

# Vedanta

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420 JULY - AUGUST 2021

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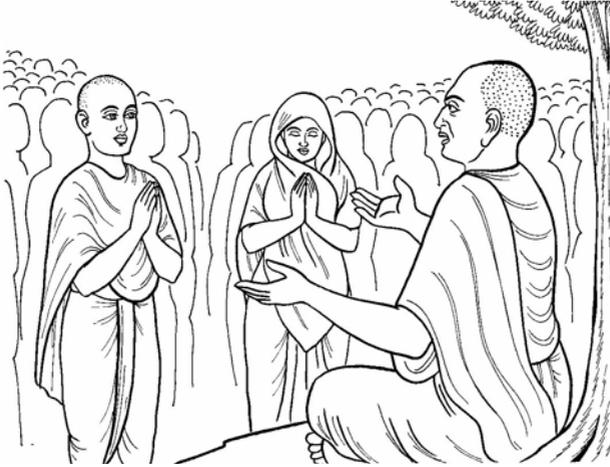
**The Guru and Spiritual Guidance**  
*Swami Yatiswarananda*

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**Mandukya Upanishad: A Philosophy of the  
Totality of Existence**  
*Swami Siddheswarananda*

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### THE FALL OF THE TWELVE HUNDRED

There is the story of twelve hundred *nedas* (shaven-headed monks) and thirteen hundred *nedis* (shaven-headed nuns). Virabhadra, the son of Nityananda Goswami, had thirteen hundred 'shaven-headed' disciples. They attained great spiritual powers. That alarmed their teacher. "My disciples have acquired great spiritual powers," thought Virabhadra. "Whatever they say to people will come to pass. Wherever they go they may create alarming situations; and those people offending them unwittingly will come to grief." Thinking thus, Virabhadra one day called them to him and said, "See me after performing your daily devotions on the banks of the Ganges." These disciples had such high spiritual nature that, while meditating, they would go into

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## Mantra Japa or Repetition of the Holy Name – 6

In our previous editorials, we saw that the whole universe according to the Tantra philosophy is a manifestation of sound, or rather it is grossified sound. They follow the Purva Mimansa doctrine of *Shabda*, with such modifications as are necessary to adapt it to its doctrine of *Shakti*. According to the Mimansakas, Sound (*Shabda*) is a quality or *guna* of *Akasha* (ether) and is sensed by hearing, and has a twofold manifestation. One is lettered (*Varnatmaka Shabda*) and the other unlettered (*Dhvanyatmika Shabda*). They say that the unlettered sound that is caused by the striking of two things together is meaningless. *Anahata Shabda* (or unstruck sound), on the other hand, is that sound that is not caused by striking two things together. Lettered sound is composed of sentences (*Vakya*), words (*Pada*) and letters (*Varna*). Such sound has a meaning. *Shabda* thus manifesting as speech is said to be eternal.

But the followers of the Nyaya school of Indian philosophy do not agree with this and say that *Shabda* is transitory because the word is uttered and in a moment it is gone. This opinion the Mimansakas deny, saying that the perception of the lettered sound must be distinguished from the lettered sound itself. Perception according to them is due to *Dhvani* caused by striking of the air in contact with the vocal organs, namely, the throat, palate and tongue. Before there is *Dhvani* there must be the striking of one thing against another. It is not the mere striking which is the lettered *Sabda*. This only manifests it. The lettered sound is produced by the formation of the vocal organs in contact with air, which formation is in response to the mental movement or idea, which by the will thus seeks outward expression in audible sound. It is only this perception which is transitory, for the *Dhvani* which manifests ideas in language is such. But lettered sound, as it is in itself, is eternal. It was not produced at the moment it was perceived. It was only manifested by the *Dhvani*.

It existed before, as it exists after, such manifestation, just as a jar in a dark room which is revealed by a flash of lightning is not then produced, nor does it cease to exist on its ceasing to be perceived through the disappearance of its manifestor, the lightning. The air in contact with the voice organs reveals sound in the form of the letters of the alphabet, and their combinations in words and sentences. The letters are thus produced for hearing by the effort of the person desiring to speak, and become audible to the ear of others through the operation of unlettered sound or *Dhvani*. The latter being a manifestor only, the lettered *Shabda* is something other than its manifestor.

We have also discussed in our previous editorials how the first manifestation of Brahman in the relative world is through *Shabda* or sound. The transcendence too can easily be achieved by going back through the same sound-route. And it is a very natural route, safe and sure, to retrace the path by which we have descended into this realm. This process can be called *Mantra Yoga* or *Japa Yoga*, which consists of repetition of certain sound symbols called '*Mantra*' — letters or syllables or a combination of letters into a word or a sentencesignifying a particular aspect of Divinity or a Deity. It is the sound symbol in which name, form, power and the Consciousness of the Supreme Reality, the Brahman, are embodied.

There is perhaps no subject in the Indian philosophy which is less understood than the concept of Mantra or Mantra Shastra. It is considered to be so important in the Tantra philosophy that Tantra Shastra is often referred to as Mantra Shastra. Commonly, translators describe Mantra as a mere prayer or a formula of worship and so forth. But to consider Mantra as a mere prayer shows a lack of proper understanding. Mantra, in short, is power (Shakti); power in the form of sound. The root 'Man' which means 'to think' is this creative power of thought that manifests as sound. Since thought is a power or Shakti, they are as real as material objects or forces that we see

around us. Both are projections of the creative thought of Brahman. Mantra is thus the result of manifested *Shabda Brahman*.

According to the basic principles of Indian Philosophy, the ultimate Truth is One, but Its manifestations are many. In *Prakriti* or Nature there are three manifestations—as *Jivas*, individual souls; as power-heads or the personified powers of nature, the *Devatas*; and as the composite material world. Being governed by time, there is activity; and as a room for activity, there is space. The *Jīva* is enmeshed in the world of matter in the realm of time and space, and governed by the laws of Nature and controlled by the powers of Nature. The *Jīva* has to escape from the limitations of Nature and transcend Nature and attain everlasting peace, joy and eternal freedom. He can neither avoid dependence on matter nor control any of the powers. The only way is to build up friendship and identity with them and then transcend them and enter the Everlasting unchanging limitless Pure Consciousness and realise one's own relationship with that shoreless ocean of Consciousness, the *Sat-chit-ananda*. *It is something like a child depending on its mother to protect and guide it safely through its childhood to adulthood.*

Says Swami Vivekananda in his Raja Yoga, *"Nature's task is done, this unselfish task which our sweet nurse, nature, had imposed upon herself. She gently took the self-forgetting soul by the hand, as it were, and showed him all the experiences in the universe, all manifestations, bringing him higher and higher through various bodies, till his lost glory came back, and he remembered his own nature. Then the kind mother went back the same way she came, for others who also have lost their way in the trackless desert of life. And thus is she working, with and without beginning and without end. And thus through pleasure and pain, through good and evil, the infinite river of souls is flowing into the ocean of perfection, of self-realisation. Glory unto those who have realised their own nature."*

(C.W. Vol 1, pg. 304)

(To be continued)

# The Guru and Spiritual Guidance

Swami Yatiswarananda

## Need for training in spiritual life

A disciple of the great Chinese mystic philosopher Lao Tsu narrates the following story. A young man joined the gang of a robber chief named Chi. One day the young apprentice asked his leader, 'Can the Tao (the right Way) be found in thieving?' And Chi replied: 'Pray tell me of anything in which there is no Tao, a law or right way. In thieving, there is the wisdom by which the booty is located, the courage of going in first; the heroism of coming out last, the insight of calculating the chances of success; finally, there is justice in dividing the spoils equitably among the robbers. There never was a successful thief who did not possess these five qualities.'

There are principles to be learned in every activity of life, even in thieving. An apprentice in any profession needs training. This is all the more true of spiritual life. The disciple of Lao Tsu continues, 'The doctrine of the wise is equally indispensable to the good man and to the robber since good men are few and bad men are in the majority; the good the sages do in the world is little and the evil done by the rest is great.' In the course of my travels in the West, I have been amazed at the amount of energy which is constantly expended on destructive activities. How many soldiers, pilots, technicians and even scientists are being trained for war? Why can't even a fraction of the same time and energy be used for training in the spirit, in making ourselves receptive to divine illumination, bliss and peace?

The ideal which the great sages of the Upanishads place before us as the goal of life is Self-realization. But this ideal cannot be realized without spiritual awakening. However, in the religious

field we see too much of ritual and ceremonial and too little of true spiritual awakening. Real religion, which is Self-realization, has for this reason become discredited. And there is now an over-abundance of religious pretenders who claim supernatural powers and promise easy passports to heaven, while parasites unwilling to strive for moral purity want to attain salvation easily. The highest goal can be shown only by a person who has attained it or by one who has at least gone very near it. Regarding the importance of right guidance in spiritual life, the Upanishads declare:

'Many do not hear about the Self. Many others, though they hear of it, do not understand it. Wonderful is he who speaks of it. Wonderful is he who learns of it. Blessed is he who, taught by a good teacher, is able to realize it.'<sup>1</sup>

'The truth of the Self cannot be fully understood when taught by an inferior person, for there are different opinions regarding it. Subtler than the subtlest is this Self, beyond all logic. When taught by a teacher who has realized himself as one with Brahman, a person attains the goal and becomes free from transmigration.'<sup>2</sup>

'Let a man devoted to spiritual life examine carefully the ephemeral nature of heavenly enjoyment. To know the Eternal, let him humbly approach a guru established in Brahman and well versed in the scriptures. To a disciple who approaches reverently, who is tranquil and self-controlled, the wise teacher gives that knowledge, faithfully and without stint, by which is known the truly existing, changeless Self.'<sup>3</sup>

### **Function of the Guru**

What does Self-realization mean? It means the union of the individual spirit with the supreme Spirit. After passing through various experiences and sufferings in life, the individual soul

draws closer to the Oversoul and finally realizes its oneness with It. The Upanishad gives a picturesque description of this process: 'Two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, are perched on the branches of the same tree. One of them tastes the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the other, tasting neither, calmly observes. The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of its real divine nature, gets involved in worldly life and suffers. But when it recognizes the worshipful Lord as its own true Self and beholds His glory, it becomes liberated from sorrow.'<sup>4</sup>

We have forgotten our true divine essence. So instead of moving closer to God, we get drowned in worldly existence more and more. Somebody must remind us of our real nature. He who does this is the guru or spiritual teacher. The function of the teacher is to awaken the disciple from his age-long sleep and show him the way to the Divine. The guru is not like the Christian priest who stands between man and God. The word guru etymologically means a spiritual guide who removes darkness and brings light. He helps us to dehypnotize ourselves by removing the false notions we have been entertaining about ourselves.

In one of his parables Sri Ramakrishna speaks of a tiger-sheep. Once a tigress attacked a flock of sheep but, as the shepherd resisted, she fell on her side, gave birth to a cub and died. The shepherd took pity on the little creature and raised it along with the flock. The little tiger drank sheep's milk and learned to bleat and eat grass like sheep. Years later, another tiger attacked the same flock and was astonished to see a tiger behaving like a sheep. He caught hold of the tiger-sheep, dragged him to a pool and forced him to look at his reflection in the water. Then the old tiger put a piece of meat into the mouth of the young tiger-sheep and told him that he was not a sheep but a real tiger. Thereupon the tiger-sheep gave up his sheep consciousness and regained his real tiger consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

Swami Brahmananda used to liken the teacher to a king's minister. A poor man requests the minister to grant him an audience with the king who lives in a palace with seven gates. The minister grants his request, and leads him through the gates one after another. At each gate there stands a richly dressed officer, and each time the poor man asks the minister if that is the king. The minister answers 'No' each time, until they have passed the seventh gate and have come to the presence of the king seated there in all his regal splendour. Then the poor man does not ask any more questions. What he needed was somebody who could guide him through the gates and corridors of the palace. 'So is it with the guru,' says Swami Brahmananda. 'Like the king's minister, he leads the disciple through the different stages of spiritual unfoldment until he leaves him with the Lord.'<sup>6</sup>

The human personality is like a big palace with buildings and courtyards one within another. The supreme Spirit comes to us in the form of a teacher, making us realize that we are not the physical body, not the mind, not the feelings, ideas and emotions, but the Spirit eternal. When we travel to an unknown country, it is wise to have a guide who knows the way. The guru is the guide who leads us to our destination and leaves us there.

### **Need for a Guru**

In India, we take the necessity of a guru for granted in spiritual life. When I first went to Europe, I was surprised to hear some religious groups saying that they could commune with God, hear the voice of God, get directions about spiritual life without any special training. I studied a few cases and found, as I had expected, that these people were hearing their own voices, which sometimes were good. God and the divine Voice are far off from an impure soul. A well-trained, pure-hearted person can certainly commune

with God, the indwelling Spirit, but when impure and untrained individuals make the same claim, they only deceive themselves. And yet they say they need no outside help. My teacher, Swami Brahmananda, used to say, 'One requires a teacher even when one wants to learn stealing. And this sublime Brahnavidyā, the knowledge of Brahman, does it not require a teacher to acquire it?'<sup>7</sup>

There is no mystery in this. People go to Madame Curie to study the properties of radium; they go to Rutherford to learn about the nature of the atom. As in natural science the guidance of a competent teacher is necessary, so in spiritual science the guidance of a guru is absolutely necessary to learn the technique of realizing the Self. Here we are travelling into regions of which we know nothing. Those who do not feel the need of any teacher, who are over-anxious to be teachers of others, should remember that the blind should not try to lead the blind.

Hindu scriptures repeatedly stress the importance of the guru. Take for instance the Bhagavad-Gītā. In it Krishna at first simply takes Arjuna to the battlefield, without giving him any spiritual instruction. Then Arjuna pleads with Him: 'Overpowered by grief, my mind is confused regarding the right path. I supplicate You as Your disciple, instruct me who have taken refuge in You.'<sup>8</sup> It is only when Arjuna accepts Krishna as the guru does the divine Teacher begin His teaching. In Shankara's *Crest Jewel of Discrimination* we find the disciple appealing to his teacher: 'O Master, I have fallen into the sea of birth and death. Save me from this misery.'<sup>9</sup>

### **The power of spiritual initiation**

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'One must have an awakening of the Spirit within in order to see the one unchanging imperishable

Reality.' Mere reading and talking about spiritual truths is not enough. One should directly perceive the Light within.

How is this first awakening to be brought about? An illumined teacher does this for the disciple through a process of spiritual initiation. In all religions there are initiation rites consisting of bath, baptism, sprinkling with holy water or oil, reciting of sacred texts, rituals of worship, etc. These practices make the initiates eligible for the special privileges of the religious communities into which they are admitted as members thereby. This formal initiation is very different from the spiritual initiation of which we here speak. This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'<sup>10</sup> To be born again means to undergo spiritual awakening, to cease to identify oneself with one's body and realize oneself as the Spirit. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'<sup>11</sup> Later on St. Peter, a disciple of Christ, explained the meaning of this passage: 'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.'<sup>12</sup> The guru is one who transmits the word of God. The power of God comes through the word, the mantra, and through the mantra comes the awakening of the Spirit.

In India, we have the ideal of the *dvija*, the twice-born. The word *dvija* also means a bird. First comes the egg, then out of the egg comes the fledgeling which will some day develop into a mature bird. All eggs do not get hatched; all fledgelings do not grow fully. Similarly, all people do not attain spiritual realization. People are in different stages of spiritual growth. A well-known Sanskrit verse says: 'By natural birth a man is born a *Sūdra*, an ignorant person; through purificatory rites he becomes a *dvija*, the twice-born; through study and knowledge of the scriptures he becomes a *vipra*, a scholar or poet; through the realization of the supreme Spirit he becomes a *Brāhmaṇa*, a knower of Brahman.'<sup>13</sup> The

purpose of spiritual initiation is to enable a person to become a true Brāhmaṇa, a knower of Brahman. The Upaniṣad says, 'He who departs from this world knowing the Imperishable is a Brāhmaṇa.'<sup>14</sup> Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda), a great direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, once told me, 'Whoever comes to Sri Ramakrishna is really a Brāhmaṇa.'

Spiritual initiation brings the individual Self into harmony with the supreme Self. A Chinese sage demonstrated the principle of natural harmony (Tao) in this way: he took two lutes and strung them identically. One he placed in an adjoining room, then struck the Kung note on the instrument he held. Immediately the Kung note on the second lute responded. When he struck the Chio note on one, the corresponding string of the second instrument vibrated, because they were tuned to the same pitch. If he changed the intervals on one lute, the tones of the second were jangled and out of tune. The sound was there but the influence of the key note was gone. Similarly, we may read and think and talk. But all this will be of no avail unless we learn to attune our souls to the Oversoul, the supreme Self.

The power of initiation becomes manifest only in a pure soul who intensely yearns for God. Patañjali distinguishes three types of disciples: 'The soft (mṛdu) ones who cannot bear much the rigours of spiritual disciplines; the middling (madhyamā) ones who strive harder than the first; the intense (tīvra) type including those who struggle intensely for realization — they have learned the secret of withdrawing their minds from outside distractions, are always conscious of the divine Reality within them and have deep yearning for God.'<sup>15</sup> Yearning for God should always be regarded as a mark of divine Grace.

At the beginning of my own spiritual life the path seemed very difficult. When I asked Swami Brahmananda what I should do, his reply was, 'Struggle, struggle.' It is not enough to get directions

from a guru; one must struggle incessantly. The disciple must first of all yearn with all his heart to know the Truth. To those who are prepared for it the awakening may come all of a sudden. To others who are struggling it comes gradually.

When we are in a joyous mood, we are able to transmit that joy to others. In a similar way, a good spiritual teacher is able to communicate spiritual vibrations to his disciple. We have seen the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna exercising this power on many occasions. They were great storehouses of spiritual power, but they used it with great caution. Normally a guru transmits his power through a mantra.

### **The power of the Mantra**

A monastic disciple once asked Mahapurush Maharaj, 'All persons do not get spiritual awakening as soon as they are initiated. Will they not be benefited nevertheless?' Mahapurushji replied, 'Even though they may feel nothing at the time of initiation, the power of the holy Name given by an illumined teacher is unfailing. The spiritual power transmitted to the disciple in due course transmutes him and spiritual awakening follows.'

What about the initiation given by an advanced soul though not fully illumined? The ordinary advanced soul is about on a par with a senior in high school who, before he is ready for college himself, can still give elementary instruction to his juniors. As he himself progresses towards Truth, he strives to awaken spiritual consciousness in others. The initiation given by an ordinary guru who is sufficiently advanced in spiritual life also brings about spiritual awakening in the course of time, if the recipient sincerely follows the spiritual path. The mantra or the divine Name itself contains tremendous power. Śrī Caitanya teaches us this truth: 'Various are Thy names revealed by Thee into which Thou hast

infused Thine own omnipotent powers, and no limitations of time for remembering those names are ordained by Thee.’<sup>16</sup>

Patañjali, speaking about the effect of repeating Om and other holy Names, says that it removes the various obstacles on the path and leads to the awareness of the indwelling Spirit.<sup>17</sup> What are these obstacles? They are illness, doubt, mental disturbances, etc. Repetition of the mantra introduces a new rhythm, harmony, into the personality, which calms the nerves and unifies the powers of the mind. And in due course, this leads to the awakening of the Spirit within. A beginner in meditative life may not be able to understand the power of the mantra. But if he sincerely repeats it, he will gradually realize its power. Swami Brahmananda says, ‘Japam —japam — japam! Even while you work, practice japam. Keep the name of the Lord spinning in the midst of all your activities. If you can do this, all the burning of the heart will be soothed. Many sinners have become pure and free and divine by taking refuge in the name of God. Have intense faith in God and in His name, know that they are not different.’<sup>18</sup>

As the saints showed in the past, so in the present it has been proved time and again that the power of God does manifest through the divine Name. When the mantra given by a guru is treasured up within and constantly meditated upon, this power develops more and more in the aspirant. Sri Ramakrishna used to liken this process to the formation of a pearl. According to popular belief, the pearl-oyster waits until the star svāti (Arcturus) is in the ascendant. If at that time rain falls, the oyster will open its shell and collect a drop of that water. Then it will dive down to the seabed and remain there for several months until the rain drop is converted into a beautiful pearl.<sup>19</sup> In the same way, the heart of the devotee must be open to Truth, and after receiving spiritual instruction from the guru he must work on it with one-pointed zeal until the pearl of spiritual illumination is born.

## The pure mind as Guru

Swami Brahmananda used to say, 'There is no greater guru than your own mind.' The human guru is not always at hand. Even if we are fortunate enough to secure the blessings and instructions of an advanced teacher, he may not be always available when we need him. But there is an inner teacher, our own purified mind, who is always present within us. Says Swami Brahmananda, 'When the mind has been purified by prayer and contemplation, it will direct you from within. Even in your daily duties, this inner guru will guide you and will continue to help you until the goal is reached.'<sup>20</sup>

What does this mean? How does the mind act as the inner guru? The supreme Spirit, the source of all knowledge, the Teacher of all teachers, is ever present within the heart of everyone. When the mind is purified through moral life, prayer, meditation, etc., it comes in touch with the inner Light of the supreme Spirit. The purified mind becomes a channel for the flow of divine Knowledge. It receives spiritual guidance directly from the Teacher of teachers. When the mind thus learns to open itself to the inner Truth, it can receive instruction from many sources. The Bhāgavatam speaks of a wandering Avadhūta or ascetic who accepted so many natural objects as his upagurus, subsidiary teachers. From mother earth he learned the secret of patience, from air he learned detachment (as air remains unaffected by pleasant or bad odour), from the sky he learned freedom from all limitations, and so on.<sup>21</sup>

Many of you know how illumination came to Brother Lawrence, the seventeenth-century French mystic who spent his life in the kitchen of a monastery. The sight of a leaf-less tree in mid-winter stirred in him the reflection that leaves would be renewed, and flowers and fruits would appear on those bare branches. This revealed to him the presence and power of God lying hidden in

all creation. The spiritual awakening that he then experienced sustained him throughout his life. In all of us the power of God is lying hidden, waiting for awakening. We have to discover the centre of divine Consciousness in us and call forth the dormant power. It was this inner guru that Buddha asked his disciples to follow after his passing away. 'Be a lamp unto yourself (ātmadīpo bhava)', he told them.

But we must take care lest we should deceive ourselves. We may think that our mind has become a good guru that we are getting instructions everywhere, but there is always the danger of mistaking our own desires and thoughts for divine inspiration, divine Voice, etc. There is no such danger when we receive instruction from a living teacher who is spiritually advanced and are guided by him. The human guru instructs his disciple to purify his soul by the practice of moral disciplines and selfless work. When the disciple errs, the guru notices it and brings him back to the right path. Those who are fortunate to have the guidance of a true human guru will not go astray. Gradually, through the guru's blessings, the hidden faculty of intuition will awaken in the disciple, and from there onwards his purified intuition will act as his guru. That is how one's own mind becomes one's guru.

### **Avatāra — the greatest Teacher**

The greatest Teacher is, of course, the avatāra, the Divine Incarnation, who is able to bring illumination to thousands of people. Swami Vivekananda used to say that an avātara is a kapālamocana, one who can alter the destiny of people, one who can wipe out what is written on their foreheads, that is, their karma.<sup>22</sup> No ordinary teacher has such a power of transformation. Jesus had the power to bring divine Light to those simple fishermen who attained illumination at his touch. He also had the

power to transform impure souls whom people call sinners. When he told them, 'Thy sins are forgiven; thy faith has made thee whole; go in peace,' they at once felt freed from all impurities.

But Jesus himself passed through initiation. What else was that scene of baptism in Jordan when, we are told, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him and he heard a voice saying: 'This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.' In modern times an increasingly large number of people regard Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation. He too received initiation from a human teacher. We are told that before he took up his work as priest in the Kālī temple, he was initiated by a Tāntric teacher (by name Kenaram Bhattacharya) of Calcutta. When the teacher uttered the mantra in his ears, Ramakrishna gave a loud shout and was absorbed in ecstasy. The teacher said he had instructed many disciples but had never encountered anyone like Ramakrishna.

The Master in his turn initiated his great disciple Narendranath with the name of Rāma, and the young man's spiritual emotions were stirred to great heights. For several hours he was absorbed in a state of ecstasy. Later on, this disciple in turn became a dynamo of spirituality—Swami Vivekananda. In 1892, the year before Vivekananda went to America, an agnostic professor in one of the colleges of Madras argued with him regarding the truths of religion. Vivekananda just touched him, and the doubter was instantly transformed. Later on, this man renounced the world and lived and died a saint.

Sri Ramakrishna had the power to raise others to great heights of higher consciousness by transmitting spiritual energy even by a mere look or wish. Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj) has narrated his own experience as follows: 'One day I was meditating when the Master came near me. No sooner had he glanced at me than I burst into tears. He stood still without uttering

a word. A sort of creeping sensation passed through me and I began to tremble all over. The Master congratulated me on attaining that state.'<sup>23</sup>

Later in life Swami Shivananda himself, like many of his brother disciples, became a spiritual teacher of great power, as he was when we met him. This power manifested itself in him all the more when he became the head of the Order. About the year 1923, a spiritual seeker from Sind came to the Swami for initiation. The devotee had received a mantra in a dream but, as he could not understand its significance, his mind had become restless. Mahapurush Maharaj took him to the shrine room, initiated him, and asked him to meditate for a time. Then the Swami returned to his room with his face radiant and his mind overpowered by divine emotion, for he knew that something significant was happening in the shrine. The new disciple had a wonderful experience. The moment he received the holy Name, a new spiritual consciousness awakened in him, tears started rolling down his cheeks and he entered into deep meditation. When he returned to his guru, he related how through his grace his heart was filled with divine peace. He said that the mantra given to him during initiation was the same mantra he had received in his dream, but only then he understood what it signified. Mahapurush Maharaj then told him: 'My child, it is the Lord Himself who has blessed you today. He alone can show mercy to others. We are only instruments in His hands. The Lord manifests Himself in the heart of the guru and transmits spiritual power into the heart of the disciple. I have dedicated you to the Lord who has taken charge of your life and destiny.'<sup>24</sup>

### **The eternal Teacher**

There is a saying that the human guru utters a mantra in the ears of a disciple, while the world Teacher speaks in the heart of the

devotee. Real initiation takes place when God awakens the spiritual consciousness of a seeker. The real guru is the immanent God, the indwelling supreme Spirit who is the Goal, the Controller, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode, the Refuge, the Friend, the Origin and Dissolution of the universe, its Substratum, the Repository of all knowledge and the eternal Seed.<sup>25</sup>

When the ordinary teacher and the pupil meet, each tries to see God in the other. The disciple looks upon the teacher as a visible manifestation of the supreme Spirit, the Teacher of all teachers, as a channel for the flow of divine Grace. It is in this spirit that he serves him, obeys him and worships him. The well-known verses repeated by thousands of people in India express this idea:

'I bow to the divine guru who, by the application of the collyrium of Knowledge, opens the eyes of one blinded by the disease of ignorance. I bow to the divine guru who imparts to the disciple the fire of Self-knowledge and burns away his bonds of karma accumulated through many births.'<sup>26</sup>

'I offer my salutations to the beneficent Being who is incarnate in the guru, the Light of whose absolute Existence shines forth in the world of appearance, who instructs the disciples with the holy text, "That thou art", realizing whom the soul nevermore returns to the ocean of birth and death.'<sup>27</sup>

The Jīvātman, the individual Self, is interpenetrated and pervaded by the Paramātman, the supreme Self. But, owing to ignorance, the soul does not realize this truth. The purpose of initiation is to remove the veil of ignorance. Once this veil is lifted, the contact can be maintained through regular spiritual practice. The old law of supply and demand is at work in spiritual life too. If a seeker feels a tremendous yearning for the light of Truth, that light must come to him from some source or other. Something happens to him, his heart opens to divine Grace, divine Light bursts

upon him. And as he moves closer to the ultimate Reality, he sees the Light of the supreme Spirit shining in all beings. And when he becomes one with the supreme Spirit, the Teacher of all teachers, he too becomes a channel of divine Knowledge for others. He serves all beings knowing well that he is serving the Lord alone, the eternal Teacher who is teaching, awakening, illuminating and guiding souls throughout the ages.

## References

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- 4 *ibid.*, 3.1.1,2
- 5 See The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras:Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), pp. 306-7
- 6 Swami Prabhavananda, The Eternal Companion (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1971), p. 250
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- 9 Vivekacūdāmani, 139
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- 17 Yoga-Sūtra, 1.29
- 18 The Eternal Companion, op. cit. p. 297

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- 23 Cf. Swami Saradananda, Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master (Madras: SriRamakrishna Math, 1970), p. 134 136
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# Mândukya Upanishad: A Philosophy of the Totality of Existence

Swami Siddheswarananda

## 1. Reality and Relations

### Introduction

The *Mândukya Upanishad* is a philosophy of the Totality of existence, which is not the same as the sum total of a number of separate entities or data added together. It seeks the knowledge of that Totality, which endeavours to solve the greatest problem of philosophy: *the contradiction between life and death*.

In non-duality there are no relations: there is only the one reality. That is why the *Mândukya Upanishad* speaks of *Asparsha Yoga*, the yoga of 'no-contact', of 'no-relation'. This is in contrast to everyday-life, which consists of relations and rapports *only*. The problems in the life of an individual are always relational problems. It is only through relations and rapports that we can have knowledge, normally speaking. This we ought to keep as a keystone for the study of the *Mândukya Upanishad*: "*all is rapports*".

### Causality: A Presupposition

Perhaps the most important mental artifice for establishing rapports is causality. Causality is a principle which is established by our intelligence in order to find an explanation via relations and rapports. It is also a given fact of our education, of our culture. From early childhood each human being has been conditioned by the principle of causality, and thus it has become a universal principle. Nevertheless, it is only through the intelligence of our imagination that we have created such a universal principle in order to be able to interpret and manage our everyday world.

The notion of a 'primary cause' is only an idea born from the need to understand. The numerous gods of Hinduism represent only that one idea: the search for the cause—God (in religious terms). It is very difficult to eradicate the notion of a cause.

In religion, once we have been caught by the principle of causality, there are the ideas of immanence and transcendence. We then believe that there is the one reality and that that is a transcendental state. In that state, a 'fall' takes place, and then, in that fall, the manifestation takes place, and so on. From an early age we have been nourished by that theological dualism, and we don't even ask ourselves whether such an idea is really correct!

The *Mândukya Upanishad*, on the other hand, is a metaphysics leading to wisdom, to knowledge. In it there is *no* redemption, *no* God, *no* sanctity, *no* transcendence, *no* mysticism, *no* esoterics. There one does not run to the forests in order to attain the final *samâdhi*. This metaphysics is reserved for very few people and therefore in India this teaching was given behind closed doors so as not to confuse other people.

The problem of cause and effect is well presented in the example of the clay and its forms, which is found in the *Chhândogya Upanishad*: *Brahman*, the one reality, is the clay. No one is able to perceive clay as such: we always see only *forms* of clay—where there is form, there is clay, and where there is clay, there is form. Thus, as an 'observer', we can never go and stand *outside* the one reality; being a *form* of clay, we are inescapably *part* of the Whole and, as such, we will never be able to 'grasp' the Whole. As an individual we are indissolubly connected with the one reality; we cannot objectify the reality nor abstract ourselves from it as a subject. As no form of clay can exist apart from clay, so also no material or mental form can stand outside the reality. In this sense the idea of a separate, independent personality—however much unique in itself—is an illusion.

In terms of cause and effect we can never experience the cause, *Brahman*, as an object. What we see are always the effects only, even when the effects (*the forms of clay*) cannot be distinguished from their cause (*the clay*), as in the case of a substance that is constantly changing, but which remains unknown in itself. Our error is that we are trying to find a cause apart from the forms. *Brahman*, the one reality, is being known *through* the forms by means of the metaphysical insight, just as the clay is known *through* its forms, for the clay and its forms are inseparably one.

The evolution idea, the idea of 'progress', tells us that form A precedes and, therefore, is the cause of form B which we are seeing now, and so on. This is an error: the so-called cause is always the one and the same reality (*clay*). The same applies to the practice of spirituality: 'realisation' or 'liberation' is not the 'product' (*effect*) of a foregoing, personal effort (*cause*), however much it may take its legitimate place.

Also one should always try to get rid of the notion of a substratum, of a separate, more or less concrete base serving as a 'ground' cause. Shankara's theory of super-imposition (*adhyâsa*) of the reality as presented in the classic example of the piece of rope which is being mistaken for a snake, is a concession to the presupposition of causality. Nobody ever experiences ignorance or unreality *directly*. It is always only *afterwards*, through memory, that we speak of unreality or of error—so always in relation to an experience *in the past*. The notion of reality persists through *all* of our perceptions and experiences: *the clay remains clay under all of its forms*. The *Mândukya Upanishad* places a time-bomb under the pre-supposition of causality.

### **Name and Form**

However, in order to communicate the experience of our perceptions, we attribute certain sound-symbols to them—their

names. The names are like labels which enable us to indicate objects and ideas. Through the emotional value of a name we maintain a certain rapport, a certain relationship with an object or idea.

First, we have the idea that an object is presenting itself as an independent, separate reality. Nevertheless, each object is but a form, the essence of which remains unnameable—just as in the example of the clay. Next, we attach, through tradition or convention, a name to the form of the object, which we are able to communicate via a common language. The name (*nama*) is the 'naming' (and therefore defining) element, and the form (*rupa*) is the element 'named' (the defined). It is said that it was only *after* the fall, when Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (the knowledge of *relativity* brought about by polarisation through opposites—*mâyâ*), that they started to give names (definitions) to the things.

In the perception of a table, for example, there is only the perception of its total instantaneousness. (Just as in the perception of a dream). We first have a *direct* perception of the table, then the idea 'table' comes to our mind. Next, we try to analyse the experience of that perception: we put the idea 'table' (*the name*) on one side, and the object (*the form*) on the other side. Through the power of abstraction we make a separation between the table and the name of the table, that is to say, with our imagination we mentally attribute an independent existence to the name of an object. That way all names are recorded and stored in the mind, to be processed into a more or less complex structure which we experience as an 'inner' world of our own. With this complex we identify ourselves *indirectly* and *retrospectively* through the memory, so as to derive a sense and meaning from it as a person.

With one single effort, push aside the illusion that name and form may be seen separately. Name and form are indissolubly

linked to each other as the mental and physical aspect of one and the same reality. From the Totality of Time the names are as much a manifestation within *time-duration* as are their forms: the name has no superiority over the form, or the form over the name. He who knows through realisation that, *in reality*, there is no difference between name and form, is liberated.

The notion of unreality, of illusion or of ignorance, consisting of name and form, is felt only in relation to a foregoing experience. With the realisation of the metaphysical insight all rapports collapse into the non-dual *one*.

## 2. The Three States & the Fourth

### The Three States

The unique contribution of the *Mândukya Upanishad* lies in an investigation into the nature of the three states of consciousness (*avasthâtraya*) of waking (*jagrat*), dreaming (*swapna*), and deep, dreamless sleep (*sushupti*). With a very rigorous logic it can be established that, from the standpoint of consciousness, it is impossible to arrive at dualism. The individual which imagines itself to be passing through the three states of consciousness every day is *in reality* nothing but the indivisible, pure and non-dual consciousness. The dialectics of this analysis is explained by K.A.Krishnaswami Iyer in his book: '*Vedanta or the Science of Reality*'.

One never becomes conscious of consciousness as of an object. Consciousness is not an 'object' to be known as such, nor is it an entity of which the individual as a 'subject' could have the experience. On the other hand, for consciousness itself everything is equally an object, including the individual in its role as subject. In the Samkhya philosophy also everything is *prakriti*, matter, the whole of the mental world included. In Indian thought there is no dualism between matter and mind. That is the big issue which

separates European thinking from Indian thinking—*there lies the whole difference: From the standpoint of consciousness no real distinction can be made between mind and matter.* For that reason Cartesian thinking ('*Cogito ergo sum*') actually represents a big fall in Western philosophy, spiritually speaking.

Pure consciousness is like the number 1: indivisible (*advaita*). The notion of individuality, the sense of 'self', is really the notion of consciousness, essentially undivided, persisting *through* the three states of consciousness of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. The universal man—he who *knows* through realisation that he is pure consciousness—bears the whole universe within himself.

In the waking and dream states there is the experience of the reality in its manifested aspect, characterized by the opposition between the 'I' and the 'non-I'. In the state of deep sleep the reality is in its non-manifested aspect, which is the negation of the manifested aspect. No one can imagine a state in which there is a subject and an object, without there being another state, in which there is no subject and no object. Everything which is experienced here in the manifested is known, because of its being opposed to its antipode, the non-manifested: all relative knowledge arises from an opposite. According to Prof. V. Subramanyam Iyer: 'This is one of the greatest achievements of Indian thought.'

The positive can become a form of knowledge, only if the negative also exists. We can acquire an integral knowledge of the relative, only if we have an experience of another order in which all relative knowledge is absent. Every person is daily in the state of deep sleep, the state of the non-manifested. An understanding of the position which deep sleep takes up within the whole of the three states of consciousness gives a clear insight in which the error collapses. The non-manifested is a negative affirmation.

Is empirical knowledge possible without its opposite? All knowledge arises through opposition: black-white, cold-warm, pain-pleasure, etc. Empirical knowledge cannot arise unless there is non-empirical knowledge as well. If the whole of empirical knowledge is only a play between the positive and the negative, then empirical knowledge as a whole can arise only if its opposite *as a whole* is also a factor of our experience. Without the state of deep sleep it would be impossible for us to come to an experience of the waking and the dream state. This is made clear in the last line of verse 5 of the *Mândukya Upanishad*: 'Deep sleep....who is the doorway to the experience (of the dream and waking states).' This knowledge regarding the state of deep sleep is only received through oral transmission.

## The Fourth

The *Mândukya Upanishad* first gives us a definition of the waking state, the dream state, and the state of deep sleep. Subsequently the Upanishad speaks of '*turiya*' as being a fourth state of consciousness, using the word '*pâda*' which may mean both 'foot' and 'quarter'. In his commentary Shankara explains that *turiya* is not, for example, like the fourth foot of the four feet of a cow, in other words, as part of an arithmetical series. *Turiya* is *Brahman*, looked at from the non-causal standpoint, and is not part of any enumeration or classification. The Upanishad, according to the opposition raised by Shankara, actually identifies *turiya* with the fourth quarter of a coin that is divided into four parts, as it were.

The three states of consciousness of waking, dreaming and deep sleep make up the first three quarters of the coin. The first quarter merges into the second, the second quarter merges into the third, etc. *Turiya*, being the fourth and last quarter into which the first three merge themselves, completes the coin by making it into one

whole and, in that sense, it contains the first three quarters. It could then be argued accordingly that each of the first three quarters represents a state of consciousness, and that *Turiya* is a fourth state of consciousness into which the first three are merged successively. *Turiya* would thus complete and 'perfect' the other three states by making them into one whole, thereby raising itself to a state of 'transcendence' as compared to the other three states. But it is not at all like that: *Turiya* is not a *state* which one enters, stays in for a while, and then leaves again.

*Turiya* is the non-causal reality which persists *throughout* the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. It is the awareness of the reality, the sense of the real, which accompanies all of an individual's perceptions and experiences. The realisation of *Turiya* is a metaphysical insight. The one reality is an indivisible Totality and forms no part of the scheme of numbers. The example of the coin is used only to arrive at the notion of prime number: the philosophy of Shankara is non-dualistic (*advaita*), therefore undivided and indivisible. For that reason, *Turiya*, the one, non-causal reality, is considered as the number 1. Whether one multiplies, adds or divides, the number 1 is always implied. Whatever the process that is being applied, the number 1 is always implicitly present, we can never eliminate it. The divisions which we make are but our own mental divisions, the abstractions of our intellect. The notion of '1' is a metaphysical insight: *Turiya* is the 1.

*Turiya* is the Intemporal, the eternal *Now*, always staying outside the framework of the personal vision. Here it is not a matter of a 'fourth' state of 'transcendence': *Turiya* is the eternal 'here-and-now', present under all circumstances and in all states of consciousness. This given fact is, normally speaking, disregarded by the individual because of the power of ignorance (*avidyâ*), resulting in the denial and negation of its very indivisibility. The realisation of *Turiya* is the removal of that denial,

which does not mean the removal of the world: it is only the ignorance which is removed. If the ignorance (*avidyâ*) results in the negation of the one reality, then the realisation of *Turiya* is the removing of that negation, leading to an affirmation, namely that *everything* is this one reality: *everything is Brahman*. At the same time this realisation gives us the knowledge that cause and effect are *one* in the moment of the eternal *Now*.

### **The Three States viewed from the Fourth**

The idea that the three states of consciousness would succeed one another in time follows from a wrong interpretation by the intellect, made afterwards through abstraction in the waking state with the aid of memory. The 'I' of the waking state unjustly 'appropriates' the other two states of consciousness. This applies to the state of deep sleep in particular. In the expression, 'Last night I slept soundly for eight hours; I didn't know anything', the paradox of the state of deep sleep comes to light. The three aspects of this statement—'I' (causal), 'for eight hours' (temporal), and 'didn't know anything' (cognitive)—are but elements of an illegitimate claim made *afterwards* by the ego of the waking state. To that same ego the state of deep sleep remains puzzling, because in it [in deep sleep] the perception of the world as a time-space complex disappears all at once, including the perception of an 'I' as a subject. At the same time, the state of deep sleep is a miniature example of the reality as a non-causal, non-relational and non-temporal actuality.

The dream state also may be an important guru to us. Looking at them from the eternal *Now*—time—the waking and the dream states, as manifestations, are equivalents. The dream state may give us an insight into the waking state: in the dream state, one and the same consciousness is spontaneously split into subject and

object, thereby giving us a miniature example of how the world as a time-space complex may be presented all at once just as pure idea [imagery], in the Totality of the *Now*. The dream state makes it clear how everything may be pure idea, including the idea of an 'I' as a subject. It is the unique contribution of the *Mândukya Upanishad* that it removes the distinction between the illusory reality of the dream state and the empirical reality of the waking state by viewing them as being on the same level.

### **The Mantra 'OM'**

The mantra 'OM' forges the connecting link between the above metaphysical analysis and spiritual practice. The *Mândukya Upanishad* gives a unique place to the symbol 'OM'. OM is not a symbol in the usual sense of the term. Let us take an example: It can be said that the flag of a country is the symbol of that country, because the flag represents that country. OM, however, is more than a symbol representing the one reality. OM is a sign which possesses a concrete counter-value. A banknote, for example, is a sign, that is to say, the note may be exchanged for its fixed counter-value. Similarly, OM is a sign which not only represents the one reality, but presents it at the same time. The *Chhândogya Upanishad* states that the syllable OM contains all the sounds that may be uttered by man. Swami Vivekananda also explains in his 'Raja Yoga' that the syllable OM is the womb of all the vowels and consonants which the human voice is capable of: starting with the 'A' sound with a fully opened mouth, one concludes, via the 'U' sound, with the 'M' sound, where the mouth is completely closed. Thus OM comprises all sounds and therefore all names and their meanings.

The *Mândukya Upanishad* identifies the letter 'A' of the symbol OM with the waking state, the letter 'U' with the dream state, and

the letter 'M' with the state of deep sleep. The letter 'A' merges in the letter 'U', and the letter 'U' in the letter 'M'. The silence which follows the uttering of the last letter 'M', and which constitutes the interstitial void between any two words or thoughts, is identified with *Turiya*. The interstitial void may be made bigger by slowing down the 'internal dialogue' through the practice of the objectless attention. Since name and form are indissolubly connected with one another, the same applies to OM. OM is the name of the reality. Meditation on the mantra OM is essential for those who are not able as yet to remove the ignorance directly with the aid of metaphysical insight. Life is a dream. Dream that you are the immortal Atman and you become Atman.

### 3. Seeing Brahman with Open Eyes

#### Introduction

The *Mândukya Upanishad* is the only Upanishad that is purely metaphysical. It teaches *ajata vada*, the way of the unborn, of non-causality. In the metaphysics of Vedanta, a distinction is made between (1) reality (*tattva*)—that which does not change and which persists through all our experiences, and (2) truth (*mata*), of which, according to the Vedanta, there may be any number. Swami Vivekananda explains this with the example of the sun: somebody is travelling towards the sun and at each stage he takes a picture. The images are all different, but no one can deny that they all show the same sun. The reality always stays the same, whereas the truths, although all true at their own particular level, are relative. As such, everyone else is entitled to a place for his standpoint which is as important as the place occupied by our own standpoint.

The reality is the Totality of existence, which has two aspects:

(a) the manifested aspect, and (b) the non-manifested aspect. The purport of the *Mândukya Upanishad* is to prove that,

irrespective of the level of existence at which one may find oneself, there is only one Reality which *Is*.

### **Life as the Confrontation of Contradictions**

*Mâyâ* is that which is constantly changing, thereby giving rise to the numerous contradictions in life. That is why Swami Vivekananda explains that *mâyâ* is not just a theory of illusion, but a fact of our experience: it is the confrontation of the contradictions in life, the play of interaction between the positive and negative poles, wherefrom the ordinary, relative knowledge springs. The only way by which we may know life is *by* means of opposites, *by opposition*. And true knowledge (*jñâna*) arises from the confrontation of the silence with the tumult. Only very few can have *that jñâna*.

This confrontation is to be met on a basis which connects all the data of our perceptions and experiences, and which is not a denial. (Compare the concept of *dharma*, which literally means 'that which holds things together'.) When you faint, you deny pathologically; but in *samâdhi*, you deny supernaturally in a trans-psychological state. But the reality is the Totality, the whole of everything (*sarvam*). A summing up of three or four states of consciousness would mean that the one reality is a compound, which is impossible. And it is a great error of spiritual and philosophical life to think that all that is matter in life is to be rejected: by trying to make psychological supports and abstractions for oneself, by practicing yoga, by leaving the world, retreating into caves and thus to deny the world completely. Surely, there are ways to leave the world, to practice meditation, *samâdhi*, etc. for oneself, but that is not the ultimate state. It is not a matter of denying, of escaping or destroying the world, but of destroying *avidyâ* that we are ignorant of the one reality as one undivided Totality.

One seeks solitariness, because one is too much occupied by the outer world. We practice detachment and renunciation in order to break our attachment to the material world; we enter the monastery in order to discipline ourselves, but we can never deny the Totality. Why not try to get rid of those contradictions of life *here and now*, in the little place that we occupy in life? Why practice all these gymnastics, which only serves to postpone the true knowledge?

Therefore, it is not the *yoga-samâdhi* as such, as the ultimate form of meditation, against which a charge is being made by the *Mândukya Upanishad*, but the wrong use of it as a means to arrive at the knowledge of reality. It is a warning against the practice of meditation as an end in itself. The world is not going to be explained by concentrating oneself exclusively on a condition of peace or by making oneself immune to the world. And this explanation of the world, of life's contradictions, is what is needed. The word *samâdhi* means 'sameness of vision'. That sameness of vision comes with the enlightenment of the *buddhi*, the faculty of metaphysical discrimination, as a metaphysical insight. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna taught this *buddhi yoga* to Arjuna on the battlefield. He did not advise Arjuna to go and meditate in the caves, but to fulfil his duty as a warrior on the battlefield, established in the metaphysical insight. Sri Ramakrishna also admonished Naren (later Swami Vivekananda) to see Brahman *with open eyes*. Thus we can make a distinction between *yoga-samâdhi* and the *jñâna-samâdhi*: the former is a condition, in time, between a 'before' and an 'after', whereas the latter is a metaphysical insight into our true, intemporal being, which is not time-related.

So, the *Mândukya Upanishad* breaks the wrong notion that the philosophy of Vedanta or the spirituality of Hinduism would advocate an escape from the world. The solution of problems and

contradictions of life is the vision of the Intemporal *here* and *now*. Why not seek that knowledge right from the beginning? 'The unreal never exists; the real never ceases to exist.' Even in the midst of confusion and error, the awareness of the reality of the *Eternal Now* never fails.

We make a distinction between Time itself as the Totality of the *Eternal Now* (*turiya*), and 'time-duration' which is an interpretation *afterwards* of that which is constantly changing. The eternal *Now* is an ungraspable certainty; it is the eternal Subject which never becomes an object of knowledge. When there is the notion of *particular* attention, there arises the notion of time-duration, of Time apparently being divided into *durations*. Then there is duality and multiplicity, and we enter into the scheme of numbers. Through *particular* attention we are living in time-duration, as it were; in other words, in relativity. This particular attention is innate in all beings and is the negation of Totality as the indivisible One. That is the ignorance, *avidyâ*, of the Vedanta, and the Western 'fall' and 'original sin'. It keeps 'the third eye' of wisdom closed.

At present we have not the vision of the Totality, but the experience of relativity—*mâyâ*. The literal meaning of the word *mâyâ* is: 'That which measures (the Unmeasurable).' The ignorance (*avidyâ*) makes itself felt as a want, a gap, and as an individual we are constantly looking for possibilities to fill that gap: trying to fill our lives sensibly so as to come to fulfilment. In our attempts to find compensation, we are caught by the desire to embrace the particular in the manifestation. In the process of wanting to grasp the reality through the particular, we enter the field of time-space to be confronted there with the contradictions inherent in all ex-perience—*mâyâ*. These contradictions *are* life—through this polarisation we *know* life. But, at the same time, there is the possibility to detach ourselves from it. The same relativity (*mâyâ*) may be solved through the very fact of its being inescapably related

to the Totality in the eternal moment of here and now—justas forms of clay are always indissolubly connected with clay.

Through the practice of objectless attention, we open ourselves to the possibility of being the pure and non-dual consciousness. Through the detachment of objectless attention, that very attention may be realized as the unrelated and unborn *Now* of Time. We don't have that attention; we *are* that attention as pure Intelligence, apart from all physical and mental activities. That realisation is the realisation of the metaphysical insight.

### **The Mahavakya**

In the second verse of the *Mândukya Upanishad* is the *mahavakya* '*Ayam Atma Brahma*': This Atman is Brahman. The realisation of this *mahavakya* is not an experience, but a metaphysical insight falling outside the realm of duality. With this realisation disappears the ignorance regarding the non-dual nature of the one reality and, along with it, all the rapports and relationships which were built between the 'I' and the 'non-I'. At the same time, the illusion that there had ever been the question of *two* selves, a higher Self and a lower Self, the latter being in search of the former, disappears.

As long as there is a seeking, there is the sense of separation. As long as there is a seeker, there is the faith in the words of the holy scriptures and in the example of those who realized their true nature. Faith is a knowledge 'by anticipation': without faith one cannot progress, whereas a *belief* may be refuted at any level.

Realisation is not the outcome of a certain discipline or planned action, but a metaphysical insight which makes one recognize that the reality is one integral whole. The metaphysical insight cannot be 'practiced' as one would practice yoga. When all our personal efforts have collapsed through the bankruptcy of all our seeking,

only then, on that basis, can the reality come and seek us with its grace. Realisation is a gift of the Omnipresent to stay in the Intemporal, where the past and future dissolve in the moment of the eternal *Now*.

Realisation is the perception of the reality, a unique happening, indivisible, and therefore ungraspable by the mind and its categories. The metaphysical insight is not a form of mental cognition (*vritti*), it does not remain stuck in an intellectual conviction, but implicates the person as a whole.

The *Mândukya Upanishad* teaches us 'to see Brahman with open eyes'. In the words of Meister Eckhart: 'To see God is to see through the eyes of God.' It is a great outburst against the fixed idea that realisation is an exclusive state of security, in which there is no longer any danger, created by religion and yoga. Nor is it a matter of transcending the world: the world stays as it is.

There is only the overcoming of the ignorance regarding the truth of the one reality. Indian thought does not avoid the world of matter at all but gives it its true value. There is no question of mystique or of transcendentalism: the whole of reality may be seen in a single grain of sand. Why seek a transcendence?

There is but one reality and three ways of seeing it. The three states of consciousness are three different visions of one and the same reality; they are like zones of attention through which the awareness of the reality persists. Let us take a stone, for example: in its grosser aspect it is perceived as a form of gross matter; under a microscope it is perceived as a specific molecular structure in movement; and with an even subtler perception the stone appears as a speck of light. All three are but the different presentations of one and the same substance.

What one sees in realisation is the reality and always only the reality. Mind and matter are equally Brahman. On the one hand,

there is only Atman-Brahman who, as the eternal Subject, is the Self of all our experiences; on the other hand, the experience of the world is but 'one unbroken perception of Brahman' as an Object. Therefore one can no longer say, 'Brahman is real and the universe is unreal.' *'All that exists is Brahman.'*

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## The Journey to Universalism - 2

Srinivas Venkatram

The first part of this article explored the need for shared universal ideals, ending with a proposition that Swami Vivekananda's broad based and compassionate vision of universalism can make a profound difference to humankind today. This second part is a deeper study of Swami Vivekananda's vision of universalism, delving more closely into six building block ideas.

Swami Vivekananda's vision of universalism is not based on mental and social re-ordering, nor is it based on a utopian vision of the future.

It is based, instead, on a living and palpable spiritual truth that seekers and mystics all over the world have individually recognized and which has been formalized as the Vedantic tradition in India. This tradition has come down over thousands of years, predating many religions that have been born thereafter. Swami Vivekananda himself realized this truth. He built a vision of universalism around the kernel of the realization that each one of us is potentially divine. Furthermore, he proposed that the journey of life may be seen as the gradual realization and manifestation of the divinity within.

### **Building Block 1: *The Potential Divinity of Humankind***

The first building block proposed by Swami Vivekananda is the *potential divinity of humankind*.

Swami Vivekananda builds on the truths experienced in the Upanishads. He points out that if the very essence of a human

being is not biology or matter, but a spiritual core, then that truth, instead of being seen as the last step of the human journey, should be seen as the first axiomatic step of human life, informing and enlightening the whole of human existence in new and profound ways.

## **Building Block 2: *Manifesting our Infinite Possibilities***

The second building block flows from the first. If a human being is a spark of the infinite and eternal spiritual Reality behind our material/biological existence, then it follows that *there are 'infinite possibilities' within each individual.*

Put differently, each individual can unfold possibilities on one or more of several dimensions of human life – at the physical plane, at the mental/intellectual plane, at the plane of human character, and at the spiritual plane.

This *vision of infinite human possibilities* has dramatic implications not only on how we educate and develop people, but also on our understanding that no human being can be judged or boxed in. This means that all judgements, all evaluations, are only temporary – until further development of the possibilities inherent in the individual are seen and encountered.

This *vision of infinite human possibilities* is a call to celebrate the diversity of human existence and human activity, but alongside takes away from each of us any right to 'rate' or evaluate people as greater or lesser (except perhaps on one specific possibility of growth among the infinite possibilities available to every human being).

This vision challenges all notions of bell curves and talent-assessment except within narrow and limited boundary conditions.

### **Building Block 3: *Same sightedness***

This vision of infinite human possibilities leads to the third building block of Swami Vivekananda's vision – *Samadarshitva* (the Indian word for '*same sightedness*'). *Samesightedness* essentially begins where building block 2 ends – the equality of human possibilities – even if manifestation of that possibility may vary from person to person.

What does *same sightedness* imply? It implies neither humility nor pride in relation to other human beings, but 'equal sightedness' – the quiet acceptance that you and I are equally different in our manifestation, and at the same time equal at a fundamental spiritual level.

It implies a flat world, one where any hierarchy is only a convenience, an artifact for the purpose at hand, rather than a fundamental 'state of affairs'. This refers not just to organizational or institutional hierarchies, but also to cultural, social, racial, and gender-based hierarchies.

All these hierarchies represent in the final analysis not states of how the world exists but 'ways of seeing'. *Samesightedness* proposes a way of seeing that is equal, which, because it is cognitive in nature, also confers cognitive freedom from all hierarchy.

### **Building Block 4: *Responsible Individualism***

The fourth building block of universalism is *responsible individualism*. There is no 'equality of vision' without *responsible individualism*.

To consistently identify oneself as potentially divine, to constantly seek to manifest one's own possibilities, to see and be seen as equal, one needs to also turn inwards, and recognize that one is a creator of one's own destiny.

If I carry within myself the seed of infinite potential and infinite freedom to grow and manifest myself, then I also carry within myself the profound responsibility for manifesting these gifts.

Furthermore, as a creator of our own destiny, we carry within ourselves the power to break or modify or redesign around the constraints that stop us from moving forward towards the goals that we seek.

How is this *creatorship* awakened? If we carry the profound recognition that each of us is gifted beyond our wildest imagination, then it is up to us to open the unopened box of infinite potential within. The natural consequence is our self-acceptance that we become creators of our destiny.

*Responsible individualism* also shows us the way to *inner freedom*.

### **Building Block 5: *Inner Freedom***

We all understand external freedoms – democratic or political freedom, social freedom, freedom to express ourselves, freedom to pursue the careers or pathways we choose in our lives, and so forth.

But all these freedoms are, in the final analysis, limited by the caveat that personal freedom is valid only insofar as it does not impinge on another human being's freedom, or it does not impinge on the smooth and effective functioning of the institutional mechanisms of society like government, the legal system, social norms, among others.

But there is a deeper form of freedom we also seek – *inner freedom*.

*Inner freedom* refers to the cognitive dimension of freedom. *Inner freedom* is born when we are not bound by the biases, the mental models, the prejudices, the ego-constructs that come from our own sense of the world (developed from childhood onwards) and the mental dogma that we absorb from our family, peers, and social, cultural, religious, and national environments.

These mental dogmas are a mass of assimilated *models of reality* that everyday shape our thinking and responses to the world. These dogmas or *models of reality* gift us unfreedom. They take away our capacity to think from first principles and accept the grand truth about ourselves and others.

*Inner freedom* is born only when we are able to become aware (more and more) of the models of reality shaping our responses to life. It may be relatively easy to become conscious of some visible biases that we carry but there is a need to dive deeper ourselves to reclaim more and more of our inner freedom from the jungle of bias that encroaches on our own thought.

### **Building Block 6: *Spiritual Fraternity***

Swami Vivekananda furthermore asks us to go beyond being creators of our destiny and reclaiming our inner freedom. He also asks us to accept our larger identification with the collective whole, over and beyond our individual identity.

Once we recognize that each one of us is a spark of the infinite spiritual reality, we are in effect accepting that we, together as a human race, are also potentially one whole – that all of humankind at a fundamental level is tied together through a common oneness

beyond national, social, gender, caste, and other myriad divisions between human beings.

This identification with the collective whole becomes a deeper basis for unifying humankind beyond religion, color, gender, nation, and certainly beyond class, education, status, wealth or power, along a new dimension of *spiritual fraternity*. We are all “sisters and brothers”, as Swami Vivekananda famously said at the beginning of his opening address at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago (1893).

*The recognition of this spiritual fraternity is the basis of a true universalism.*

How will this recognition of our spiritual fraternity become part of humankind’s shared understanding of ourselves?

Swami Vivekananda was a realist as much as he was an idealist. He saw four levers that will help humankind successfully reshape its vision of itself in the decades to come:

- (i) the gradual spiritual evolution of humankind,
- (ii) the increasing awareness of our essential nature as spiritual rather than biological beings,
- (iii) the increasing self-awareness that helps individuals and communities question their own biases and prejudices,
- (iv) the increasing recognition of the inalienable rights of human beings as spiritually equal.

It is these levers that he sought to put into place not only during his brief, incandescent life on earth, but also through the ideas he shared, the ideals he proposed, and the movements (engines for disseminating Vedanta) that he inspired.

(Concluded)

# Reminiscences of Swami Saradanandaji - 1

Swami Bhuteshananda

**W**e are not at all familiar with the childhood of Swami Saradananda. Whatever I have seen of him was towards the end part of his life. Mostly unknown to all are incidents of the days when he came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna in his youth, his intense thirst for spiritual life and the spiritual practices that he performed sitting at his feet. This is because Swami Saradananda did not write any autobiography. Those who have written about him have presented a picture after hearing from others. They did not have the privilege of coming in direct contact with his personality. But this much we can understand is that he had intense attraction for religious life that guided his life right from his childhood.

## **His Selfless Personality**

Sharat Maharaj's physique was strong, robust and a bit bulky. I have heard directly from Swami Akhandananda Maharaj that he (Saradanandaji) was the strongest among the disciples of the Master. He had enormous physical strength, but it was never manifested outwardly because his nature was very soft. But one manifestation of his strength came to light when Baranagore Math was established. Then he would always come forward to do jobs that required physical strength—such as scouring out cooking utensils. There were no servants, so the monks themselves did everything. Saradanandaji used his muscular strength for laborious tasks. Moreover, he was totally free from conceit. He could not even think of indulging in brawls and scuffles with others—actions through which a man's physical strength is

manifested. Moreover, I have heard from Akhandananda Maharaj that he had great eagerness to serve others.

If any of his brother monks fell ill, he would nurse him carefully, remaining always by his side. None else had such perfection as he had in this work, and he would bear all personal inconveniences in this act of service. Later on also this propensity to serve was very much noticeable when he started his life of spiritual sâdhanâ sitting at the feet of the Master. A divine mood was manifested in the Master on that extraordinary day when the Master became 'Kalpataru' — the wish-fulfilling tree. Seeing this divine mood, the devotees became overwhelmed and started calling one another to receive the coveted boons from the Master. When all were excited over it, the two sevakas (attendants) of the Master, Sharat and Latu, who later became Swamis Saradananda and Adbhutananda, were busy cleaning and sunning the beddings of the Master, dusting the room, etc., for the Master was then bed-ridden. Feeling a little better that day he went out for a short walk. The two sevaks took the opportunity to tidy his room. The devotees went on calling them, but the sevaks did not pay any heed to that. They thought,

'Let those who seek the Master's blessings go, we should rather take this chance to do more of his service.' This shows how strong was their spirit of service. Before them came a rare opportunity — perhaps for only a moment — for spiritual progress in their lives, yet they remained engaged in the same work of service and did not go to the Master leaving aside the work. This was a great test for the spirit of service and sincerity. A selfless devotee does not seek anything other than service to God, not even liberation. A sloka of the Bhagavata (3.29.13) comes to the mind:

*Salokya sarsti sarupyaikatvamapyuta diyamanam na grihnanti vina matsevanam janah*

Devotees do not accept, even if given to them, the different kinds of liberation mentioned in the Bhakti-scriptures such as living in the same sphere with God, being as glorious as He is, having similar form as He has, being a part of God's form—unless these conduce to His service. They are ready to do anything to serve God; they do not hanker after mere liberation. Even the highest spiritual bliss is not their goal. The above-mentioned incident gives an example of such selfless service.

### **Service and Spirituality**

At the Baranagore Math all lived in abject poverty; some days they had food, some days they had none. In those days when all remained immersed in meditation or singing, Sharat Maharaj would always be at the bedside of any brother-monk who fell sick. Even later on, when the children of the Master were moving about in tirthas (places of pilgrimage) and important places of sâdhanâ being inspired by intense renunciation, this spirit of service remained intact in him. In those days, if any child of the Master fell ill at Hrishikesh or elsewhere, Sharat Maharaj ignored his own spiritual practices and engaged himself in service. Sometimes he himself narrated to us incidents of his wandering life. Once he said, 'I have travelled all over India with only one cloth.' Even when he was thus moving about in extremely cold places with only one cloth and was performing intense tapasyâ—without food, without clothing—there was no change in his spirit of service.

Sharat Maharaj obediently went to the West—first to England and then to America—when Swamiji sent him there for the work of the Sangha (Ramakrishna Order). Again, Swamiji called him back to India to shoulder the responsibility of the Indian work. Immediately he accepted Swamiji's behest and came back to work in this country. Swamiji placed on his shoulders the heavy

responsibility of the General Secretaryship of the Ramakrishna Sangha. Thus, the words of the Master were fulfilled to the letter. Jesus Christ had told Saint Peter, 'I shall build my church on this rock (on Peter).' The responsibility indicated by the Master was placed on Sharat Maharaj.

When we saw him as the General Secretary of the Sangha, we have observed how he worked as the leader of the Order without any attachment. We have heard many instances of this at various places from many sâdhus. In some centres there would be conflict between two monks. One person would come to him and complain against another. Maharaj would quietly hear everything but give no reply. The complainer perhaps thought whatever he said was all in vain. He said, 'Maharaj, I have told you everything but you are totally silent.' Sharat Maharaj replied, 'Your statement I have heard, my boy, now I have got to hear what the other party has to say.'

What can I tell you before that? When we saw him it was not that he was just shouldering the responsibility of the Sangha. He was also bearing the burden of the devotees—especially those who were helpless old people, who had none to depend upon, who were neglected in the world.

### **With Holy Mother**

Swami Yogananda was capable of carrying the burden of Holy Mother. He was her first sevak. After his demise that burden rested on Sharat Maharaj. Once Mother remarked, 'It is not easy to bear my burden. Yogin could do it, Sharat also can.' Someone asked, 'Mother, can't Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) do it?' She replied, 'No, he can't. His nature is different.'

Now, Mother's burden was not an ordinary one; it meant the entire load of her huge family. Sharat Maharaj served Mother

meticulously. Always he bore the burden of Mother calmly whether she was in Jayrambati or in Kolkata. The dedication and farsightedness with which he rendered this service was remarkable. Those who used to come to Mother were not all devotees. Perhaps someone was her relative, while someone else had taken shelter with her having none to depend on. The burden of all such persons Sharat Maharaj had accepted on his own shoulders. He himself made the statement: 'Even a dog or a fox of Kamarpukur or Jayrambati is venerable to us.' And those who were closely related to the Mother — what to speak of them! What has he not done for them? Serving them did not mean merely to look after them or collect money for them; it meant accepting responsibility of every kind. One of the brothers of the Mother might have done some mischief somewhere or there might be some problem with the landed property — everything he had to manage keeping an eye everywhere. Whatever personal inconvenience he might have had, he never felt embarrassed.

Even after Mother left her physical body, the responsibility of carrying the load of the huge family of Mother remained on his shoulders. The situation remained unchanged even later. Those who did not have any refuge in the world were always objects of compassion to him. Not only compassion, what great love he had for them!

(To be continued)

Samadhi and be unaware of the river water flowing over their heads during the flood-tide. Then the ebb-tide would come and still they would remain absorbed in meditation.

Now, one hundred of these disciples had anticipated what their teacher would ask of them. Lest they should have to disobey his injunctions, they had quickly disappeared from the place before he summoned them. So they did not go to Virabhadra with the others. The remaining twelve hundred disciples went to the teacher after finishing their morning meditations. Virabhadra said to them: "These thirteen hundred nuns will serve you. I ask you to marry them."

"As you please, revered sir," they said. "But one hundred of us have gone away." Thenceforth each of these twelve hundred disciples had a wife. Consequently, they all lost their spiritual power. Their austerities did not have their original fire. The company of women robbed them of their spirituality because it destroyed their freedom.

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We have all these variations now and we see them — what we call the five elements: solid, liquid, gaseous, luminous, ethereal. After that the state of existence is mental and beyond that spiritual. Not that spirit is one and mind is another, ether another, and so on. It is the one existence appearing in all these variations. To go back, the solid must become liquid... The solids will become liquid, etherised. This is the idea of the macrocosm — and universal. There is the external universe and universal spirit, mind, ether, gas, luminosity, liquid, solid. The same with the mind. I am just exactly the same in the microcosm. I am the spirit; I am mind; I am the ether, solid, liquid, gas. What I want to do is to go back to my spiritual state... Thus man can be free in this life...Meditation consists in this practice [of dissolving every thing into the ultimate Reality — spirit]. The solid melts into liquid, that into gas, gas into ether, then mind, and mind will melt away. All is spirit.

Meditation, you know, comes by a process imagination. You go through all these processes of purification of the elements — making the one melt the other, that into the next higher, that into mind, that into spirit, and then you are spirit.

- Swami Vivekananda

