

# Vedanta

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422 NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2021

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**The Lord's Prayer**  
*Swami Prabhavananda*

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**Srimad Bhagavata**  
*Swami Gitananda*

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## THIS IS INDEED THE WORLD!

Once, Hriday (Sri Ramakrishna's nephew) brought a bull-calf here. I saw, one day, that he had tied it with a rope in the garden, so that it might graze there. I asked him, "Hriday, why do you tie the calf there every day?" "Uncle," he said, "I am going to send the calf to our village. When it grows strong I shall yoke it to the plough." As soon as I heard these words I was stunned to think: "How inscrutable is the play of the Divine Maya! Kamarpukur and Sihore are so far away from Calcutta! This poor calf must go all that way. Then it will grow, and at length it will be yoked to the plough. This is indeed the world! This is indeed Maya!" I fell unconscious. Only after a long time did I regain consciousness.

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## Mantra Japa or Repetition of the Holy Name – 8

The sages of India observed the simple fact of man being predominantly a mass of thoughts. Buddha says, “As you think, so you become.” Bound and controlled by thoughts, he moves about in the world as thoughts; as thoughts, he sleeps and dreams; embracing a thought of nothingness, he enters into deep sleep. As thought he comes into Nature and lives in it; when free from thought, he is Divine. That is why Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras say, “*Yogah Chitta Vritti Nirodah*” – Yoga is complete control of all mental modifications or the waves of the mind. If through thoughts he projects himself and gets involved in Nature, then through thoughts alone he must be able to link to the Divine, transcend Nature and reach the unchanging Eternal Existence of God. The thought that links his mind to the Divine is called the *Mantra*. *Mantra* is like a ‘Super Thought’ that makes us return Home – to the highest state of the Self free from vrittis or all mental modifications. Like all other thoughts, these *Mantras* too have ‘*Shabda* and *Artha*’, i.e., ‘name and form’. As all other general thoughts are powers that generate likes and dislikes, joys and sorrows, passion and poise, action and movement, so also are these *Mantras* full of specific powers that release us from bondage and suffering, and make us transcend Nature and attain the ultimate and Eternal Freedom, Peace and Bliss.

Thoughts pertaining to the world create world-awareness in us, link us to the world and tune our emotions to the world. In a similar way, a *Mantra* creates a Divine awareness in us, links us to the Divine, and tunes and helps and compels us to centre our emotions in the Divine. The conscious and unbroken repetition of a *Mantra* makes us have unbroken Divine awareness filled with emotions and backed by a superior intellect known as *buddhi*. The *buddhi* or intellect has a determined will, and is sound and unwavering, intent and pursuing, rational and probing, sharp and clear, with a right and comprehensive

view of the true nature of life, endowed with intuitive understanding, of discovering nature, logical, scientific and profound, and having deep penetrative insight. It is a kind of self-effacing state of subjecting oneself unconditionally to the Divine—to be led by the Divine to our True Self. It is a silent supplication or prayer for grace too.

We know that thought, whether orally expressed or repeated at mental level, is the effort of *Prana* (the Jiva's existential or vital energy). We must make this *Prana* concept clear to ourselves: for life to emerge, there must be a fundamental energy which brings life into existence; it then moves with life as vital energy imparting existential support to the living being. It is this vital energy that supports the awareness of 'I am' in all beings. When a dying man pants for life, it is these *Pranas* that are trying to vacate the body. It is these *Pranas* or vital forces that maintain all activities of the body at the organic level—from developing a body and conducting all functions like metabolism etc., essential for its existence. These *Pranas* are further sustained by breathing oxygen as well as food intake. *Pranas* cease instantly with cessation of breath. Therefore breath is called vital air. Cessation of food weakens the *Pranas* and gradually the *Pranas* cease. At the moment of death, with the exception of one of the five *Pranas* called *Udana*, the rest of the *Pranas* get dissolved into the 'self'. *Udana* helps the separation of the soul from the body and helps in the migration of the subtle body to another body. According to the Tantras, however, *Pranas* are sustained by food and oxygen; they have their base and existence in the *Kundalini* at the *Muladhara*. The inevitable part of a *Jiva's* existence, i.e., the thought formation, is caused by the *Pranic* effort to exist, to live. It is common to all living beings, but happens in different ways.

When a *Mantra* is thus repeated in the calm recesses of the heart, the spiritual heart, especially when free from external activity, the entire *Prana*, the very life principle, the fundamental existential Energy of our being, joins the stream of Divine Awareness, which

shrinks down to the core of our being to enter the transcendental realm. The substance of all *Mantras* is *Chit* (Pure Consciousness), notwithstanding their varied external manifestation as letters, words or sound. In fact, the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are known as *Akshara* (meaning the imperishable) because they are diagrammatic representations (*Yantras*) of the imperishable *Brahman*. Thoughts that get translated into words and actions originate in Pure Consciousness, the *Shuddha Chaitanya*, the *Brahman* enclosed within the body like the waves forming in an ocean. Therefore thoughts/words/language are manifestations of *Brahman*.

As the substance of a *Mantra* is *Chit*, its power, the *Chitshakti*, is therefore embedded in every *Mantra*. This is called the *Mantra Shakti*. Thus a *Mantra* is considered to be a potent compelling force, a word of Power, and is undoubtedly capable of producing the desired end—the Advaitic perception, total liberation, as well as the four aims of the sentient being: *Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha* (the four *Purusharthas* — righteous living, means of living, the joys of life, and liberation). This the *Sadhaka* realises when the power (*Shakti*) generated by spiritual practices (*Sadhana*) adds to the *Mantra Shakti* (power of *Mantra*) in his/her efforts to unveil the Truth. Exercising self-control and practicing selflessness; serving all beings with love and compassion, seeing the Divine in them; pouring heart and soul, love and devotion in repetition of a *Mantra*; and meditating on the Deity with an attitude of self-surrender, the *Mantra Shakti* is awakened. When the *Mantra Shakti* is awakened by the *Sadhaka*, the presiding Deity (the *Devata*) appears. And with perfect *Mantra-siddhi*, every *Mantra* merges into *Om* and the true inner nature (*Svarupa*) of the Deity (*Devata*), who is *Sacchidananda*, is revealed.

Every *Mantra* is, then, the *Rupa* (form) of *Brahman*, the Absolute. The *Devata* to be meditated upon (the form) is the *Devata* whose *Mantra* has been given to us for *Japa*. And that *Devata* is called the *Ishta Devata* (the beloved or desired Deity) and the *Mantra* is called

the *Ishta Mantra* (the beloved/desired *Mantra*). The process of imparting the *Mantra* with the procedure to be adopted for its practice by a competent Guru is called the *Mantra Diksha*. The rhythmical repetition of *Japa* creates a pleasant and steady flow of divine thought-wave that regulates the unsteady vibrations of the external sheaths of the aspirant, and also de-clutches them from the clutches of worldly tendencies to which they are kept tuned since birth. It activates the divinity in them that had entered into dormancy because of indulgence in the activities of everyday world life. Constant unbroken *Japa*, performed with a loving heart and total dedication, purges an aspirant of all 'impurities' at every level of being and leads to absolute divinity. A new person emerges.

Sri Ramakrishna says, "Do you think God's name is an ordinary thing?—it sanctifies body and mind totally." When the body-mind gets purified and attains eligibility, then from the same *Mantra* arises the *form* of the *Devata* of that *Mantra*, because the utterance of the *Mantra* by the one pure at heart compels the sought-for *Devata* to appear. In other spiritual practices (*Sadhana*), like prayers, meditation, and so forth, the aspirant's *Sadhana Shakti* (power of self-effort) alone works. Whereas in *Japa* it is the power of the *Mantra* (*Mantra Shakti*), which has power to destroy evil tendencies like that of fire, which has the power of revelation like that of the Sun, and the power to liberate, that really works. There is nothing more powerful than this *Mantra Shakti*, which works in conjunction with the aspirant's power of will or self-effort, the *Sadhana Shakti*. Human efforts, however great they may be, being bound by the clutches of Nature, cannot take the aspirant beyond Nature. But the pains the aspirant takes, the intense longing and total dedication to the ideal, make the *Mantra* awaken. And it is the power of the *Mantra* that helps transcendence. When the Guru initiates the disciple with a *Mantra*, he gives an awakened *Siddha Mantra* (by which the Guru himself, having practiced, has reached the ultimate Goal). But when the *Mantra* reaches the ears of the

spiritually immature disciple, it passes into an inactive 'sleep' state and enters into the inner vault (*Antaranga*), where it remains in dormancy. As words/letters/syllables, the *Mantra* remains in the memory part of the mind, but the actual *Mantra*, the '*Chit svarupa*', enters the *Jivatman* and remains there as an unchallenged solitary security. Each man is, in fact, *Brahman*, and can attain that state depending on the degree of his ability to realise himself as such.

However, by the use of *Mantra Japa*, the cloud covering the soul is reduced as well as the presence of the *Ishta Devata* invoked. Concentrated *Japa* is compared to the action of a man shaking a sleeping man to wake him up. But the *Mantra* becomes awakened (*Prabuddha*) only through love, devotion and total dedication to the ideal, and not by mere lip movement. The love and devotion are vitalised by right understanding of the *Mantra vidya* (the science of *Mantra*). The awakened (*Prabuddha*) *Mantra* is a power that has come into its active state, much like a vehicle with its engine running. Now it is capable of functioning independently in order to achieve the desired goal, and is therefore called the *Mantra Chaitanya*; the *Mantra* is said to have become *Mantra Chaitanya* with its awakening. A word uttered by a man in any language is a gross expression of his inner thought-movement; words may differ according to language, but the inner thought and the meaning they convey remains the same. The idea in the mind is consciousness expressing itself through mental operation. Consciousness expressing itself through mind could be said to be idea/thought-movement. If an idea/thought-movement (name/form) expresses Consciousness or can help to transcend mind and lead to Consciousness, then it is called the *Mantra Chaitanya*.

A *Mantra*, once awakened, works consciously—destroying the *Tamas* engulfing the soul, purifying and leading to divinity of the outer vehicles (the body, mind, senses, etc.), awakening the heart, unifying the entire being, and finally resulting in a vision of the *Ishta Devata*. The *Devata* is a particular manifestation of Consciousness or



*Shakti*. The *Mantra* too is the embodiment of a particular form of that very Consciousness or *Shakti*. The same Consciousness or *Shakti* also exists in the form of the *Sadhaka*. The object then is to allow these three to unite. With the vision of *Ishta Devata*, the *Buddhi* recognizes the inner substance of the *Mantra* and excludes the outer husk—the letters and sound. Since *Siddhi* in *Mantra sadhana* is a union of all the three *Shaktis*, the eternal *Shakti*, which is the life of the *Mantra*, helps the union of the *Shakti* as *Sadhaka*, *Shakti* as *Mantra* and *Shakti* as *Devata*—to manifest one indivisible Consciousness. The identification of the aspirant with *Mantra* and *Devata* is the identification of the knower/experiencer (*Vedaka*), the knowing/experiencing (*Vedana* or *Vidya*) and the known/experienced (*Vedya*), i.e., *Sadhaka*, *Mantra* and the Deity/*Devata*. Then the *Mantra* attains the ultimate fulfilment and is termed the *Siddha Mantra*. In fact, *Mantra Japa* matures into meditation, by which the *Sadhaka* gains unity with the *Devata* (Deity) behind the *Mantra*, who until then was available in the form of the *Mantra*.

The union of the *Sadhaka* and the *Devata* (Diety) of the *Mantra* at the pure spiritual level is the result of the effort of the *Jiva* to wipe out the persistent inner wants through a series of lives. There is also in all *Jivas* a demand and desire to see the Divine, which at the lowest level expresses itself as a moral and aesthetic urge, and at the highest level as a spiritual urge, the search for the Truth. This pull and will towards the Divinity is a powerful dynamic force that pushes aside all obstacles and pierces through every veil, and finds there Divinity itself.

(To be continued)

## The Lord's Prayer

Swami Prabhavananda

Perhaps most people repeat The Lord's Prayer every day of their lives, but this prayer is not as simple as it appears to be. It is aphoristic, and if we take it literally we do not get its significance. It has such deep meaning behind it that it can be understood only by those who practice spiritual disciplines. Christ therefore taught The Lord's Prayer to a select few, his intimate disciples, who already knew the methods of prayer and meditation. As the disciples heard the prayer, it reminded them step by step of the discipline.

The Lord's Prayer begins: "**OUR FATHER**" — When we come to the teachings of Christ, we find that he emphasised bhakti yoga, the path of devotion. The impersonal God is too much of an abstraction to be loved, so Christ taught his disciples to worship God as a personal being. He reiterated the first commandment of the Jews: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy might." In order that we can love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we have to consider him as our very own. And in order that we can consider him as our very own we have to enter into a relationship with him. Now this idea of entering into a relationship with God has a deep philosophical implication. In every human heart there is the desire to love and be loved, and we try to fulfil that desire in our human relationships. We want the love of a father, a friend, a sweetheart, but it is really a desire for God and nothing else. That is why ultimately in our human relationships we feel lonesome, in spite of all kinds of love we may have because we are hugging the shadows.

The great sage Yagnavalkya truly taught his wife Maitreyi: "The husband loves the wife, not for the sake of the wife, but for the sake of the Self, God, that is in the wife. The wife loves the husband not

for the sake of the husband, but for the sake of the Self. The son loves the father and the father loves the son, not for the sake of the father or for the sake of the son, but for the sake of the Self." That is the truth we have to recognize. That great love attracts us, but we misread it. And to read that love truly, and to find fulfilments of the desire for love which is within each human heart, is to turn that love towards God, who is love. As there are expressions of love on the human plane, the same expressions of love exist on the divine plane: the love of a child for his father or mother, or of a servant for his master, or of friends, or the affection of a father or mother for the son, or the sweet relationship between husband and wife. Now we find this same idea of different relationships not only in the teachings of the great devotees of India, but also in the teachings of this great devotee Christ. In this Prayer he teaches us to regard God as our father. As soon as we take this relationship, the awe which separates us is gone. There is no longer the thought that God is great, that he is the creator of this universe. His creation and his glories do not mean anything to him. In ignorance we are caught by the glamour of the creation and we forget the creator. We must approach God in a simple manner because again, he is simple. Let us regard him as our own father, and immediately there is an intimate relationship. In a simple manner we come into our Father's presence. The father loves the son; the son may be wayward, but the father does not discard him. He continues to love his son. In the same way, whatever we may be, God continues to love and attract us. And that is what Christ teaches us when he utters these two words: "Our Father".

**"WHICH ART"**— What proofs are there for God? On the one hand, you find philosophers, theologians and scientists giving proofs for the existence of God. On the other, after you have read all the proofs for the existence of God, you can discard all their logic

and arguments by a different logic. Why is it not possible to prove the existence of God by logical reason? Because before you can prove anything you have to exist. You do not need any logic to prove your own existence, and your true being, your self, is no other than God.

When you come to a Christ, or any God-Man, the question whether God exists or not does not arise; in his presence all doubts cease. I know from my own experience with holy men that not only could you feel the presence of God in such an atmosphere, but you felt that God could be realised easily, that he was like a fruit in the palm of your hand. In the presence of such illumined souls, who have known and realised God, who have reached their union with God, you feel that "which art".

The real proof is not to be had from the scriptures, scriptural authorities, or even from the lips of the teacher. The philosophy of Vedanta has always insisted that God is not an idea, not a conception, but that he is the Reality. He is realizable, and when you realise that truth, when you see that Reality, then you have the real proof. In the Upanishads the great sage says: "I have known that reality, I have gone beyond darkness. You also, having known that truth, go beyond darkness and attain to immortality."

**"IN HEAVEN"** — Where do we find God? Where is heaven? Each individual carries both heaven and earth within him. What is earth? Earth is experience of name and form. We are within ignorance, and in ignorance we see this world appearance, within the bounds of time, space and causation. Psychologically it has been pointed out how the Self within, that pure consciousness, is covered by ignorance. What is this ignorance? It is the sense of ego, the sense of individuality or separateness, arising from the identification of the Self with the body, mind, or senses. This ignorance has two aspects: it covers the Reality, and it creates something new. So

through ignorance the heaven within, the divine Self, remains hidden and there is created instead an earth—a false self—and thus do we experience through the senses this world appearance.

How can we find heaven? Let us look to the teachings of Jesus. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." One has to be born in spirit. The moment you are born in spirit you have entered heaven, and there God is. Buddha calls this "awakening". He compares earth and heaven, samsara and nirvana, to sleep and awakening. In the Upanishads we find more psychological detail about that. We read that there are three states of consciousness: waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep. Normally, man dwells within these three states, but there is "turiya", the Fourth. The three states can be likened to the state of sleep compared to that awakening, that turiya, which is the state of transcendental consciousness. In every individual there is the capacity to be awakened into "turiya". Transcend the limits of the mind, senses, and body, reach the pure consciousness within, and you are born in spirit and have found heaven.

**"HALLOWED BE THY NAME"** — There arises a question in the heart of every spiritual aspirant: "I have not seen God. How can I love him?" And the answer has been given. There is a bridge between the known and the unknown, and in philosophical language this bridge has been called the Logos by the Greeks, the Word by St. John, and the Sphota by the Hindus. In the Gospel according to St. John, we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In the Vedas, we read: "In the beginning was Brahman (God). His second was Word. Word is Brahman." In every religion we find a great emphasis laid upon this medium, the Logos that is one with God. According to yoga psychology, the very repetition of the holy name of the Lord

leads to illumination. It bridges the chasm between our sense-universe and the divine beyond.

What the Hindus call Japam, chanting the name of the Lord, is a great spiritual discipline in itself. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the holy name is like a rope; hold fast to it, and it will take you to God. With the help of the rope, which is something definite and concrete, we reach the eternal, inexpressible Reality.

**"THY KINGDOM COME"** — Christ teaches a great secret here. As you go to pray and meditate, you must try to feel, even in your ignorance, that "Thy kingdom come". In other words, feel the presence of God everywhere. It is the universal truth that God is, and if he is, he must be omnipresent. In the Upanishads we read, "Brahman is before, Brahman is behind, Brahman extends to the right, Brahman extends to the left, Brahman is above, Brahman is below, Brahman is all, and Brahman is supreme." Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "When you pray to Father, 'O Father, come unto me', you have not yet begun to pray." And the great seer-philosopher Shankara pointed out: "Our perception of the universe is a continuous perception of Brahman, though the ignorant are not aware of this." Indeed the universe is nothing but Brahman. With physical eyes we see only a physical universe. Transform your physical eyes into the eyes of the spirit, and with a tranquil heart see God everywhere. We live, move, and have our being in him every moment. At least when we go to pray and meditate, let us try to recognise this truth and feel his living presence. Realise in your heart of hearts: "Thy kingdom come".

There is a spiritual discipline in Hindu ritualistic worship called the purification of the elements. The principle is that as you sit for worship, you try to feel that the whole universe and with it your body, your mind, your senses, your intellect, and your ego are gradually dissolved into the final cause. And that final cause is God.

Again try to feel that out of him comes this whole universe; you are getting, as it were, a new body, a new mind, new senses, and a new universe. And you and the whole universe are pure consciousness; everything is made of spirit. You are God and you are worshipping God. This is what Christ refers to when he says, "Thy kingdom come".

**"THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"** — At the moment when you see God everywhere, earth and heaven have become united, earth has been transformed into heaven, and it is His will that is done.

One can really do the will of God only after one has known him. We forget that. My master told me once that he was always guided by the will of God. I questioned him: "Do you do the will of God as I may think or feel that I am doing his will, when actually I am only following my own inclinations and attributing them to God's will?" He said, "No, it is not the same." Then I asked: "Do you see him and then he tells you what to do?" He answered: "Yes, I see him, I talk to him. That is how I know what he wills." And that is how anyone can do the will of God. When the ego, when the desires and cravings are completely wiped out, then only the will of God reflects upon you.

**"GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD"** — This daily bread is divine grace. Our master taught us: "There is the grace of God, pray that that grace may be revealed to you." And Christ says: "Give us this day our daily bread." May that grace be revealed unto me, not tomorrow, not after this body is gone, but this moment. It is a great truth to learn that God may be revealed to us at any time. That grace is there; at any moment the screen covering it may be removed. Most of us think that we are weak and impure, that we have to acquire certain merits, that we have to pray and purify ourselves, that we have to be worthy of God, and then alone God can be

revealed to us. But it is not possible for a human being through any effort to deserve the grace of God. Does this mean we should not make any self-effort? No, self-effort and spiritual disciplines are necessary in order that we may know and believe in his grace.

My master often repeated a saying: "There is the grace of God, there is the grace of the Guru, there is the grace of the devotee of God, but for the grace of one a man may be ruined. What is the grace of the one? The grace of our own mind." Self-effort is the grace of our own mind.

In the words of Sri Ramakrishna: "The breeze of grace is always blowing. Set your sail to catch that breeze." In your prayer and meditation, you must be ready at every moment to have the revelation of God's grace, but at the same time persevere, have patience, and you are sure to attain that revelation.

**"AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS"** — This is a reference to what the Hindus and Buddhists call the law of Karma. This law of cause and effect teaches us that so long as we live within Karma there is no freedom. Within the law of Karma, the realm of the relative, here is both good and evil, and we are always making debts. These debts really cannot be paid back. We need forgiveness, nothing else. Karma is finished when we attain illumination. In other words, it is the knowledge of God, the absolute, that gives us freedom from the law of Karma. So the Lord's Prayer says: "Forgive us our debts." May we not become entangled in more Karma.

Does this mean that we should give up work? No, but let us learn to act, not to pay debt to Karma, but as worship to God. When our work is worship, we are no longer within the bounds of karma.

**"AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL"** — It is difficult to understand how God can lead us into temptation. But is not this whole creation a temptation? In



the story of the garden of Eden, we read that Adam was made in the image of God. He was warned not to eat of the fruit of one tree. But he did not heed the warning, and as he ate of the fruit he saw both good and evil. What does that imply? This creation is really God; but we do not see God, we see the creation as this mental or physical universe because Adam, that God within us, has fallen, as it were, and been caught up in the sense of ego. The shadow we hug as ourselves is the ego, and with this ego we see and enjoy this manifest universe through the doors of the senses. So the Lord's Prayer says: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Deliver us from the evil of both good and evil, which may sound paradoxical. In this relative world there is good and there is evil, and as such, the world is evil because good is only temporary. It is but another side of the same page; when you take one, you must take the other.

There is a beautiful verse in the Bhagavad Gita which explains this prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Sri Krishna says: "How hard to break through this my maya, made of the gunas. But he who takes refuge in me only shall pass beyond maya." This maya is the creation, and we are caught up in it. Sri Ramakrishna used to say. "People love this creation. They do not inquire into the creator. They are caught up in his creation." If only we can break through this maya, we shall find God, we shall find that bliss and that freedom. The ego, which has caused this creation, in a sense, will disappear, and we shall see God playing everywhere, if only we can take our refuge in him. Then what will be our experience? — "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."

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# Srimad Bhagavata

Swami Gitananda

In the Vedic age, in the *samhita* portion of the Vedas, hymns were sung in praise of gods like Indra, Mitra, Varuna, and others. However, there is a point to be noted in this regard: there was then the clear notion that these gods are the manifestations of one reality. Truth is One; sages address it by different names, says the *Rig Veda*. Following the *samhita* portion, in the *brahmana* portion the way to the performance of ritualistic actions, like sacrificial rites, were stipulated. This *brahmana* literature is called the *karma-kanda* of the Vedas. The Vedas are divided into four sections: *samhita*, *brahmana*, *aranyaka*, and *upanishad*. Broadly speaking, the first two parts deal with rituals or actions (*karma*), and the latter two deal with philosophy and metaphysics (*jnana*). But later, amongst the followers of *karma-kanda*, there arose some who realised that such actions cannot bestow on us infinite happiness, immortality, and everlasting peace—that these are not capable of releasing human beings from the clutches of birth and death. The *Katha Upanishad* says (1.2.10): “I know that this treasure (actions done for attaining objects of enjoyment) is impermanent—for that Permanent Entity (atman) cannot be attained through impermanent things.”

There is a limit to worldly enjoyments; they are not infinite. The atman, which is infinite, can never be attained through something finite like performance of sacrifices. Thinking thus, some began to follow the science of Self-realisation as given in the Upanishads, which is known as the path of knowledge (*jnana-marga*). There were still others who failed to fully understand and accept the Non-dual Truth as the Supreme Reality. They developed faith in the path of devotion (*bhakti-marga*). Their dependence was on an infinitely powerful God, who had also limitless qualities and limitless

compassion. Though in the Vedas there are hymns to gods like Indra, Varuna, Agni, and others, wherein we find the seeds of devotion (*bhakti*), some people feel that it is the Ultimate Reality of the Vedas that has been imagined as these deities.

In any case, along with the practice of singing hymns to gods, which is found in the *samhita* portion of the Vedas, the practice of performing sacrifices as laid down in the *brahmana* portion, as well as the practice of Self-enquiry as given in the Upanishads, there came into being, almost simultaneously, another practice—the practice of devotion (*bhakti*). According to one’s eligibility and taste, the spiritual aspirants of India chose a particular spiritual path and discipline. In this way they attempted to arrive at a harmonious view of unity. And we should remember that these three streams of spiritual disciplines prevailed in India centuries before the birth of Christ.

It is known by hearsay that after writing the *Brahma Sutras*, the epic *Mahabharata*, and the Puranas, the great sage Vyasa realised that in and through his life-long writings he had not been able to express any extraordinary spiritual ideology, or present a role model, depending on which, age after age, human beings could make their lives blessed. Owing to this he became extremely sad and immersed himself in meditation on the Supreme Brahman. It was during this meditation that the idea of *Bhagavata* flashed in the depth of his heart. Thus, *Bhagavata* was obtained in deep meditation. Its subject is also, therefore, an object of meditation, and it is only in deep meditation that one realises the Truth presented there. In this way, *Bhagavata* is best understood in meditation.

You may ask: It is said that even after composing such great works like the *Brahma Sutras*, *Mahabharata* and the Puranas, Vyasa suffered from sorrow. Is this an imagination of the author in order to eulogise *Bhagavata* or is there any truth in this statement?

It is seen that until the seventh century, Buddhism was extremely powerful in India. Then Shankaracharya came and, owing to his brilliant intellect and extraordinary comprehension and interpretation of the scriptures, practically eliminated Buddhism from the land. The philosophy of Shankaracharya removes all the weaknesses in human beings; it inspires spiritual aspirants to renounce everything and strive to attain the attributeless and formless Brahman. He laid extreme stress on the path of knowledge. This he did in order to demolish the well-planned structure of logic and arguments of the Buddhists, as well as to humble the unreasonable supremacy which the different Hindu sects had arrogated to themselves. For this reason, the philosophy of Shankaracharya went beyond the comprehension of ordinary minds. Moreover, the “followers” of Shankaracharya gave credence to the thought that religion stands on the sharpness or fineness of intellect than on feelings and sentiments of the heart.

Though Shankaracharya himself had composed many melodious and supremely devotional hymns to several gods and goddesses, his “followers” decried devotional sentiments and feelings of the heart. As a consequence, they, on the one hand, failed to grasp and follow the philosophy of Shankaracharya in their lives; on the other, they could not follow the path of devotion either, which was the common man’s way of religion. Such a state of the common man is figuratively depicted in this book in the form of Vyasa’s sorrow. The common man’s despondency as well as longing had deeply stirred the heart of one person, who was perhaps the greatest among all the spiritual geniuses and pundits of those days, and the result was the composition of *Bhagavata*. It can be said that the bliss Vyasa experienced after he composed *Bhagavata* became well known as *Bhagavata dharma*, or the religion of *Bhagavata*.

Having composed *Bhagavata*, Vyasa taught it to his son Shukadeva, who was a born knower of Brahman and a supreme lover of God. Shukadeva narrated it to Emperor Parikshit who, having understood that his death was imminent, had given up everything and had taken to the contemplation on the glories of God. Numerous all-renouncing sages and saints had assembled at that place. From this it is evident that initially *Bhagavata* was chiefly the scripture of monks and those who had renounced the world because a monk had narrated it to the assembled monks. But later the followers of Vaishnavism laid chief stress on the devotional aspect of this scripture and, in course of time, *Bhagavata* became the principal scripture of the householders. However, towards the end of every chapter of *Bhagavata* we find the following statement: "Composed by Vyasa, here ends this chapter in *Bhagavata*, which is also known as a great Purana, and is the scripture of monks." From this it is evident that *Bhagavata* is the scripture of monks.

*Bhagavata* has been called a great Purana. In the Puranas there are ancient stories of India. In ancient times India was divided into numerous small kingdoms, and in the court of every kingdom there used to be a "state historian" called *magadha*. They used to sing the glories and genealogies of the kings. Apart from this, there used to be another class of men who were truthful and endowed with brilliant memory. They were called *sutas*. They could keep in memory anything they heard, be it even for once. These *sutas* would collect information from the *magadhas* about the different kings and their genealogies. They would then place this information and stories before the people at the time of different sacrifices or in the assembly of pundits. These stories recited by the *sutas* were compiled and the literature called Purana came into being. Thus Puranas contain the most ancient history of India. What is the subject matter discussed in the Puranas?

*Sargasca prati-sargasca vamsa manvantarani ca, Vamsanucaritam ceti puranah panca-laksanam* — (Vayu Purana, 4.10)

“Creation, destruction, and re-creation (of the universe), genealogy of kings, Manvantaras and the description of families of sages—these five constitute the characteristics of a Purana.”

*Sarga* means creation; *prati-sarga* is destruction; *vamsa* means the birth, evolution and destruction of the lineages of kings, sages, important personalities, deities, demons, and others. *Manvantara* refers to a period of time measurement, that is, the time frame in which a particular incident had occurred. Presently we use the Gregorian or the Bengali or some other calendar to calculate time. Similarly, the writers of Puranas used frameworks of time such as Manu and Yuga, etc. to decide the period in which a particular incident had occurred. *Vamsanucarita* means the life-stories of famous kings and other personalities. Thus it is clear that in the Puranas we get information about the creation and destruction of the universe, the lineages of the kings and their life stories, as well as the period of time when a particular incident had occurred.

The authors of Puranas believed that in order to write the history of a nation, they should begin with its birth, and from thereon, until its destruction, the entire story needs to be chronicled. They wished that their chronicle should be regularly updated with new events that occur from time to time, and that it should remain until the dissolution of the universe. To make the Puranas immortal, these writers resorted to religion; because as long as human beings live, they will hold on to some or the other form of religion. As a consequence, the history found in the Puranas got transformed and enlarged into religious scripture. The spiritual thoughts of the Vedas and the Upanishads became included in the Puranas in the form of stories narrated in the language of the people. In this way,

in and through the Puranas the ordinary people were introduced to the history of their nation as well as high spiritual thoughts.

We have earlier mentioned the five characteristics of the Puranas. But in later times, to these five characteristics were added the codes of conduct of the ordinary people, their hopes and aspirations, their cultural heritage, administration of the state, the science of medicine, spiritual disciplines, and so forth. In this way some of the Puranas became Maha Puranas (great Puranas). There are eighteen major Puranas, of which some are called Maha Puranas and others are called Upa Puranas. While the five characteristics of the Upa Puranas have been mentioned above as *sarga*, *pratisarga*, *vamsa*, *manvantara*, and *vamsanucarita*, the characteristics of the Maha Puranas are: *sarga*, *visarga*, *vrtti*, *raksa*, *antara*, *vamsa*, *vamsanucarita*, *samstha*, *hetu*, and *apasraya*. Among the Maha Puranas are the Brahma-purana, Vishnu-purana, Shiva-purana, Narada-purana, Markandeya-purana, Bhagavata-purana, and other Puranas. Among the Upa Puranas are included the Matsya-purana, Kurma-purana, Varaha-purana, Narasimha-purana, Vamana-purana, and so on.

According to the Puranas, the Hindu civilisation was flourishing at least 6000 years before Christ. The Puranic age could therefore be fixed between 6000 BC and AD 1400.

It is clear that Sage Vyasadeva compiled the eighteen Puranas by bringing together the descriptions given by all the *sutas*, the stories of numerous kings and religious leaders, and the innumerable fables and anecdotes current then in the country. As a result, the narratives of Krishna and other avatars and of different kings found in the *Bhagavata* are not imaginations of Vyasa. All these narratives were prevalent in the form of ballads or traditional stories even before Vyasa. Through deep contemplation Vyasa organised them for the supreme good of humanity and gave to us

the wonderful jewel called *Bhagavata*. By obtaining this priceless jewel, human beings have been given the opportunity to express their true human nature to the fullest extent; thus we all remain eternally grateful to Vyasadeva. Therefore the large-hearted Vyasa, endowed with a great intellect, is to be adored by one and all.

Both *Vedanta Sutrās* (or *Brahma Sutrās*) as well as *Bhagavata* are compositions of Vyasa. He composed *Bhagavata* at the end of everything. Many people say that *Bhagavata* is his commentary on *Brahma Sutrās*—that *Bhagavata* is the essence of all Vedanta. In *Bhagavata* both knowledge and devotion have been blended in a beautiful manner. The fragrance of devotion is seen in every verse of *Bhagavata*, and thus ordinary people have encountered the fullest form of all their aspirations in this great work.

We generally observe that some sad incident is at the background as the cause of the composition of a scripture. The killing of one of the two playmate cranes pained Sage Valmiki, and owing to the intensity of pain a curse rang out of his mouth unconsciously, in a poetic way; and that was the beginning of the *Ramayana*. In the Kurukshetra, seeing his friends, kith and kin, Arjuna was pained. He thought: “I shall have to conquer the throne by killing them! I shall not fight in such a war!” This sorrow of Arjuna was the seed of the *Bhagavad Gita*. King Suratha’s own ministers dethroned him in a coup and drove him away to the forest. A businessman named Samadhi too had come to that forest, being driven out by his wife and children. The two, Suratha and Samadhi, went to Sage Medhasa and spoke to him; this was the origin of *Chandi* or *Durga Saptashati*. In a similar way, even after having organised the Vedas and having composed many scriptures, Vyasa did not have peace. The span of human life in the age of Kali is very small, and the time needed to become adepts in ritualistic sacrifices, eight-limbed yoga, Sankhya and other disciplines is very long. Therefore Vyasa



worried and thought, “What is the use of organising the Vedas and composing so many scriptures? This did not bring any good to human beings.” It was from this sorrow that *Bhagavata* was born.

After first composing the *Padma-purana*, Vyasa wrote the other sixteen Puranas. Gathering the gist of all these Puranas, he finally composed *Bhagavata*, which he taught to his own son, Shukadeva. The central theme of *Bhagavata* is the glorification of the name and sports of Sri Hari. (“Sport” or “sports” has been used in this translation in the sense of “activities of the incarnation” while on earth.)

You may ask: If *Padma-purana* was composed first and the other Puranas were written later, how could there be reference to *Bhagavata* in *Padma-purana*? The answer is as follows: The *suta*, the spokesman of the Puranas, had narrated the order in which Vyasa wrote the Puranas. When the *suta* spoke of the Puranas, Vyasa had already completed composing all of them.

Living beings want to be liberated from the clutches of birth and death, and this liberation is the most important premise of all the scriptures. But the place of devotion is above this liberation too—and this is what has been said in the *Bhagavata* (3.29.13).

*Salokya-sarsti-samipyasarupya-aikatvam api uta, Diyamanam na grhnanti vina matsevanam janah—*

To live in the same world with God (*salokya*), to have equal prowess as he has (*sarsti*), to live with him (*samipyas*), to have the same form as God (*sarupya*), and to be one with him (*sayujya*)—even though one or all of these are bestowed upon true devotees, they will not accept them; they only want to serve God. This wonderful principle of devotion is what has been discussed in detail in *Bhagavata*.

The principal speciality of *Bhagavata* is the idea of sweetness of the worship of the Supreme. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says: *raso vai*

*sah, rasam hi eva ayam labdhva anandi bhavati*, "That Brahman is of the nature of sweetness (*rasa*); having attained him who is of the nature of sweetness, one becomes blissful." Thus, *Bhagavata* mainly discusses God whose very essence is bliss.

After discussing the other incarnations, *Bhagavata* speaks of Sri Krishna in this manner (1.3.28): *Ete amsa-kalahpumsah krsnastu bhagavan svayam*, "All these (avatars) are partial manifestations of God, while Krishna is God himself." Among the avatars some are partial manifestations of God (*amsa*), some others are expressions of his glories (*kala*); but Krishna alone is the Supreme Being (*bhagavan*). The true nature of Krishna has been the main focus of *Bhagavata*, and also the wonderful congruence of the reality as discussed in Vedanta with that of the true nature of Krishna. *Bhagavata* is on the one hand the mine of Vedantic principles; on the other, it shows us how to sweetly commune with these principles found in Vedanta. The highest philosophical truths of *Bhagavata* have sprung from the extremely sweet divine sports of Krishna.

The following is what a great non-dualist like Madhusudana Sarasvati has written while commenting on *Bhagavad Gita*: "I do not know of any reality higher than that of Krishna whose hands are adorned with a flute, whose colour is that of a new rain-cloud, who wears a yellow cloth, whose lips are like a red bimba fruit, whose face is beautiful like the full moon, and whose eyes are like lotuses." And Sridhar Swami salutes Sri Krishna at the very beginning of his commentary on the *Gita* and says: "I salute Sri Krishna who is seated in the hearts of the devotees, and the nectarine knowledge of whose feet even the *paramahamsas* enjoy."

## The Contemplative Life

Swami Atmasthananda

**S**ADHAN-BHAJAN or spiritual practice—japa, prayer and meditation—should play a very vital role in the lives of all. This is a sure way to peace despite all the hindrances that one must face in daily life. The usual complaint is that it is very difficult to lead an inward life of sadhana or contemplation amidst the rush and bustle of everyday life. But with earnestness and unshakable determination, one is sure to succeed. Sri Ramakrishna has said that a devotee should hold on to the feet of the Lord with the right hand and clear the obstacles of everyday life with the other.

There are two primary obstacles to contemplative life. The first one is posed by personal internal weaknesses. One must have unswerving determination to surmount these. The second one consists of external problems. These we have to keep out, knowing them to be harmful impediments to our goal.

For success in contemplative life, one needs earnestness and regularity. Study of the scriptures, holy company, and quiet living help develop our inner lives. I have clearly seen that all the great swamis of our Order have led a life of contemplation even in the midst of great distractions. They lived this life amidst engagement in service to the Lord through whatever responsibility they were assigned. I have been very fortunate to have come in close contact with some of the very illustrious monks of our Order like the revered Swamis Virajananda, Achalananda, Shantananda, Jagadananda, Madhavananda, Nirvedananda, and Gadadharananda. Their lives have been wonderful. There was always a glow on their faces, and association with them was spiritually very inspiring, assuring one of the priceless values of sadhana.

One thing that is a very great power in all men of God is unaccountable love. You cannot explain why they love you. They don't ask anything in return. They do not ask that you become a monk or do anything in return. They just love you. This is something very, very wonderful. Whenever I visited Belur Math, I found this to be true. But the first monk to leave a deep impress on me was Swami Gadadharananda.

I was then doing my intermediate at Cotton College, Gauhati. During summer vacation, when I was visiting my home at Dinajpur, I came down with serious malaria with several complications. My father, who was a big Sanskrit pandit and a specialist in the Bhagavata, had gone to deliver a lecture at a function in a nearby school. Swami Gadadharananda was at that time the head of the Dinajpur centre (now in Bangladesh). He happened to meet my father at this function and found him very worried. He enquired about the reason and, on learning about my illness, asked if he could come and see me. My father of course welcomed him. Next, I found a monk placing his hand on my head and chest—and to my surprise, and everybody else's, all problems were soon over! He had also spoken in such an affectionate and loving manner that I had at once felt drawn to him. So, when I was cured I asked my father who the sannyasin was, and coming to know that he was the head of the nearby Ramakrishna Ashrama, went to meet him one day with some friends.

Swami Gadadharananda was very pleased to see us. He took us to the shrine and introduced us to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. He gave us prasad and asked us to come again. So, I started frequenting the Ashrama. The swami gave me books like Swami Vivekananda's *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, which I started reading. Knowing that I came from a

Brahmin family with the tradition of worship at home, he asked me to do arati in the shrine and then also puja, even though I had not had as yet my spiritual initiation. After the arati, he would ask me to meditate a little before returning home. I was deeply impressed.

In the morning, after mangalarati, he used to go out walking on the bank of the Kanchan River. Sometimes he would ask if I would like to go with him. During the walk he would suddenly ask: "What are you thinking as you are walking? Always think of Him, of God. 'Ho jaye tere nam vasa, ho jaye tere nam vasa; may your name become my refuge, may your name become my refuge.' Whenever you walk here and there, you must mentally think like this." He would find a nice place to sit by the riverbank and would soon close his eyes and start meditating. What could I do? Not knowing what meditation was, I started imitating him. He would be very still and appear very happy. I imitated him, and in this process discovered something happening within.

The swami also allowed me occasionally to spend the night at the Ashrama. There were not many rooms, so he let me stay in his own room. And there I saw something wonderful. Whenever I happened to wake up, at midnight or any other time, I found the swami sitting and meditating! I was amazed! You see how holy company works!

Swami Gadadharananda was nothing short of a saint. I have never seen him hating anyone. He was always ready to serve anybody in need. Even his way of collecting flowers, making garlands, and preparing for arati impressed me. I could not help following him and assisting whenever possible.

As mentioned earlier, even before I met Swami Gadadharananda, I used to do puja at home. Ours was a religious home, and we had a tradition of thakur seva (service to the family

deity). In the hostel also I used to perform sandhya-vandana (daily devotions prescribed by the scriptures) on a regular basis. That, however, was traditional. What I got from the ashrama was something totally different. An ashrama is a place full of spiritual vibrations. That is something inspiring, lively. But in one's home and family, it is a mere traditional way of life, and religious practice, more of a routine.

Another person who greatly inspired me to take to monastic life was Swami Achalananda, popularly known as Kedar Baba. He was a very austere sadhu. When I first saw him at Belur Math, he was walking about clad only in a kaupina (loin cloth). His regular prayer, japa, and meditation were a thing to see! Even when his health was completely broken, out of twenty-four hours his rest and other personal activities would take up at most six to eight hours.

I was in close contact with him. He used to come to Belur Math every year for two to three months and stay in the Leggett house, in the room where Holy Mother had lived. Whenever he used to come, I would go and clean his room and serve him a bit. Every day he would ask me to read the Kathamrita and would ask me, "How much japa have you done?"

Once there was a feast at the Math. Next day Kedar Baba asked us how many rasgullas we had eaten. When I said that I had had two, he exclaimed, "What? Two rasgullas, and that at night! And you want to be a monk and follow Swamiji! Impossible! Those who want to live a pure life must eat a very light meal at night and be careful about sweets." He was a terrific inspiration.

I was in the Calcutta Students' Home while pursuing my graduate studies, and there I came in close contact with Swami Nirvedananda, a real inspiration in every sense. He emphasized brahmacharya and a God-oriented life, especially for students.

Swami Shantananda was another great contemplative. He was a quiet man and talked very little, but you would always find him doing japa. I think, out of twenty-four hours, he would be doing japa for eighteen to twenty hours. Very sweet and very kind—that was Swami Shantananda. Even when he was down with tuberculosis, there was no change in his routine. When he was asked not to strain himself doing prolonged spiritual practice, he said that he could not do otherwise. And never did he give any external expression to the distress of disease.

Then there was Swami Madhavananda. Though he was the General Secretary, and very active, his life was very regular. He was very strict in matters of principle. But he also knew when to be considerate. Those who live this contemplative life regularly also work better. There is no doubt about it. There is nothing haphazard about their work. Whatever they do they do with all their heart, and as service to God.

Does it work the other way round too? For those who work well, do their inner lives also improve? Well, work alone will not do. The spirit behind the work is important. If you work with the spirit that it is service to God, then that work will be spiritually fruitful. Otherwise, well, everybody works. But their work and the work of a Ramakrishna Order monk is not the same. There are many doctors attending to patients. But there is a difference between their work and the service rendered by a monk to the sick. The monk's spirit is that of service to Narayana, God. The other person doesn't necessarily look upon the patient as an embodiment of God or any such thing. "He is a patient, I give treatment, and I get my fees, that's all"—that is the professional attitude.

For those who have heavy work responsibilities, will the simple maintenance of this attitude of service to God improve their

meditative life? Yes! There is no doubt about it. Relief work or hospital work, or school work or kitchen work, or whatever—it is all His service. That spirit must be there. Then your inner life improves automatically. This is my own personal experience. I have derived tremendous joy from hospital work. I worked at the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama in Rangoon, a busy general hospital. I was also involved in the building of the tuberculosis sanatorium in Ranchi, practically from the beginning. It was a joy! And when you worked with devotion, help came from the most unexpected quarters. We had to work hard. But I worked keeping in mind that this was service to the same Being to whom I offered flowers in the shrine. If He came in this shape and form, this was how I had to serve Him. But I also practised japa and meditation every day, irrespective of the time. That is the support one has to hold on to. For everybody that is a must, there is no question about that.

There were also occasions when I took time out from work. That time I spent in spiritual practices and scriptural study. I used to go to Swami Jagadananda and study Vedantic texts. Swami Jagadananda was a living embodiment of the spirit of Vedanta. I shall describe the scene of his passing, and from that you will be able to understand his personality. He had had a heart attack and was gasping for breath. We had brought him to the Vrindaban Sevashrama for treatment. The doctors had declared that there was no hope of recovery and that he would collapse very soon. His legs were turning ice-cold. The doctors asked us to massage the legs with brandy. While I was doing that, he suddenly looked at me and exclaimed in his native Sylhet dialect: "Kita karo? Kita karo? What are you doing? What are you doing?" I replied: "Your legs are turning cold, so I am massaging them a little." "Massaging them a little!" he retorted. "Satchidekam brahma! Brahman is



Absolute Knowledge and Existence! Have you understood that, or not? Sarvam khalvidam brahma, all this is verily Brahman. Know and hold on to this!" And he was gone!

Are the joys of work and that of quiet contemplation and study equivalent? Yes, they are. But both are necessary for harmonious spiritual development.

I had also the opportunity to serve Swami Virajananda, the sixth President of the Order. His life too was very regular, in its own way. And he was very hard-working also. Everything that he did, he did thoroughly—everything! And he was a hard taskmaster, too. He had his hours of deep contemplative moods. And he had a great sense of humour. Sometimes he would prepare some sweets and snacks and send them for the monks after having checked the number—you could not get two! We knew that there would be more in his stock, and that all of it was turning stale. Coming to know what we were thinking, he would remark sarcastically, "Rotten! Rotten!" Then he would do some trick and send those foodstuffs to us; and lo! it was all very good and fresh! He would then ask, "Now what are they doing, what are they doing?"

Even at the time of his passing away he retained this sense of humour. The doctors had given up hope and many sadhus had gathered in his room. When he saw that the sadhus were preparing to chant 'Hari Om Ramakrishna' (which is usually done at the final hour), he quipped: "Ekhon na, ekhon na, deri ache; Not now, not now, there is still time." But when the actual time came it was a sight to see: a beaming face, hair standing on end, and tears trickling down from the outer corners of the eyes—all signs of divine joy according to the scriptures.

Can householders also have equally inspiring lives? Yes, they can. Let me recall just one incident, again a parting scene: I heard

that a certain devotee was on the verge of death. I went to see him. His wife was massaging his feet. He looked up and, seeing me, said, "Bless me, so that I can reach the goal, the feet of the Master." He was quiet for some time. Then he looked at his wife and said, "Now the moment has come. Put charanamrit (holy water) here (in my mouth)." Having swallowed the charanamrit he uttered: "Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna." And that was the end.

So, both householder life and monastic life can equally be ways of developing oneself spiritually. But one must follow the right route. A monastic life that ends with the taking of gerua robes alone is nothing. You have your mantra; you have to make that mantra practically realized in your life. Then alone is your sannyasa worthwhile.

Let me conclude by recalling my own initiation from Swami Vijnanananda Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. As he was giving us the mantra and reciting God's name, it appeared as if he was intoxicated. The atmosphere was indescribable. It is this divine intoxication that one seeks in leading the life of a contemplative. And on obtaining even a bit of that divine joy, one attains fulfilment.

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# **The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man - 1**

Carl G. Jung

## **The Modern Man and the Modern Problem**

The spiritual problem of modern man belongs to the type of question which is invisible because of its modernity. The modern man is the man who has just emerged, and a modern problem is a question that has just arisen and whose answer still lies in the future. The spiritual problem of modern man is therefore at best only the placing of a question, which would perhaps be put in altogether different terms if we had only a slight inkling of the future answer. Moreover, the question involves something so extraordinarily universal, not to say vague, but something which so immeasurably transcends the grasp of an individual that we have every reason to approach the problem with the greatest modesty and caution.

This explicit recognition of the limitations involved seems to me necessary, for nothing so tempts toward filling the mouth with empty words as the handling of a problem of this sort. We shall be forced to say apparently audacious and daring things that can easily blind us.

## **Who is a Modern Man?**

To begin at once with these, that is to risk audacities, I may say that the man we characterize as modern, the man living in the immediate present, stands on a peak, or on the edge of the world, above him heaven, below him the whole of humanity with its history lost in primordial mists, before him the abyss of all the future. Modern men, or better said, men of the immediate present, are few in number, for their existence demands the highest possible degree of consciousness, the most intense and widespread

consciousness, with a minimum of unconsciousness—for only he is wholly in the present who is completely conscious of his existence as a man. It is to be well understood that it is not the man merely living in the present who is modern, else all men of this day would be modern, but it is a term which applies only to the man most completely conscious of the present.

Whoever achieves consciousness of the present is of a necessity lonely. The so-called 'modern' man is in all times lonely, for each step toward a higher and wider consciousness removes him further from the original participation mystique with the herd, further from immersion in a common consciousness. Every step forward means a tearing away from this all-inclusive maternal womb of original unconsciousness in which the mass of people for the most part linger. Even in a cultured people, the psychologically lower levels have an unconsciousness of life little distinguishable from primitives. The next higher strata live in essentials, in a stage of consciousness corresponding to the beginnings of human culture, and the highest stratum possesses a consciousness resembling that reached by the century just passed.

It is only the man who is modern in our sense that lives in the present, because he has a present-day consciousness. For him alone are the worlds of past levels of consciousness faded; their values and strivings interest him only from the historical view-point. Thus, in the deepest sense he becomes 'unhistorical', and thus does he also estrange himself from the masses, who live only in traditional ideas. He is only completely modern when he has gone to the furthest edge of the world, behind him all that has been discarded and conquered, and before him a void out of which almost anything can grow.

These words are so large-sounding that they approach perilously near banality, for nothing is easier than to affect this

consciousness. Actually, there is a great horde of misfits who give themselves the air of modernity, because in a deceptive way they leap over all the stages that represent just so many of the most difficult tasks of life, and suddenly arrive as uprooted, vampire ghosts, by the side of the really modern man, discrediting him in his little-to-be-envied loneliness. And so it comes about that the few really modern men, only seen by the undiscerning eyes of the masses behind the cloudy veil of these ghosts, the 'pseudo moderns', are confused with them. It cannot be helped. The modern man is dubious and suspect, and has always been so in times gone by as well.

### **Uprightness the Sole Criterion**

The confession of modernity means the voluntary choice of bankruptcy, the oath of poverty, and abstinence in a new sense, and the still more painful renunciation of the halo of sanctity, for which the sanction of history is always necessary. To be unhistorical is the Promethean sin. In this sense, the modern man is sinful. Higher consciousness is therefore guilt. But a man cannot attain the maximum degree of present-day consciousness unless he has passed through the various levels of consciousness belonging to the past; unless, in other words, he has satisfactorily fulfilled the tasks set for him by his world. Thus he must be a virtuous and upright man in the best sense, one who can do just as much as anyone else, and still more besides, by virtue of which he is able to climb to the next higher levels of consciousness.

I realize that the concept of 'uprightness' is one especially hated by the pseudo-modern man since it reminds him in an unpleasant fashion of its betrayal. But that cannot prevent us from selecting uprightness as an essential criterion of a modern man. This criterion is indispensable, for, without it, the modern man is

nothing but a conscienceless adventurer. He must be upright in the highest degree, for being unhistorical is merely faithlessness to the past, if it is not supplanted by creative capacity on the other side. To be conscious of the present only by giving the lie to the past would be a pure swindle. The present has meaning only when it stands between yesterday and tomorrow. It is a process, a transition, that parts from yesterday and goes towards tomorrow. Whoever is conscious of the present in this sense may call himself modern.

### **The Disappointment of Thousands-of-Years-Old Hopes**

Many people call themselves 'modern', especially the pseudo-moderns. By the same token, we often find the really modern people among those who call themselves old-fashioned. They do this, on the one hand, in order to compensate in one way or another for that sinful vanquishing of the historical by a heightened emphasis of the past, and, on the other hand, they call themselves old-fashioned in order to avoid being confused with the pseudo-moderns. Cheek by jowl with every good thing is to be found its corresponding evil, and nothing good can come into the world without bringing forth at the same time its correlated evil. It is this sad fact that makes illusory the feeling of elation that comes with a full consciousness of the present, the feeling that one is the fulfilment and result of uncounted thousands of years. At best, it is the confession of a proud poverty, because one is also the disappointment of thousands-of-years-old hopes and illusions. Nearly two thousand years of Christian history, and instead of Paradise and life everlasting we have the World War of Christian nations with barbed wire entanglements and poisonous gases—what a debacle in heaven and on earth!

In the face of such a picture, we do well to return to modesty. The modern man stands indeed upon a peak, but tomorrow he will be out-distanced; he is indeed the product of an age-old evolution, but at the same time the greatest conceivable disappointment of all humanity's hopes. The modern man is conscious of this. He has observed how rich in blessings science, technique and organization can be, but also how catastrophic. He has also observed that well-meaning governments, following the saying, 'In time of peace prepare for war', have so thoroughly protected peace as very nearly to destroy Europe. And when it comes to ideals, neither the Christian Church, the brotherhood of man, international social Democracy, nor the solidarity of economic interests have withstood the fire-test of reality. Ten years after the war we see again the same optimism, the same organizations, the same political aspirations, the same phrases and slogans at work, which, taking a long view, are preparing further unavoidable catastrophes. Agreements to outlaw war make one sceptical, although one wishes them all possible success. At bottom, there is a growing doubt behind all these palliative measures. Taking it all in all, I think I am not saying too much if I compare modern consciousness with the soul of a man who has suffered a fatal shock, and who, as a result, has become essentially uncertain.

From this exposition you can see that I am handicapped by reason of being a physician. I cannot cease to be a physician. A doctor always sees illnesses, but an essential part of his art lies in not seeing them where they do not exist. I will therefore refrain from saying that Western humanity in general, especially the white man, is ill, or that the West faces a downfall; such a judgment goes far beyond my competence.

I know the spiritual problem of modern man, as is self-evident, only through my experience with other men and with myself. I

am now familiar with the intimate spiritual life of many hundreds of cultured people, both sick and well, and from a field covering the whole of white civilization, and it is out of this experience that I speak. Doubtless it is only a one-sided picture that I can draw, for it all lies within the soul, that is, in the inner side of us. I must add at once that this is a peculiar state of affairs, because the soul does not always and everywhere lie within. There are peoples and times in which it has been outside. There are peoples and times that are unpsychological, as for example, all ancient cultures, and especially Egypt with its grandiose objectivity, and its similarly grandiose, naive, negative confession of sin. No personal spiritual problem can be imagined as being the cause of the Apis Tombs of Sakkara and Pyramids, any more than as being the source of Bach's music.

### **The Importance of Psychology**

As soon as there exists an external ideal and ritual form in which all the strivings and hopes of the soul are taken up and expressed, for example, a living religious form, then the soul lies without, and there is no spiritual problem, as there is also no unconscious in the narrower sense. The discovery of psychology was therefore necessarily deferred to the last centuries, although previous centuries had enough introspection and intelligence to recognize psychological facts. In this respect, the course of events has been similar to what happened with regard to technic. The Romans, for instance, had knowledge of all those mechanical principles and physical facts which could have enabled them to build a steam-boat, but it never came to more than a toy of the tyrant Nero. The reason was that no urgent necessity existed. Only the great division of labour and the specialization of the last century brought about this necessity.



It took the spiritual need of our time to induce us to discover psychology. Obviously, the psychological facts were present in former times also, but they did not make themselves felt, and no one heeded them. It was quite possible to live without taking note of them. But today, we cannot get along without the soul. The physicians were the first actually to discover this truth, for to priests the soul can only be something that must be fitted into the already recognized form in order to represent an undisturbed function. As long as this form really does insure the possibility of life, psychology is merely an assisting technique and the soul is not a factor *sui generis*. As long as a man lives in the herd, he has no soul, nor does he need one, excepting a belief in an immortal soul. But as soon as he outgrows the circle of his local religion, that is, as soon as his religious form can no longer embrace his life in its entirety, then the soul begins to be a factor that can no longer be dealt with by the ordinary methods. Therefore we have today a psychology based on experience, and not on articles of faith, or philosophical postulates.

(To be continued)

## The Compass of all Education

Dr. Vayu Naidu

**M**ahashivaratri is firmly embedded in our minds with the experience that the boy Gadadhar, known later as Sri Ramakrishna, had as a 10-year-old during the festival. Here it is for recall.

While acting as Siva on the occasion of the Sivaratri, the Master had ecstasy for the third time.

"Once on the occasion of the Sivaratri, a dramatic performance had been arranged. The troupe belonged to the neighbouring village; they were to play a few scenes indicative of Siva's greatness and the play was to begin about half an hour after dusk.

At dusk it was learnt that the boy of the troupe who was to play Siva's role was seriously ill. As no one else could be found to play that part, the proprietor gave up all hopes and proposed with humility that the performance be postponed.

What was to be done? How could the vigil be kept during the night? The elderly people sat together for consultation. They sent word to the proprietor, asking him whether he could conduct the drama that night if a person could be found to play the part of Siva. A reply came in the affirmative.

The village council consulted again as to who might be asked to act as Siva. Although Gadai was young, he knew many songs of Siva and he had the appropriate looks to play the part. So it was settled that he should be requested. As to the speaking of a few words while playing that part, it would be managed by the proprietor somehow.

Gadadhar was approached, and when he saw that all were eager, he agreed. The play as arranged began about half an hour after nightfall.

As Dharmadas Laha, the landlord of the village, was a close friend of the Master's father, his eldest son Gayavishnu and the Master also became friends. When Gayavishnu came to know that Gadai was to act as Siva, he and his friends began to dress him accordingly.

The Master put on the dress of Siva, sat in the green room, and was thinking of Siva when he was called to appear on the stage. One of his friends came to lead him there.

Called by his friend, the Master rose and without looking in any direction, in a preoccupied state of mind, approached the stage with a sedate and slow step, and stood there motionless. The audience felt an indescribable divine emotion and were filled with joy and wonder when they saw the Master in the dress of Siva, bedecked with ashes and matted hair, with a calm and dignified gait, and in a fixed and motionless posture. They felt particularly charmed to witness that heavenly, indrawn and fixed gaze, and that gentle smile on his lips.

As the villagers are wont to do, they suddenly cried out the name of Hari. Some of the women uttered the auspicious sound of "ulu" and some blew conch shells.

Afterwards, to restore order in the audience, the proprietor began reciting hymns to Siva even before the noise had subsided. Although the audience became a little calm, they made signs to each other and nudged one another, whispering in low tones, 'Bravo, how beautiful Gadai looks! We never thought the lad would act the part of Siva so well; it will be very good if we can secure the boy somehow and form a Yatra troupe of our own', and so on and so forth.

But Gadadhar was all the while standing in that same posture. Moreover, incessant streams of tears were flowing down his cheeks. Some time passed this way, but Gadadhar did not speak

or move. Then the proprietor and one or two elderly men of the village went to the boy and saw that his hands and feet were insensitive and that he had no external consciousness at all.

The noise then doubled. Some cried out, 'Water, water. Sprinkle water over his eyes and face.'

Some said, 'Fan him', some others, 'An ecstatic influence of Siva has come on him; utter His name', while some others murmured, 'The boy has spoilt the whole amusement; it is certain that the play cannot continue now.' At last, the audience dispersed when the boy could not be brought to consciousness by any means.

Some people carried Gadadhar home on their shoulders. That ecstasy, we are told, did not come to an end that night despite much effort, and there was much agitation in the house. He regained normal state the next day after sunrise."

The greatness of the experience reveals the point at which Sri Ramakrishna is immersed and embodied Consciousness and its manifestation while playing the role of Shiva. That experience opened the way with His method to discipline and draw the whole of humanity from drudgery to liberation. The sharp learning, recall, attentiveness, capacity to experience and articulate is staggering for our comprehension. Even more so as he created the harmony of coexistence between faiths, schools, commentators and commentaries of scriptures, and became the compass that steered the spiritual level.

Swami Vivekananda was reared by His Master on that unique infinity of Love, and showed the way of the Industrial age into the phenomenon of the here and now of potentiality and divinity as a science and an art. Method and discipline required individual will. Swami Vivekananda's words sparked a new trail that continues to blaze:

"The first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our scriptures and Puranas, must be brought out from the books, the monasteries, and the forests and scattered—broadcast over the land so that these truths may run like fore all over the country, from north to south, and east to west, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, from the Indus to the Brahmaputra."

All that was seemingly scattered he unified with translations and interpolations, not only for the age he was born in, but he also revolutionised being, thinking and becoming for the future of humanity.

The universality of his opening locked minds in a deadened age overgrown with greed under the mantle of progress continues to be the need of the hour. As technology progresses, his constant steering for student and spiritual seeker is to return to the source that is the power station of all existence. The choice of entering those channels of development in any subject, any temperament of student, requires the acceptance of the primal cause. It was not confined to any particular ethnicity, or national boundary. In his own lifetime of nearly four decades, Swami Vivekananda was always connected to That Source, despite being engaged in enquiring about worldwide institutions, historians, philosophers, the news, as well as inspiring the discriminating faculty in the student to be curious not for the sake of curiosity but for what it can do to the upliftment of the human condition. He lived in the most challenging of times but with the Love of a great Master was able to be at ease anywhere—hosted, homed, or homeless. His intermittent call to 'Shiva, Shiva' in unfamiliar, ostentatious drawing rooms, as Sister Nivedita noted, indicated his constant connection with the source; his immense freedom was having let the 'I' cease to be.

Along with the yogas he refined for the contemporary and future, he put into practice the perennial Truth through work: "Where should you go to seek for God? Are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, also gods? Why not worship them first? Why go to dig a well on the shores of the Ganga? Let these people be your God—think of them, work for them, pray for them incessantly. The Lord will show you the way."

The beauty and Truth of Sri Ramakrishna's experiences and His distilled guidance quenched the spiritual thirst of Swami Vivekananda—that the core radiates in all walks of life and study. Swami Vivekananda brought the essence of Reality and delivered it to social reality, and this continues to be true from Primary learning to the specialisations of all professions.

Education worldwide is at the epicentre of transformation, but it cannot be only through information systems and technological tools, medicine, and theories of social sciences. The real finger on the pulse is through the awakening at the source that mobilises human and emotive intelligence to know its connections of that source. Mahashivaratri is 'celebrated' as the great conjunction; the union of this source—pure consciousness and energy—promotes creation. This festival is also a reminder of overcoming darkness and ignorance in life.

The reverberations of the great gift that Sri Ramakrishna continues to impart to us is that teaching opens with the fundamental question: What DO we mean by education? As we reflect, taking into account the many layers, gross and subtle, we begin the journey where there is no travel, rather the illumination of the source and how life can be lived.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were educationists of the supreme kind who went beyond institutional educational boundaries and their endorsements. The utterances of Swami

Vivekananda rumble like thunder and strike us at the core with his lightning use of metaphor and sound. It came without art—it came from the depth of an experience that goes beyond the fear barrier of 'death' in the form of social qualifications. The truth is in the scriptures, the truth is in the guidance of the Guru, the Truth is the experience born from self-effort and re-cognition of the Grace of the Divine.

This is the one constant that is both tradition and distinctively contemporary. All diverse faculties are made one-pointed for the one purpose. The human being is a universe, and university in itself.

In the last five years we have adapted to so much change and still have not found the answers. The meaning of Education is being seriously examined by students—to what purpose? That makes the beginning of a profound journey.

A radical example is of a lady who had the foremost books on Business Studies. One day she was caught looking up where she could dispose of the collection. When asked why, she said the ideas were so outdated despite a publication date of 2021, that she would not want to donate the collection to new students with fresh minds only for them to be deadened by theories of business systems that are so out of touch with service and humanity. She had a point.

This is where we return to the real value of Life—return to the purpose of what are we studying for? It also opens a relevance and motivation for what we are studying. It is not, of course, by rote or cut and paste, but in venturing to deconstruct our position to learn, to participate. Spiritual reality has no boundaries; social and political reality creates them.

As Swamiji states: "I do not mean to say that political or social improvements are not necessary, but what I mean is this, and I

want you to bear it in mind, that they are secondary here, and that religion is primary."

The great voyage that Swamiji opened up was to shake our little selves out of oblivion and see the light of Light. Immerse our selves by recalling Gadadhar's pure concentration on the beatitude that Shiva IS.

That is the compass of spiritual study—it points the needle to the purposefulness and illumination of study in self processing as the higher Self steers all forces to partake in it.

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Utterances from Ramakrishna Vivekananda Reader App



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The first obstruction to our following reason is our unwillingness to go to truth. We want truth to come to us. In all my travels, most people told me: "Oh, that is not a comfortable religion you talk about. Give us a comfortable religion!" I do not understand what they mean by this "comfortable religion". I was never taught any comfortable religion in my life. I want truth for my religion. Whether it be comfortable or not, I do not care. Why should truth be comfortable always? Truth many times hits hard — as we all know by our experience. Gradually, after a long intercourse with such persons, I came to find out what they meant by their stereotypical phrase. These people have got into a rut, and they do not dare to get out of it. Truth must apologize to them.

-Swami Vivekananda

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The main cause of all bondage is ignorance. Man is not wicked by his own nature — not at all. His nature is pure, perfectly holy. Each man is divine. Each man that you see is a God by his very nature. This nature is covered by ignorance, and it is ignorance that binds us down. Ignorance is the cause of all misery. Ignorance is the cause of all wickedness; and knowledge will make the world good. Knowledge will remove all misery. Knowledge will make us free. This is the idea of Jnana-Yoga: knowledge will make us free! What knowledge? Chemistry? Physics? Astronomy? Geology? They help us a little, just a little. But the chief knowledge is that of your own nature. "Know thyself." You must know what you are, what your real nature is. You must become conscious of that infinite nature within. Then your bondages will burst.

-Swami Vivekananda



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