before him, and he also threatened to destroy the Lord. Undeterred by the fulminations of his raging father, Prahlada maintained that Vishnu alone was the Lord of the universe, without beginning and end, omnipotent and omnipresent, and that, as such, He alone was to be worshipped.

"You vile creature," cried the demon king, "if your Vishnu is God omnipresent, why does He not reside in that pillar?" "He is indeed

there," replied Prahlada with the fullest conviction. "If so," shouted the king, "let Him defend Himself; I shall kill Him with this sword." So, saying, he rushed madly at the pillar and dealt it a terrific blow. Instantly the palace shook: a thundering noise was heard, and lo, Vishnu emerged from the pillar in the awful form of half lion, half man. The demons fled in whichever direction they could and as quickly as their heels could take them. But Hiranyakashipu, sword in hand, challenged the intruder. After a long and bitter fight Hiranyakashipu was slain by the Lord appearing as a man-lion.

After his fight with Hiranyakashipu, the Lord of that terrific form turned to Prahlada and spoke to him in the tenderest voice: "Ask, Prahlada, for anything you desire. You are My favourite child. Ask therefore for anything you wish." Overcome with emotion, Prahlada replied, "I have seen You and that is more than enough for me. Please don't tempt me with earthly or heavenly boons."

"Ask something, my son," importuned the Lord. "Then grant me this," said Prahlada, "that intense love which the ignorant bear for worldly things, may I have the same for You; may I have the same intensity of love for You, but only for love's sake." The Lord replied: "Prahlada, though my devotee does not want anything here or hereafter, yet at My behest you will enjoy the blessings of this world to the end of the present cycle, and with your heart fixed on Me live an exemplary life here. Then, in time, after the dissolution of your body, you shall attain Me." Uttering these words of blessing the Lord disappeared." (Adapted from Srimad Bhagvatam: The Wisdom of God, translated by Swami Prabhavananda)

VI

Prahlada is one of the most beloved figures of Hindu mythology, who by his constancy of faith has inspired countless devotees down the millenniums. Moreover, he is one of the blazing

testimonies of the Lord's pledge that His devotee will not perish. We sophisticated people of today, however, may find it difficult to draw inspiration from a mythological character, whose historicity we should like to question. Well, we are entitled to that, in all honesty: but it is not as if Prahlada stands alone as proof of the Lord's protection. There are any number of cases in historical times by which the Lord's never-failing loyalty to His devotee has been proved beyond a shadow of doubt. Therefore, as we boldly said in the beginning, if you are a devotee of the Lord, you have a reason to rejoice in this gloomy world. You have reason to be fearless in this world saturated with fear. You have a reason to be unworried in this world possessed by all-consuming worry. And that reason is that the Lord's devotee will not perish.

But before one rejoices, one should ask oneself a disturbing question: am I entitled to rejoice? Or, in other words, am I really a devotee of the Lord? What is the criterion of a true devotee? Giving the most liberal meaning to the word 'devotee', Sri Krishna says in the Gita (7.16): "Four types of virtuous men worship Me, O Arjuna: the man in distress, the man seeking knowledge, the man seeking enjoyment, and the man endowed with wisdom."

Not all men in distress, seeking knowledge or enjoyment, worship the Lord; only the fortunate among men take refuge in the Lord. Though the devotion of these three types of people is not without selfish motives, Sri Krishna accepts them as his devotees; but he adds (7.17): "Of these, the wise man, ever steadfast and devoted to the One alone, is the best. For, supremely dear am I to the man of wisdom, and he is dear to Me." He then says (7.18): "Noble indeed are they all; but the man endowed with wisdom I deem to be My very Self. For, steadfast in mind, he remains fixed in Me alone as the Supreme Goal."

Therefore, among devotees there are ranks. Those who worship God with motive, on the one hand, and those who worship him without motive and love him for love's sake, on the other hand, do not stand on the same level. Sri Ramakrishna says: "To be sure God exists in all beings: who then is a devotee? He whose mind dwells on God. But this is not possible as long as one has egotism and vanity."

In the Gospel, Sri Ramakrishna refers to the three signs of a true devotee:

1. His mind becomes quiet as he listens to the teacher's instruction.
2. He develops the power of assimilating instruction.
3. He has controlled his senses and subdued his lust.

Sri Krishna says in the Gita: "The Lord is the same toward all beings. To Him there is none hateful or dear." But then He adds: "Those who worship me with devotion—they are in Me, and I too am in them." And here is the secret of the imperishability of the devotee. The devotee who has controlled his senses, subdued lust, emptied himself of egotism and vanity, within him the Lord has found a home. To the extent the devotee has allowed the Lord to find a home within him, to that extent he is imperishable.

We have also to understand clearly the meaning of the words 'will not perish'. Will the devotee not die? Certainly, he will die. He may even die earlier than people usually do. Shankara died at thirty-two. Vivekananda died at thirty-nine. Will not the devotee suffer from afflictions? He may or may not suffer. He may suffer more than others. Socrates, such a good man, do you not call him a spiritual man? On him hemlock worked very well. Nor did the heavenly Father raise His little finger to save His dear Son from being nailed on the cross. Sri Ramakrishna's Divine Mother did

not do a thing to cure his throat cancer, though the devotees implored Her. And, stranger still, the Lord makes a heart-freezing declaration in the Srimad-Bhagvatam, the great devotional scripture of the Hindus: "Him on whom I shower my grace I gradually deprive of wealth. His own people thereupon forsake him when he is thus reduced to penury and stricken with sorrow." So, of escaping suffering through devotion, there is no hope.

And why should the devotee have special exemption from life's common lot? In fact, when our spiritual understanding develops, we begin to see new meaning in suffering. How significantly the Holy Mother said: "Everybody says regretfully, 'There is so much misery in the world. We have prayed so much to God, but still there is no end of misery?' But misery is only the gift of God. It is the symbol of His compassion!" (Sri Sarada Devi, *The Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1940, p. 315).

Let us be clear about that. The exalted devotees of the Lord, the very remembrance of whose names is purifying—they had more suffering than normal in life. To think that my devotion entitles me to expect God to cure my physical illness, to bring about increment of my pay and restoration of my energy, to cause my victory in an election, to help me win the hearts I seek to win, and smash the heads I seek to smash, to procure me a position, popularity and prosperity—this is not the high-water mark of genuine devotion. This is better described as sanctimonious materialism. A true devotee does not want God to do his chores. He just loves God for God's sake. And whatever comes from the Beloved is a blessing.

A saint once exclaimed, when bitten by a snake, "Ah, a messenger from the Beloved!"

In what sense, then, does the devotee of the Lord not perish? In the sense that he is no more affected by misery and its opposite; in the sense that in a world full of anger, fear, hatred, selfishness, vanity, lust and greed, he manifests the opposite virtues; in the sense that on account of his intense love for God he loses all attachment to the things of the world, and overcomes the terrific tendency to cling to life and also the fear of death; in the sense that, having offered all his actions and their fruits at the feet of the Lord, he does not any more accumulate binding karma which will be the cause of repeated birth and death with their resultant misery; in the sense that having established his relationship with the Lord in life, at death he becomes united with the Lord. United with the Lord, he naturally becomes as indestructible as the Lord Himself.

This pledge of the Lord, that His devotee will not perish, has a tremendous significance for our time and for the future, individually and collectively.

Seeking as we do to live a fearless, unworried, joyous life, we have no other alternative but to cultivate devotion to the Lord, devotion in the truest sense of the term. Given purity of life and love for God, one is sure to become blessed even in this bad burning world.

What one does by loving God, and what one does not do by loving God, all has great meaning for mankind. It is this love alone that makes life meaningful, death significant, and the beyond all wonderful, for verily the Lord's devotee will not perish.

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, June-August 1962)

Man as He Is in All the 24 Hours of the Day

Swami Ghanananda

I

We are living in an age of science and reason, and it is but natural that there are sceptics and heterodox thinkers who do not accept the authority of anything except their own reason and the evidence of science. There are, however, persons who believe in God and approach Him with faith and devotion, but they are unable to convince those who are devoid of faith and devotion. Those who wanted reasoning and would not accept any teaching which was not the result of a scientific enquiry or was not supported by reason were not lacking even in ancient times: indeed, such people benefited from the teachings of monism.

Monism is, therefore, peculiarly suited to the needs of the modern man who insists on applying the tests of reason and experience before accepting any teaching. Monism is so thoroughly logical and makes its stand so completely on reason, that a few non-monists like the author of at least one of the Puranas condemn it as a sanction for agnosticism and atheism, and consider Sankara, the great monist philosopher, to be a crypto-Buddhist. This explains perhaps why monism was kept a secret amongst the sannyasins, the monks who renounced the world and devoted themselves exclusively to meditation.

The rigorous reasoning and merciless logic of monistic philosophy may pass for scepticism, but if the approach is considered to be that of a sceptic, it is only a healthy and scientific one which cares for nothing but the absolute Truth and which is not satisfied even with the next best. Monism does not want men

to accept any particular dogma or doctrine and is entirely free from all sectarianism.

II

It is well known that when the scientist observes phenomena, investigates their nature, and arrives at his results, he has the conviction that he is an unchanging entity. The teachers of Indian philosophy discovered that the mind itself changed the very mind with the help of which man investigated phenomena. They, therefore, proceeded to study man himself. In Indian philosophy man himself is thoroughly studied as he is, not only in the waking state, but in all the twenty-four hours of the day. Whereas the ordinary philosopher is content with explaining man and the universe from the standpoint of waking, the Indian philosopher is unique in emphasizing that any such explanation can yield only a partial truth and that a true philosopher should take into account experience in its totality. He was thus led to a study of the three states of consciousness—the waking state, the dream state and the sleep state—a study which is peculiar to Vedanta. Its aim is to prove the unity of consciousness in all the three states. In studying these the ancient Indian philosophers like Gaudapada and Sankara observed what happened to man and to the universe in man's waking, dream and sleep states, and set down the results of their study.

They found that the waking state is not the same as the dream state. In the former the subject, the ego, does not change, despite the vicissitudes brought on by development or decline of the body, mental growth through education, experiences through marriage, or acquisition or loss of wealth; but it totally disappears when man begins to dream, and another subject, another ego, takes its place in the dream state. The waking subject cannot, therefore, be

permanent and real. This ego of the waking state is, therefore, ephemeral, and ephemeral is also the ego of the dream state,

because that also disappears in man's deep dreamless sleep. Thus, we see that the subject or the ego is one thing in the waking state, is quite another thing in the dream state, and in the sleep state. What cognizes sleep is neither the ego of the waking state nor the ego of the dream state.

If the subject is ephemeral, let us examine the object as it appears to the subject in waking, in dream and in sleep. In the waking state we see this universe with its myriad objects, and we acquire a knowledge of them through what the Upanishads call the "nineteen gateways"—the five organs of perception, the five organs of action, the five vital airs, manas (that part of the mind which receives impressions), buddhi (that faculty of the mind which sorts out the impressions and determines them), the ego, and the chitta (mind-stuff). We see, hear, smell, taste and touch, and learn about the universe in the waking state with the help of these nineteen gateways. In the dream state our eyes, ears, nostrils, tongue and skin do not work, but yet we have all the sense perceptions, which are similar to those of the waking state. The entire universe, which is something palpable, concrete and material in the waking state, completely vanishes in dream, and a new universe of dreams, which is thin and attenuated, airy and unsubstantial, is perceived.

Further, the standard of the waking experience is not the standard of the dream experience. If the dreamer feels hungry or thirsty, his hunger can be appeased and his thirst quenched with the food and water served in dream by a person seen in dream. If the hunger and thirst pertain to dream experience, dream-food and dream-water satisfy the dreamer.

Take again the laws of time, space and causation. These laws, as applied to dream experience, are entirely different from the laws applicable to the waking state. In our garden we sow seeds and plant seedlings, water them, manure them, and then they grow; but in dream, while walking you may suddenly come across a garden in the middle of the street, and while you are looking at the ground, seeds may germinate, saplings grow, put on leaves and flowers, bear fruits, and you may even eat them; or perhaps suddenly you see a garden with the luscious fruits ready for consumption, although there is snow on the ground. Thus, the law of causation in the dream state is not the same as that of the waking state. Take, again, the law of time. A boy takes a definite period of time to grow into an adult, and an adult to become an old man, but in dream, a man may see that he is a boy, he grows, marries, and has children, a few of whom perhaps die, but all these occur in a few moments, whereas such events would take forty or fifty years of the standard of the waking state. What is true of time and causation is also true of space. One may be lying in bed, yet one may dream that one is in far-off Australia, New York or Paris.

III

What happens to the ego, the subject, and to the universe, the object, when we pass into the deep sleep state? We don't see, hear, smell, taste, or touch anything. We are not even aware that we are sleeping! Nor are we aware of the universe. But still there is in this deep sleep state some subject experiencing peaceful sleep and the absence of all objective phenomena. For if there had been no subject, we could not have remembered that we slept and that the sleep was peaceful. The very act of remembering to have slept proves that there must have been an experience first, and that experience is recognised or remembered in the morning. Vedanta

holds that the subject experiences the peace and happiness of sleep and cognizes the absence of all phenomena in deep sleep.

We have already seen that the ego of the waking state disappears in the other states, and the ego of the dream state also vanishes in other states. How can we cognize the ego of the dream state when we are awake in the morning, if the ego of the waking state has nothing to do with the ego of the dream state? Vedanta answers the question by saying that this can be understood only if we posit a Self which cognizes all the various states and their experiences, which runs in and through them all as the permanent and constant witness. This is present also in dreamless sleep, and that is why the waking ego is able to compare and contrast what happens in waking and dream with what happens in sleep.

This permanent and constant witness which changes not though the states may change is the real Atman, the Self of man. It is often called the Fourth, with a view to distinguishing It from all the other three states. We cannot deny It, indeed no man can deny it. In sleep we cannot be non-existent. As a matter of fact, there cannot be such a thing as pure non-existence. Existence implies consciousness, and non-existence must imply absence of consciousness. But no one can think of one's own non-existence or of the total annihilation of personality, for it is an impossibility.

The Reality, which is known in Vedanta as the Atman, the Witness, behind all the three states cannot have any form or possess any attributes. It is Pure Consciousness. Indeed, it is not all who can understand that, though devoid of form and attributes, the essence of all existence, which must be called the Absolute or the Thing-in-Itself, does remain. Usually we associate existence with that which has form and attributes, or at least attributes. It may be asked how the Atman can exist without form and without

even attributes. There are people all over the world who accept what they call God without form, but it is not all that accept God without attributes. The formless and attributeless Being is the very essence of all existence—external in the form of the universe and internal in the form of man—or in other words, it is the very essence of both subject and object.

IV

This fact, then, emerges from the study of the three states of consciousness, that the universe and all its phenomena can exist for a man only with reference to his consciousness. And when the state of consciousness in which he happens to be changes, the universe also changes for him. The universe cannot exist without consciousness in its perceiver: consciousness is the perceiver of all objective phenomena. In fact, when we study consciousness in all its implications, we can discover how the universe arose. The universe, which appears as gross in our waking state, and subtle in our dreams, exists in its causal state in our sleep. Moreover, the waking and dream states merge in the sleep state, and they emerge again from the sleep state.

V

What is the state into which we enter when we are asleep, and in which our ego, mind, body-consciousness and sense perceptions, as well as our perceptions and conceptions of the universe, are completely merged? We found that the Atman or the Self persists even in our sleep and does not change, but this does not explain the nature of the sleep state itself.

While sleeping, man's ego merges into individual prakriti. Individual prakriti may be said to be part of the Universal or Cosmic Prakriti—though Prakriti really has no parts. From this

have come the ego and the mind, the senses and the body, as well as the entire universe which is perceived, though differently in dream and waking states. The state of sleep from which we wake and again become active gives us a clue as to what must have existed before the projection of the universe began. Just as in the morning man leaves that state of sleep into which he entered at night and becomes active again, so also the universe bursts forth into activity in the morning of creation after a period of cosmic sleep. Prakriti is nothing but the primordial condition of the universe, or the latent form of both matter and energy. It is pregnant with the possibilities of creative activity.

When man sleeps, he does not see anything or think anything. His ego merges itself into Ignorance—into what Vedanta terms Avidya. Ignorance is generally mistaken for want of knowledge and, therefore, for something negative or passive. But Vedanta teaches that sleep is caused by one of the two powers of what is known as Maya—the power to veil the Reality, as in sleep, and the power to make things appear to be what they really are not, as it does in our waking and dream states. These powers are called respectively its veiling power, and its power to project the universe and everything pertaining to our body and mind, including the ego. How strong and irresistible the veiling power is can be inferred from the manner in which it paralyses the will of man, weakens his ego, and completely overpowers him by sleep. All men have to sleep. If man is overpowered by sleep, and has no control over it, it also leaves him after a time, showing thereby that he has no control over wakefulness either. Maya, which possesses the veiling and projecting powers, is the wonder of wonders.

VI

In sleep, neither the ego nor the universe arises, for both the ego and the universe are merged in it. Sleep consciousness has content. There is, however, a state of super consciousness called the Fourth, to distinguish it from the three states of waking, dream and sleep. In the Fourth, the ego, and therefore the universe also, is transcended. It may therefore appear to be similar to the state of sleep. A few Sanskrit scholars with a modern education have argued that sleep itself is Samadhi (super consciousness). They have not learnt the scriptures of Vedanta from a competent teacher and are devoid of the benefit of sadhana (spiritual disciplines). They forget that Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the goal of Monism, is contentless Consciousness, whereas the consciousness in sleep is not contentless. In sleep we forget all the miseries and sorrows of life, but it does not give us Illumination. The peacefulness of sleep just indicates what the Peace that passes all understanding can be but is not identical with it. Had they been the same, all spiritual seekers would have courted sleeping-sickness. In dream the subconscious is active, in sleep it is in its quiescent form.

How can one attain Nirvikalpa Samadhi or contentless Consciousness? By dint of sadhana (spiritual disciplines), of which meditation, after the necessary ethical and moral purification, is a vital part.

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, July-August 1954)

See God with open eyes: Meditation on Ramakrishna

by Swami Chetanananda

Book review

by Jacqueline Power

This is a hugely important book for devotees and aspirants at all stages, whether experienced or inexperienced in methods of meditation, who wish to realize God through their chosen Ideal, the Master.

An indispensable tool, *See God with open eyes: Meditation on Ramakrishna* contains a wealth of information culled from first-hand direct sources, easily accessible in one volume.

Comprehensive and with meticulous detail, provided by the Master's direct disciples and devotees, this book is a synopsis of everything you need to know about Sri Ramakrishna's personality, life, form and teachings to facilitate deep visualization of his many facets and aspects. Thus we are able to realize these divine qualities in our own lives, and to open our eyes and not only see them and God in others but also in the everyday lives of others, as well as see God in human form.

"The goal of this book is to train our eyes to see God in all: *sarvabhutebrahmadarshan* – seeing or experiencing Brahman in every being. *Sarvam khalu idam brahma* – Truly, all this [the visible universe] is Brahman."

Swami Chetanananda also writes: [...] "*Does God have a form? Can we see God as we see other objects and beings in this world? Can we hear or touch God? Ramakrishna answered these questions with his words and through his life....*"

We can experience for ourselves the answers that Ramakrishna gave; this is not just a book to read – we cannot benefit here from

‘dry knowledge’— it is a means with which to transform our everyday lives, to experience Ramakrishna’s divine qualities directly through meditation on many events and deeds in his life—to establish a living relationship with the Master. The sequences in our lives that make up our experience become living images of the Master in our hearts, a direct ‘knowing’. We can ‘become’ Thakur.

The different meditations are summarized very clearly and cover Sri Ramakrishna’s form, his mind, his divine qualities, his *Lila* (divine play), places of his Lila, his service to humanity, and meditation on the New Year/Kalpaturu Day. This means that the reader can go straight to the meditation of their choice. The meditations that we are immediately drawn to may reflect a lack of our own qualities, or a desire to strengthen some particular qualities or aspects of ourselves, or to attain more qualities to help us improve and gain understanding in our dealings with others. “*By meditating on God we develop a divine nature, and this is the significance of meditation.*”

In addition, another chapter that will prove initially informative and helpful to read is ‘Ramakrishna’s Teachings on Meditation’. This contains detailed instructions from the Master himself to his devotees on how to meditate ‘[...*meditating on God with open eyes means that you see all Beings as God; God dwells in all beings; He is the Indwelling Spirit of all..]*’; where to meditate; on God with form and without form; the Master’s experiences of Brahman during meditation; Tota Puri’s teachings; and various instructions on different types of meditation according to the individual’s personal needs. Most importantly, there is a whole section on Ramakrishna’s teachings on how to meditate on his own form, and also on the instructions he gave to thirteen of his direct disciples, starting with Swami Vivekananda and finishing

with Swami Vijnanananda. Lastly, we read how realization comes from meditation: “M. quoted Ramakrishna’s promise to humankind:

‘You will achieve everything just by thinking of me.’”

“The primary result of meditation is experiencing God as a living presence in our heart, which brings joy and peace of mind. God is so near to us but we do not see him....”

So we need to open our eyes to the Master’s presence as he pervades everything and every being, and one way of achieving this is to meditate on his message so that his way of life starts to become our way of life. We live and breathe him as a result of our direct experiences of various meditations as living images of the Master and his form and we can conduct our lives openly as him, realize him in our everyday existence.

He is readily accessible to us and the recordings of his life, his message and his teachings serve just for this purpose. How often is it that we have photographic images giving the likeness of an incarnation of God, who is still so close to us in terms of when he was born and when he died. For many, the difference can even be only a generation or two.

As stated, there are seven chapters giving specific meditations on the Master’s life:

1. Ramakrishna’s Form

“When God takes a human form, we want to see how that avatar lives, acts, talks, walks, laughs, cries, eats, and sleeps like other human beings...”

Thakur’s feet, hands, chest, back, collar bone, throat and face are all covered in this chapter. One unique thing about Ramakrishna is that there are three photos of him, unlike any other avatar or living incarnation before him. So we can visualize the

Master in human form in our meditation and bring him to life, have a living relationship with him, just by focusing on his form.

“If one’s mind thinks of any part of Ramakrishna’s body, that is akin to perceiving an avatar, or an incarnation of the infinite Lord.”

Focusing on various parts of Ramakrishna’s form can equate to the magnitude of scale of the different events in his life. Take the Master’s face alone, for example the throat area—in our meditation, we can ‘hear’ the beautiful quality of his voice in the songs that he sang, but can also visualize the terrible cancer that developed there as a result of his service to humanity.

2. Ramakrishna’s Mind

Generally, we meditate on Ramakrishna’s form and divine play, the incidents and events in his life, so that they can mirror our own. But meditation on his mind means we go beyond seeing the form of a person to see his or her inner qualities—“... *to be able to rectify the shortcomings of our own mind during meditation.*”

The Master said: “*I cast the mould, you put your mind into it and shape yourselves accordingly.*” Having addressed the issue of what the mind is, in answer to the questions of where does the mind dwell, how and where we should meditate, Swami Chetanananda gives Ramakrishna’s wonderfully inciteful all-problem-solving solution (page 27). And a plethora of fascinating stories throughout the Master’s life illustrate the vast array of facets he demonstrated in everyday situations and in his teachings. There are no less than 28 different aspects of the Master’s mind to choose from, touching upon the qualities of truth, strength, desirelessness, courage, joy, devoutness, faithfulness, guilelessness, or a mind that is poetic, self-controlled, energetic, divine, dynamic, clairvoyant, one-pointed, noble, omniscient,

discriminating, detached, among others. We pick ones that we believe are lacking in our daily life, or there are some aspects that we naturally gravitate to in order to reach the goal of realization. Eventually, a pure mind can also become the ‘guru’—can give us answers to our questions, give guidance on spiritual issues and steer us on the right pathway to God-realization.

Last but not least, to help us better understand how to approach meditation on Ramakrishna’s mind, a later chapter, ‘Ramakrishna Scripture’, details the seven [Vedantic] stages of spiritual unfoldment Ramakrishna’s mind used to pass through (page 261) that underpinned the Master’s spiritual experiences and visions.

3. Ramakrishna’s Divine Qualities

For the majority of us, it is probably easier to visualize and meditate on a form rather than a quality, a characteristic or trait, which are more abstract. But Swami Chetanananda says: “Form and quality are interconnected. When we see Ramakrishna’s form, his divine qualities manifest in our minds. As we meditate on the Master’s qualities, our own qualities become divine.”

This chapter first deals with the six divine qualities of God cited in the scriptures—*aishwarya* (splendour, supernatural power), *viryā* (vigour), *yasha* (fame), *shri* (beauty), *jnana* (knowledge), *vairagya* (renunciation)—and gives us the opportunity to meditate on the various scenes in Thakur’s life that manifest these six noble qualities, that is, they demonstrate how God lived in human form.

Swami Chetanananda then lists a further nine characteristics that are more down to earth, everyday qualities that we can more easily identify with: purity, steadfastness in truth, simplicity, humility, shradha (faith), devotion and longing, forgiveness and forbearance, sense of humour, and saviour and destroyer. These

are illustrated by various incidences, scenes, parables, and anecdotes in the Master's life, and as we reflect on them, we can hear the words of Swami Vivekananda's vesper hymn: "... the breaker of the world's bondages....stainless even though he has assumed human form....attributeless, yet full of attributes."

"While free from gunas, the avatar plays with gunas."

4. Ramakrishna's Lila (Divine Play):

"We cannot seeRamakrishna with our physical eyes, but God gave us an inner eye with which to visualize [his] *lila* (divine play). Meditation opens the inner eye, known as the 'third eye', the 'mental eye', or the 'eye of knowledge'."

"There is no end to the human imagination. We can choose various episodes from the avatars' lives and meditate on their glories, which will illumine our hearts."

If we want to look at our own lives in terms of how we interact with our families—our spouses, our parents and loved ones—and the everyday functions that we perform—what we eat, our personal hygiene or daily routine—plus our moods and emotions, likes and dislikes, and other habits, we can equate all these with Ramakrishna's human *lila* (*nara-lila*). He lived by example. We are given intimate personal details of the 30 years of his life spent at Dakshineswar, for example, where he enacted his divine play, and of even many small scenes in the Master's daily life which make up some entire episodes, for example his visits to a zoo, museum, and a circus.

The Master's *nara-lila* ends with the last days of his life, when he suffered from cancer of the throat. The moral here is that while we may not be able to absorb others' sins in the same way, we can

by example put the welfare of others first, make our own divine play part of our service, his service, to humanity.

5. Ramakrishna's Service to Humanity

“Anybody who meditates on Ramakrishna's unselfish service to humankind will develop a desire to serve others, and that person's ego and selfishness will be uprooted. That, in fact, is the goal of meditation on *seva*....”

In this chapter, Swami Chetanananda mainly brings to our attention the practice of *seva* (service to others), ostensibly one of the five main methods of practice that we should incorporate into our spiritual life, namely *seva*, *swadhyaya* (study of spiritual books), *sadhana* (practice of spiritual disciplines), *satya* (speaking the truth), and *samyama* (self-control).

Under 'humankind', Swamiji includes families and relatives, worship of family deities, serving the monastic community, his disciples and devotees, as well as serving God in the poor, and serving human beings as God. Many small episodes are given of Thakur's actions of servitude to all, in particular his modes of service to his disciples and devotees, as well as his approach to the worship of the Divine Mother when priest of the Kali temple. In fact, Swami Chetanananda suggests that the Master's "*mode of worship is a wonderful object for our meditation*" and gives priority to his practice of the 'servant attitude to God'.

6. Places of Ramakrishna's Lila

“Blessed are the places where incarnations of God are born and raised, where they lived, travelled and passed away.”

This chapter covers the well-known sites of Kamarpukur and Jayrambati that make up the early part of Ramakrishna's *lila* (divine play), and gives in great detail numerous incidents and events throughout the remainder of the Master's life (adult and

final *lila*) that took place in the temple garden of Dakshineswar (“the playground of an avatar”), the Shyampukur house, and, finally, the Cossipore garden house. In addition, there are also a total of 68 holy sites in and around Calcutta connected with the Master (‘In the footsteps of Ramakrishna’) to reflect upon as well as the pilgrimage sites that he visited.

For our meditation practice, perhaps one of the most solitude and sacred places among all of the sites connected with the Master’s *lila* is the tulsi grove at the Panchavati. We can imagine ourselves sitting quietly in this holy ground, visualizing and experiencing for ourselves our choice of the seemingly unending places of play in the life of the beloved Master.

7. Meditation on the New Year

“What more need I tell you? I bless you all. May you all be illumined.”

January 1 1886 – New Year’s Day – Kalpaturu Day: this was the Master’s last message to all. That day he became the wish-fulfilling tree (the kalpaturu) and blessed all. New Year’s Day is the object of our meditation. We can make every day a Kalpaturu Day by meditating on his last message. We can imagine the Master in samadhi walking along the garden path at the Cossipore garden house, passing by the devotees who had waited so patiently, stopping and touching each devotee as he went. In our visualization, we are there with them, we are among those devotees and can feel that same love and intense joy felt by the devotees at his touch, as he blesses us individually. We can see and realize God with open eyes.

Blessed meditation

“Meditation helps us to understand that what God does is good for us.”

This is a useful supporting chapter to the previous seven as it tells us what meditation does for us, explains the important differences between meditation and concentration, and describes two types of meditation on a Chosen Deity/Personal God: active and still. Swami Chetanananda also gives wonderful advice on how to ‘use’ a restless mind—by suggesting that it can be made to travel to different spiritual places associated with the Master as well as Holy Mother on a type of ‘spiritual adventure’; he lists eleven places in total, and the illustrations throughout the book could also provide additional spiritual scenes on which to meditate.

The remainder of the book contains various chapters on the background history of the compilation of Saradananda’s *Lilaprasanga* (Divine Play) and M’s *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (The Gospel of Ramakrishna), with copies of some of the actual handwritten pages of M’s diaries, the role of prayer, an explanation of the scriptures [*Shāstra*], and Ramakrishna’s philosophy. The last chapter is an imaginary interview with Ramakrishna between the Master and a reporter on the occasion of the Master’s 175th anniversary.

The appendix is an article that was published on the occasion of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention in 1980.

‘Mysticism’ is the aspect of religion that will play a vital role in the 21st century, on the back of humankind’s inherent search for the eternal Spirit, Oneness or Unity, for bliss and freedom, and the Truth.

“As children inherit the wealth of their parents, so those who mediate on me will inherit my treasures.”

Leaves from an Ashrama - 70

Swami Vidyatmananda

Expanding to Zero

I had been reading *La Naissance du Jour* (Break of Day) by the French novelist Colette (1873-1954). Is she an author suitable for the attention of a devotee? In the case of this particular book, yes. In its pages the famous French novelist speaks as an aged person, expressing wisdom gained from the events of a tempestuous life. She celebrates, as did St. Francis, the bounties of this earth—sun, harvests, creatures, human beauty. She celebrates with humble thanks the power and order that drive the world. She even celebrates life's crushing enigmas. She greets physical decline and accepts it with tranquility.

One sentence in particular caught my eye: “At my age there is only one virtue left: not to hurt anyone.” Is that all? Such would seem to be a trite lesson indeed to be drawn from the experiences of a whole lifetime.

“But,” I thought, “let me reflect on what this seemingly simplistic conclusion implies. It means that one has given up playing the customary roles of world's boss, policeman, judge, critic, complainer, suffering martyr, moralist, prima donna. All those roles which result in imposing oneself on others, in restricting others' freedom. Oh yes, it is gratifying to express one's persona in any or all of these guises. In such consists the spice of life. And express oneself one does, for ever so long a time. Until rises a new sun of wisdom, or in Colette's words, a new Break of Day. Repudiation of oneself sets in after that long night of self-love. Colette doesn't express it in that way, but I took this lesson from her words: “I see at last that God does His own work. Let Him

play all those roles that chastise or discipline others. I've retired from that; I'm complete in myself. I no longer need, in order to express myself, in order to feel secure, to hurt anyone."

I recalled an incident which had to do with a certain sadhu I had heard about. An astrologer wanted to draw up a horoscope for this sadhu. The astrologer felt sure, according to the personality traits expressed by the sadhu, that he could guess the sign of the zodiac under which the latter had been born.

"Based on my observation of your personality and behavior," said the astrologer, "I'd say that you were born under the sign of X." He mentioned a sign; people born under that sign are supposed to be especially serene.

"Wrong," replied the sadhu.

"Really!" exclaimed the astrologer. "Then surely you are a Y." He named another sign; people born under that sign are reputed to be particularly loving.

"Wrong again," smiled the sadhu.

The astrologer was baffled. "Then tell me," he cried, "under what sign were you born?"

"I was born under the sign of Z."

"Impossible!" cried the astrologer. "Persons born under that sign tend to dominate others, play the leader, attempt to organize the world. You're not like that in the least."

"Ah," replied the sadhu, "that's what Vedanta has done for me. It has absolved me from the blatant imperatives of my original nature. It has released me from the zodiac. I have almost become a zero."

I thought to myself: "Yes, only a zero. Nothing in itself, but when added to others' sums, a potent proliferator."

Programme for January - February 2020

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Jan 5	The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 51	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jan 12	The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 52	Swami Sarvasthananda
Jan 19	Swami Vivekananda's Puja	
Jan 26	"The Vedantasara" from Swami Bodhatmananda's Class Notes.	Swami Tripurananda
Feb 2	The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 53	Swami Sarvasthananda
Feb 9	"The Vedantasara" (2)	Swami Tripurananda
Feb 16	"The Vedantasara" (3)	Swami Tripurananda
Feb 23	Day Retreat	

Swami Vivekanada's Puja

Sunday 19th January
at Bourne End at **4:30 pm**

Day Retreat

With Swami Sarvasthananda and Swami Tripurananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on February 23rd
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Fortnightly Saturday Class - Message of the Upanishads - Ancient Solutions for Modern Problems - by Swami Sarvasthananda

Jan 18 (Saturday)

Feb 1 (Saturday)

Time 4:00 p.m to 5:30 p.m

Venue: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HE

than he found a young damsel sitting at his feet and stroking his legs. The traveller felt supremely happy. Presently, he felt hungry and thought: "I have got whatever I have wished for; could I not then get some food?" Instantly he found various kinds of delicious food spread before him. He at once fell to eating, and having helped himself to his heart's content, stretched himself again on his bed. He now began to revolve in his mind the events of the day. While thus occupied, he thought: "If a tiger should attack me all of a sudden!" In an instant a large tiger jumped on him and broke his neck and began to drink his blood. In this way the traveller lost his life.

Such is the fate of men in general. If during your meditation you pray for men or money or worldly honours, your desires will no doubt be satisfied to some extent; but, mind you, there is the dread of the tiger behind the gifts you get. Those tigers— disease, bereavements, loss of honour and wealth etc.,—are a thousand times more terrible than the live tiger.

Vedanta

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

Phone: (01628) 526464

www.vedantauk.com

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

It is the belief of the Hindu that the soul is neither mind nor body. What is it which remains stable-which can say, "I am I"? Not the body, for it is always changing; and not the mind, which changes more rapidly than the body, which never has the same thoughts for even a few minutes. There must be an identity which does not change-something which is to man what the banks are to the river-the banks which do not change and without whose immobility we would not be conscious of the constantly moving stream. Behind the body, behind the mind, there must be something, viz the soul, which unifies the man. Mind is merely the fine instrument through which the soul-the master-acts on the body. In India we say a man has given up his body, while you say, a man gives up his ghost. The Hindus believe that a man is a soul and has a body, while Western people believe he is a body and possesses a soul. Death overtakes everything which is complex. The soul is a single element, not composed of anything else, and therefore it cannot die. By its very nature the soul must be immortal. Body, mind, and soul turn upon the wheel of law-none can escape. No more can we transcend the law than can the stars, than can the sun — it is all a universe of law. The law of Karma is that every action must be followed sooner or later by an effect. - *Vivekananda*

