

Vedanta

421 SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2021

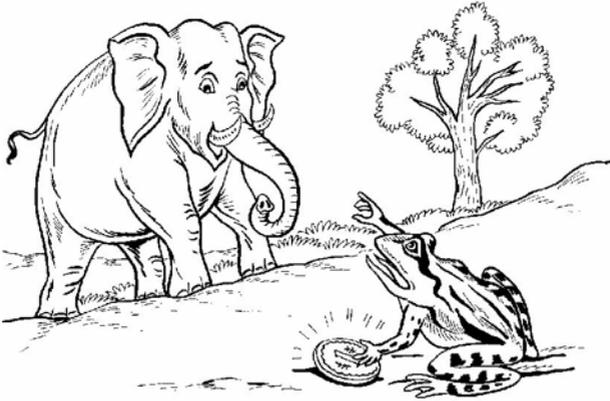
The Path to Perfection
Swami Ramakrishnananda

The Best Offering – Nivedita
Swami Ritajananda



Divine Wisdom

Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 18



SUCH IS THE PRIDE THAT MONEY BEGETS

A FROG had a rupee, which he kept in his hole. One day an elephant was going over the hole, and the frog, coming out in a fit of anger, raised his foot, as if to kick the elephant, and said, "How dare you walk over my head?"

Such is the pride that money begets!

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ISSN 1355 - 6436

Mantra Japa or Repetition of the Holy Name – 7

According to Vedanta we are all like waves with foam or bubbles in the ocean of Consciousness. Now, presently we are in such a state that, each one of us is left identified with the wave and foam of the ocean of Consciousness and each is looking at other waves with foam and bubbles as separate from oneself, and as parts of the objective world which is ever active during the processes of creation, sustenance and destruction. But, behind every wave there is the same Ocean of *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, every wave is nothing but the ocean; wave is a mere appearance, Ocean alone is real and eternal. All waves, foam and bubbles are but manifestation of that one Ocean; apart from Ocean nothing exists. If we sink within ourselves we see there is neither wave nor activity; there is one homogeneous non-dual Existence which is of the nature of Pure Consciousness. As long as we are waves, there is rise and fall, appearance and disappearance, meeting and parting — these dualities invariably bring *Sukha* (pleasure) and *Dukha*, (pain). Man is tossed between joys and sorrows, tortured and elated. The more we retreat, the more we see the world as ‘conscious’. The more we sink, the more Spirit we are and equally less body we are. The more divinity we perceive externally, the less matter we see. If we go to the core of things, whether of beings, or of matter or energy, we find the Pure Consciousness that has taken the name and form as that particular thing. To reach the core we take recourse to the principle that has caused the manifestation of Consciousness as matter. The Tantras adopt the *Mantra Yoga* as the easiest method for all human beings who can normally think, who can express a small amount of faith. Brahman, the Absolute, is both *Nishkala* (free from *Kala*) and *Sakala* (with *Kala*); *Kala* means *Prakriti*, the matter-bound or inert Nature. The *Nishkala* Brahman or the *Parabrahman* is the *Tat* (THAT), when

thought of as without *Prakriti*. It is *Sakala* when associated with *Prakriti*. As the substance of the *Prakriti* is the three *Gunas* (Satva, Rajas and Tamas), Brahman is *Saguna* when conceived as associated with *Prakriti*, and when in its other aspect of being independent of *Prakriti*, It is *Nirguna*. Prior to creation, the *Nishkala* Brahman alone exists. The Upanishad says that in the beginning there was the One. It willed and became many. "May I be many". This 'will' is motionless, calm and silent Awareness — no words, no language, neither it is an idea, but a pure, silent awareness, just the awareness. The awareness can be imagined as something like this: Suppose I am sitting all alone in a garden, and after a while I happen to return back to my room; for making me thus return, just an awareness alone dawns in my mind without any words or language, I just rise and move to my room. This is the 'pure awareness'. The difference in the two awarenesses is that the awareness that arose in me was a phase of my mind, and the one that arises in the *Nishkala* Brahman is a phase of the Consciousness.

According to the *Tantras* or the *Shaktas*, the formation of that 'awareness' itself is manifestation of The *Shakti* (the Power) that matures into *Nada*. The *Nada* condenses into the *Bindu*, and thereafter it is the manifested Brahman, who, as the subject of worship, is meditated upon with attributes (*Sagunatmika*) and conceived mentally with the help of a *Mantra*. To the *Jiva* (the embodied spirit, the individual Soul) with mind and senses as its limiting adjuncts, Brahman has body and form, i.e. It has fallen within the limits of mind. As long as there is mind, we cannot conceive an entity beyond name and form. The Brahman is embodied in the forms of all *Devis* and *Devas*, and in the worshipper himself. Its form is that of the universe, and of all beings and things therein. Scriptures which are the realisation of great sages inform us that there is One nondual Existence which is the essence of every

being. In It the entire universe is suspended like a star in an infinite space, and is pervaded by It. The universe is a manifestation of Its Power which is not different from Itself. Itself being the Pure Consciousness, governs the universe as its Lord. Jīvās being essentially Himself, for their sake He may at times manifest in any form anywhere and at any time, and is called the *Avatara*, the Incarnation of God.

With all these apparent transformations, that One non-dual Existence neither gets mutilated nor stained; Its mysterious power the *Maya Shakti* accomplishes all these apparent changes. Knowing this one non-dual Reality the *Jivas* get rid of their apparent limitation and attain to the Eternal Existence. The Creation is said to be cyclic, and the previous dissolution of the universe remains as potency to project itself again because of which the *Shakti* is said to be “a creative stress”. While projecting out the universe again there remains a backward pull, which is the seed in every object, to return to the Cause; Creation comes with the seed of dissolution impregnated in it. In *Jivas* also there is this pull to return and therefore it constantly searches for Absolute Bliss, Peace and Freedom and never gets satisfied with any pleasures and comforts of this world. This is the spiritual urge in man. This urge is an irresistible force which brings about *Vairagya* (dispassion) and eventually matures into *Vyakulata*, the longing for God or Liberation. It is this that recognises the Divinity in Nature and searches out for the means to go beyond. The *Jivas* are conscious beings and their needs and seekings are always provided by Nature. Thus, along with the manifestation of the mind, matter and the *Jivas*, there appears as a part of Creation certain projections of Divinity which directly link to the Substratum, the Pure Consciousness, the *Chaitanya*. Following the general creative process, these Divine projections too originate as *Shabda* and *Artha* (name and form). In

the Creation we find these manifestations of Divinity too remain bifurcated as *Shabda* and *Artha* (name and form). But they are generally imperceptible to human minds till the animal nature reduces substantially and falls below the liminal level. They are easily accessible to the longing hearts and the striving souls. Such names that represent Divinities that directly link to the Absolute are called *Mantras* and the forms are called Deities or *Devatas*. The Indian sages have discovered and presented to the mankind many such Divinities, the *Devatas* (Deities) like the *Durga*, *Shiva*, *Kali* etc., and have symbolised the forms for gross physical comprehension and grasping; and the *Mantra* in oral/audible physical presentation. They use these exclusively for Man's spiritual evolution and impart to true spiritual aspirants traditionally through a procedure called the *Mantra Diksha* (Spiritual initiation).

There are two approaches to the Divinity or the Supreme Reality — The objective and the subjective. These two are in accordance with the two basic human natures — the extrovert and the introvert. In the objective approach of an extrovert, the aspirant purifies the inner instruments (*Buddhi*, senses etc.,) so as to enable him to focus externally on Divinity and transcend the external nature. Whereas the subjective approach of an introvert consists in being indifferent to external Nature and turn the mind, senses and the intellect inward and to focus on the inner Divinity and transcend one's own inner nature entirely and reach the Ultimate Reality, the Pure Consciousness. The objective approach takes the route of *Bhakti* and *Karma* paths. The subjective approach takes the path of *Jnana* and Yoga (*Ashtanga Yoga* and *Kundalini Yoga*). They are not categorically fixed paths or movements, but are flexible progression. Just like the rain water makes its own way on the earth to move to a pond or ocean, so do the *Jivas* pick up a little from all paths according to one's need and capacity to reach the ultimate goal.

The entire physical (bodily) existence of man - its conception, development, birth, growth, maintenance - takes place through chemical signalling of the endocrine system and electrical (sympathetic and parasympathetic) signalling of the nervous system. In a similar way, the human existence and the interaction with the external Nature, the entire process of living is happening through the thought world. The existence of the external world is a thought in me, its perception/cognition is a thought in me. My existence in this Nature is a thought in me, my friends, relatives, enemies and belongings are but thoughts in me. All perceptions enter me in the form of thought/mentation and reach the core of my being, and reactions come out as thoughts that induce actions. The world we are seeing outside is a thought in me, all memories of the past and future plans, the understanding of anything happening anywhere is just a thought in me. Man's likes and dislikes, his enjoyments and attachments are purely thoughts! So, man is a world of thoughts and thoughts alone. Each man is moving with his own world. If there are no thoughts there is neither the man nor the world; the Reality behind the body-mind-complex shines forth. This state is called the Yoga; in its essential sense and is defined of 'cessation of all mentations' (*Yogah Chitta Vritti Nirodhah*). Even if we can have perfect control over our thoughts, we can change our world-view, give a passive meaning to all that is happening in our lives and in the world and be happy and serve the world with love. But it is extremely difficult to control the on-rushing thought waves. The incessant flow of thoughts creates a whirlpool of ego which poses to be the epicentre of all thoughts and to be the performer of all acts. The flow of thoughts creates a personality that maintains a constant awareness of the world around and links itself to it in various ways.

(to be continued)

The Path to Perfection

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Every bit of our activity presupposes some want and this conscious activity goes by the name of life. Where activity is conscious, that is what we call life, but when it is unconscious, as in a big engine or machine, we do not regard it as life. Only when activity knows that it is active, it is life. Every activity furthermore is actuated by some want. What has made me active? The desire to get something. Why have you come here? Because you think that you will get knowledge or help of some kind. We never take one step forward without the hope of getting something, or realizing something. All activity presupposes restlessness and restlessness comes from want. So long as that restlessness is in you, you will have to be active; you will try to satisfy the want in yourself.

But has man really any want? Great God-men like Sri Krishna, incarnations like Buddha and Christ have taught otherwise. Their definition of man is “wonderful”. They say that He is birthless, deathless, free from want, all-blissful, self-existent, self-luminous. Even the trident of Shiva has no power to destroy him. He is eternal and indestructible by his very nature. But if that is the definition of man, then what am I? I am also called a man; but I am only three and a half cubits in length, I am born, I die, I have many wants. Can you point out to me a single man from the poorest labourer to the greatest emperor who is not full of wants? Man is, indeed, a creature of wants. The moment the baby comes out of the womb, it cries. Why? Because it has a want. Man is born in want, he lives in want and in want he dies. Out of want he has come into existence, in want he lives, and from want he dies.

Then what is the relation of this man to that other man? How can the one be equal to the other? How can the one be united with the other? One is beyond all want, all fear, all birth and death; while the other is a man who is full of all sorts of fears and desires, who is born and who must die. How can there be any relationship between these two men apparently existing at opposite poles? Yet there is a relation. This man who has birth and death, who is finite and limited, this very man points to his infinite nature. Man is always restless, always moving from place to place. Why? Because he is never satisfied, because nothing brings him permanent satisfaction; and this very fact that he is dissatisfied with his finite nature shows that it is not his natural condition. The fact that he has infinite ambition, that he has insatiable hunger for more and more, proves that he is infinite by nature and that is why he is always dissatisfied with whatever is finite.

Go to any man and you will find that he is discontented with his finite condition. Not one of you is really content. You may say that you are content with your one hundred rupees a month, but that is laziness. You must never confound laziness with contentment. Nachiketa shows us what true contentment is. Yama offered him wealth, a whole kingdom, beautiful women, but Nachiketa knew that truth alone would satisfy him and he wanted nothing else. But if anyone should offer you two hundred rupees instead of one hundred, would you not take them? That shows that you are not really contented with what you now have. If you will analyse yourself, you will see that there is no end to your ambition.

When will that ambition come to an end? Only when you can say: "I am master of all. The whole universe belongs to me. I want nothing. I have transcended death. I am responsible to none."

Until this comes, your ambition will never leave you. You want to get rid of limitation, and until you can say that you are limitless, deathless, immortal, you will not be at rest.

This is what is called Mukti or Salvation. So although this little man seems so diametrically opposite to that great man—that infinite man—yet this little man will never rest until he has become one with that infinite man, which shows that that is his real nature. If you take a fish and place it on the peacock throne of Shah Jahan, one of the emperors of India, and bow down and worship it, will it be happy? No, it will rather say: “Throw me even into a cesspool, but do not keep me out of water”; because water is its natural element. In the same way, you are all restless after your lost nature.

There is no man who is not restless, and restless for what? Restless for his lost nature, his infinite nature; and blessed is he who is restless and most miserable is he who is contented with his present lot. The contented man is no man; he is no more than a brute. You may keep an elephant tied all its life and it will not mind if you give it some food. Men who are thus contented are no better than animals—“Eating, sleeping, procreating and getting frightened we have in common with lower animals”—and if we do not know to do anything higher and better than these, how can we distinguish ourselves from them?

Wherever there is discontent, you must know that there is the germ of greatness. Read the life of any great man, you will find him constantly active and restless, always seeking more and more. And those restful people, who have no ambition, they are destined to be coolies. They are just like those bullocks that turn round and round the mill all day but never leave the groove. When these people were at school they did not care to learn, they were quite content to be at the lower end of the class; but with them

there were some who were restless, who were ambitious to learn, and they are the high officers and the men of importance today. Study the lives of all great men and you will see that they have become great because they were restless. Therefore do not cease to be active.

Be never satisfied with little. You are infinite, you are all-perfect, and until you realize your infinite nature, you must not stop. Do not think that you are intellectually limited. You have the brain of a Socrates, you have the intelligence of a Newton. Only you have allowed a lot of dust and dirt to cover it over. Wipe away the dust, arouse your ambition, stir up your activity and know that all power is latent in you. You are not limited. No, you are as much limitless as any of the greatest sages of yore between whom and God space and time never intervened.

Our Scriptures teach us that the greatest sin is to call a man a sinner. The moment you think yourself a sinner, weak, you forget your infinite nature and identify yourself with the body and mind. This identifying yourself with the body and mind is the source of all your miseries. If you want to realize your infinite nature, throw off all association with your finite nature. Forget your body and mind. Disidentify yourself with your body and mind. You are constantly doing it in fact. Are you always thinking, "I am tall or short, I am dark or fair, I am lean or stout, etc.?" You only think all this when you stand in front of a mirror. What is the definition of health? A man is perfectly healthy when he does not remember that he has a body. Only when you have a headache, do you remember that you have a head; only when you have a pain in the leg, do you think of your leg. You are spirit itself. You are life itself. Although your body sits upon you with so much power, still it cannot keep you from forgetting it. When you are enjoying a beautiful scene or beautiful music, you

forget it; that is, for the time being you have transcended the body. This is your true nature and that is the reason you are happy. When you are calm, quiet, lost in thought, you also do not remember your body, and only when something comes suddenly to disturb this state, you call it pain.

In enjoyment, thought expires. When you are thinking, when you have no consciousness of your body, where have you gone at that time? You have gone out of your body and mind, and that is enjoyment. Enjoyment is your true nature, therefore you like enjoyment. Man is always restless after happiness, and he is restless because some misery is pinching him. Man is constantly in search of enjoyment; and he is going from this village to that village, from this town to that town, from this country to that country, only to get his lost enjoyment; and this search after enjoyment is the same as the search after God, for God and bliss are the same. They are synonymous. Therefore it is said, "A fool hath said in his heart there is no God"; for out of God all happiness has come and everyone who seeks happiness, seeks God.

Our definition of God is *Anandam* (bliss). There is no atheist who does not desire happiness and that happiness is God. Out of bliss has come the whole creation, in bliss it exists and into bliss will it merge. Out of God we and the whole universe have come, in God we rest and to God shall we go. Hence bliss and God are synonymous. So no man can say that he is an atheist, for every man believes in happiness and happiness is God. Every man, indeed, is after happiness, and what happiness do you want? Happiness that knows no break. You may take this temporary happiness because it gives you a little pleasure and you want pleasure; but your ideal is happiness that never ends.

Happiness that has no break goes by the name of God. Happiness that has a break goes by the name of sensuality. You may be content for a moment with this limited happiness which gives you momentary enjoyment, but unbroken, eternal enjoyment is your ideal and you must realize it. The man who hurries through his meals, rushes to the office and works hard the whole day, is really in search of pleasure and believes that he can get it by earning money. And that man who is sitting in a corner, concentrating his mind, trying to forget his environment, trying to find God inside himself, he is doing the same thing.

Now let us examine the two methods. One is really after money, because it will bring food, comforts and pleasures for himself and his family; so he tries to earn money and to earn power because he thinks that if he has power he can force nature to bring him whatever he wants. But this method is very precarious. He may get money, but he may not be able to digest the food or enjoy the comforts it brings. I knew a millionaire in Calcutta who was only able to take barley water and thus he was not so well off, even as his lowest servant in point of enjoyment. Then if the man has wealth, how long will he be able to enjoy it? Only so long as the body lasts. We all know that there is nothing so uncertain in this world as life. To the baby in the cradle, to the youth and to the old man, to the rich and the poor, at any moment death may come. And when we identify ourselves with the body, when we believe that by satisfying the body, or by satisfying the mind, we satisfy ourselves, then we can understand how perishable happiness must appear.

Every man will have to undergo six sorts of transformations. There was a baby in the womb and only because there was a baby in the womb, did a baby come out. When it is born it must have to increase in stature and so undergo all sorts of changes—it must

become a boy, a youth, a man. Then what will follow? A gradual dwindling away. The eyes will lose their power, the ears will cease to hear, the hands and feet will grow less active, the memory will fail. This is the life history of every living being; and such a being, who is tied to a body and whose mind is all doubts, how can he expect eternal life?

Yet no man wants to die. There is nothing man hates so much as death. But if this be the only life we have, man cannot escape death, so he cannot hope to be happy. But what is the definition of life? Life means *being*—to be. Death means *non-being*—not to be. Now we know that out of being, non-being can never come, and being can never become non-being. So life cannot be transformed into death, or death into life. Therefore, if man is living, he cannot die. But where can he find that life which cannot be transformed into death. He must have to go beyond the body to find it; and if he goes beyond the body, he must go beyond the whole universe, for even upon this fragile frame of yours, the whole universe is resting. Upon the eyes the whole form-world is existing; upon the ears the whole sound-world is existing; upon the tongue the whole world of taste is existing.

The phenomenon of sleep will prove this very easily. So long as the eyes can see, forms will exist for you; so long as the nose can smell, odours will exist for you; so long as the ears can hear, sounds will exist for you; and so with every sense. Now what is the wakeful condition, when you are in your eyes, your ears and all your senses? Then there is a thoughtful condition when you are in your mind. But there is a condition when you go away from your senses, when you go away from your mind, and that condition is known as sound sleep. Then a friend may come and sing a sweet tune beside you, but you do not hear him, because you are not in your ears. You are in your body, no doubt,

but you are not in your ears or any of your senses. Yet, although you are away from your mind and senses, you are still in your body; for if I give you a good push, you wake up. And what does this waking up mean? You come back to your mind, you come back to your senses. While you were asleep, your wife was there by your side, but you did not know it, and so is it with everything about you and with the whole universe.

The condition, therefore, on which the whole universe is existent, is that you must be present in your mind and in your senses. While you were asleep did any universe exist for you? Did any memory of it exist for you? No. So, although the little body seems so fragile and it is no doubt very fragile, yet it is the prop on which the whole universe is resting. To go away from the universe, therefore, it is evident that we must go away from the mind and the senses; and when you do that, you find your eternal life. It was in this way that your forefathers realized their eternal nature. They did it by going away from their external senses and from their inner sense, the mind. And if you can do this, at once you will realize your eternal life. Then absolute bliss will be yours. This is salvation.

Thus you find that one method leads you astray and the other takes you to the goal. The method you are all following, earning money, etc., is a false method, for you are worshipping this body of yours. It is the only God you worship. Because you worship this God, you love your wife; because you worship this God, you love good dishes, beautiful scenery, sweet sounds, etc. But when you serve a master you expect some wages. Yet when you work for this God, your body, what does it give you? It leads you to the thing that you hate most—death. You have been serving this master for so many lives and each time he has rewarded you with death. Therefore this cannot be a true service. If you want to

give true service, which will bring you a true reward, serve the real God. Then you will get eternal life.

The path of service is inwards and not outwards. The path which leads you to realize life eternal is not by exercise of your out-going energies, but of your in-going energies. You must collect your energies and direct them inwards. Unless you do this, you are no better than the lower animals. The real life is inside yourself, not outside. But you must work hard to find it. You have been worshipping this God of your body for so many lives, it is not easy to begin to worship the true God all at once. It is easier to conquer the whole world than one's own mind. Hence even so great a warrior as Arjuna had to admit that although he had conquered so many kingdoms, he was unable to master his own mind. Why? Arjuna was a hero, there was no doubt of it; but because he had never worked in this field, therefore he felt himself powerless. And we are like Arjuna. But to realize your eternal nature in this life, you must take this path. "There is no other path leading to salvation."

So you must see the path that has been found which will make you the happiest of men, the wealthiest of men and the most powerful of men. Now what is necessary? The will. Unless you have the will to follow it, it is useless to know the path. You may know how to cook all kinds of the best dishes, but unless you go to the kitchen and actually make some of these dishes, your knowledge is of little use to you. So mere knowledge that the path is inside will not help you. You must work hard and go there. Religion is therefore a thing that is absolutely practical. It has nothing to do with disputing and theorizing. That may come before you have the will to follow the path. But you may be the most ignorant man, still if you have an intense desire to go to God, you can go inside and reach Him without any learning whatever.

Then even the most learned will come and sit at your feet. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was almost illiterate. He scarcely knew how to read and write, yet the greatest pundits used to go to him to have their doubts cleared. How was it that he was able to do this? Because he had the intense will to realize God and he realized Him. His life is a standing protest against the view that a man can only know by reading books or by passing examinations. This is a very meagre idea of knowledge. After your lifelong struggle you really know nothing. Socrates was the wisest of men, because he knew that he knew nothing.

Such a man not only sees God himself but he can make others see Him. Swami Vivekananda in his boyhood was constantly in search after a man who could say that he had seen God, otherwise, he said, how can I know that He exists? Whenever he heard of a great Sadhu or a great teacher, he would go and ask, "Does God exist?" The man would answer, "Yes." Then he would put the question, "Have you seen Him?" When they would answer in the negative, he would turn and go away. Nowhere could he find a man who said that he had seen God, and for that reason he had come to the conclusion that God was a matter of imagination. Then one day he came to this prophet of Dakshineswar, to this illiterate sage, and he asked him, "Have you seen God?" At once Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes." "Can you make me see Him?" "I can," was the Bhagavan's immediate answer. At last Swamiji was satisfied; and this is the reason why in all his books he insists over and over again that religion consists in realization. Religion is indeed altogether a matter of realization.

You must see God. But to do it, you will have to work hard. First you will have to overcome the old habits, these habits which have come by worshipping the false God through so many lives. You must conquer the mind and the senses. Unless, like Christ,

you crucify this body and these senses, you cannot hope to rise. You will not be able to raise yourself from this dead body. If you would raise yourself, you must crucify the body and conquer the senses. This everyone must do. And the best means Sri Ramakrishna gives. He says, if you would conquer your senses, you must regard God as the highest. If you are a lover of beauty, where can you find such beauty as in God? If you are a lover of eloquence, who can be more eloquent than God, from whom all the Vedas have come into existence? If you are a lover of powers, what being can be more powerful than God? Every man loves one of these, and all of these are to be found in infinite degree in God. If you love a beautiful woman, her beauty will only last for a short time, but God's beauty is perennial. So if you want perennial beauty, indestructible life, all power and all knowledge, you must go to God. But to go to God, you do not need any money; you do not have to buy a ticket. To go to Him, you do not need your legs; to see Him, you do not need your eyes; to hear Him, you do not need your ears. He is inside you, and to reach Him, you have to shut up all these. To see Him you must shut your eyes, to hear Him you must close your ears, to go to Him you must give up all outer activity.

So take the hint and go inside and realize Him. Then only will you be a true man. But to do this you must have intense will. If once, however, you recognize your real relation to Him, that He is your real father and real mother, your real friend and companion, and do you go to Him, you will be infinitely rewarded, for He will make Himself even your servant in order to care and provide for you. So if you are not mad, you can choose only Him, since from Him alone can you get the highest bliss and the highest wisdom.

The Best Offering – Nivedita

Swami Ritajananda

Samuel Noble was a popular figure at Manchester. His extraordinary cultural and religious bent of mind brought to him numerous visitors. One morning, while he was seated in his study, a missionary, who had spent many years in India, came to see him, and, after having a hearty talk, he was leaving when he noticed the young daughter of Samuel. Attracted by the bright features of this girl of ten, he tenderly caressed her and said: "Darling! The distant India is going in search of her God. It is quite possible that girls like you may also be called there to work. So get ready." These strange words from an unknown man about a foreign country and his suggestion to get ready to go there produced a thrilling effect in the young child. She rushed to her father's bookshelf and pulled out an Atlas to see the country of which he had spoken. What impression the tiny red patch of the British possession in the map produced in her may be left to the imagination of the readers, but Margaret intuitively felt that she must go to that far off land and work there. All this happened about the year 1877.

Years rolled on. After finishing her education, Margaret took up a teacher's job in London. But a born educationist like her could not rest content with a routine life of pushing the three Rs into the heads of a number of unwilling children. She felt that her energies might be better spent in educating the poor and neglected children of the slums and turn them into useful citizens. It was a daring experiment, which called forth considerable energy and patience, and very little of material gain came in return. But Margaret was made of a sterner stuff, not to be shaken by obstacles. She imbued herself to the level of the children and guided them step by step. And this work became

an absorbing passion with her. Perhaps she would have lived and ended her life for those children, had it not been for a strange accident.

Novelty is the law of life. No one wants to have the same order of things always. Even in the field of religion, if it is a set of dogmas preached in the same way for centuries, many people get tired of it. They feel bored to death. Margaret and her friends were of this type. Though brought up in an orthodox atmosphere, she could not understand why God should be approached only as father. There were many such questions that they all discussed among themselves. When they came to know that an Indian monk was meeting some people in a friend's house, they felt curious. Why not go and see how this person would meet their questions? He had had a successful lecturing tour in America and his abilities might be tested as to how he would solve their knotty problems. So Margaret went to see the Indian monk, who with his supreme power at once opened up a new vista of life before her.

“The time was a cold Sunday afternoon in November (1896), and the place, it is true, a West-End drawing room. But he was seated, facing a half-circle of listeners, with the fire on the hearth behind him, and as he answered question after question, breaking now and then into a chanting of some Sanskrit text in illustration of his reply, the scene must have appeared to him, while twilight passed into darkness, only as a curious variant upon the Indian garden, or on the group of hearers gathered at sundown round the sadhu who sits beside the well, or under the tree outside the village-bounds. There were about fifteen or sixteen guests, intimate friends, and he sat amongst them, in his crimson robe and girdle, bringing news from a far land, with a curious habit of saying now and again ‘Shiva! Shiva!’ and wearing that look of mingled gentleness and loftiness that one sees on the faces of those who live much in meditation—that look, perhaps, that Raphael has painted for us on the brow of the Sistine Child.”

Thus she first met Swami Vivekananda and was charmed by his personality. There he was as a representative of India, about which she had heard even as a small girl. When he began to talk, she found that that country was not merely in search of God, but had found Him, and withal could show Him too! Otherwise, how could he talk and argue with them in such a convincing manner? While most of the listeners felt that the Swami was only presenting old truths in a new fashion, Margaret thought differently. She had an inexhaustible stock of questions and she accepted him as her Master only after he stood the test. But the Swami did not stay for long. He soon left London on a tour in Europe only to return after six months. During that period Margaret had her bookshelf filled with the scriptures of all religions and made a comparative study—and a deep one too—as if preparing for a war of words when the Swami returned. But she was to lose the battle, since the Swami was always basing his arguments not on dogmas of any particular sect, but on the core of all religious ideals, where he had direct access through personal experience. This had a marvelous effect on her. Margaret was also highly influenced by his rationalistic approach to all problems, religious or otherwise. Besides that, he had imparted vivid pictures of the rich culture of India, the land of sages and saints, the land which produces wonderful books on religion and possesses famous pieces of architecture. Margaret was captivated and felt drawn toward India. But how to express the wish?

Soon came the opportunity. She wanted that the Swami should see the institution of her creation. The Swami accepted her invitation and she began to explain what a hard job it was to handle the little children entrusted to her care. Suddenly, the Swami remembered his own country and the miserable lot of thousands of children steeped in ignorance. He sighed in deep anguish, “Who will work for the numerous boys and girls of Mother India?” Yes. Who would identify oneself with the people supposed to have no culture and civilization? That task of training the mother, who will educate her

children, has to be done only by a woman. It required a woman, intelligent, highly cultured, bubbling with energy and with a heroic temperament to face all difficulties. While listening to the words of the Swami, Margaret saw before her mind's eye the contrasting pictures of the glorious land of Sita and Savitri and the wretched millions of the modern times who had well nigh lost all their legacies. She, who had developed intense admiration for the land, felt that the opportunity had come to offer herself to serve there. This offering was not an impulsive reaction to his moving words but the genuine expression of her heart that really loved India.

The Swami began to unfold and explain to her his scheme for the regeneration of India; how he proposed to spread education in every nook and corner, this being an essential condition to make them understand the real plight. It was a very hard task and only people with exceptional abilities were suited for that. The Swami wanted to wait and see how far her enthusiasm would continue. So her departure to India was not immediate. But when the Swami saw she was determined to come, he wrote to her later on, "Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work of India."

What was wanted was not a man but a woman; a real lioness to work for Indians, women especially.

"India cannot yet produce great women; she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted."

The Swami explained to her the numerous hardships she was to encounter in India, but she was not frightened by the difficulties mentioned by him. She left England, and on 28th January 1898 she touched the shores of the land which she adopted as her own. About that time some American friends of the Swami had also arrived, and all of them stayed not far from the Belur monastery near

Calcutta for some months. It was a memorable period for Margaret. The Swami began the task of enlightening his friends about the rich spiritual heritage of his motherland. As a brilliant conversationalist, he could keep his audience spell-bound by his inexhaustible flow of "interpretation broken but rarely by question and answer in which he would reveal to them some of the deepest secrets of the Indian world." It was a marvel to the listeners and particularly to Margaret, "how such a harvest of thought and experience could possibly have been garnered, or how when once ingathered, could have come such energy of impulse for its giving forth." Day by day she gained greater insight into the Indian life in which she was going to plunge herself later on. They were unforgettable days for her and she has left the record in her great book, 'The Master as I saw Him'. Soon after, on the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, Margaret joined the Order of Ramakrishna with the name of 'Nivedita', the dedicated one. From that time onwards, a new chapter in her life began.

She had to become completely Indianised, not only in the name, in order to shoulder the responsibility of the service of India. Indian dress, the Indian way of eating, sitting and sleeping on the floor, and even ordinary manners of life had to be adopted, since the Master made her understand that a Western worker for India should develop a deep Indian consciousness, which was absolutely necessary for meeting larger questions of the land. Nivedita gladly adjusted herself to all these. Born in a different country, accustomed to a different way of life and habituated to a higher standard of life, it must have been a hard task for her. But to a person of such strong will as Nivedita, it was not so.

The training would be incomplete if the disciple did not see for herself how the spiritual life lay at the background of Indian life. So the Swami took her, along with some other friends, on a trip to some ancient places of pilgrimage, to Amarnath, Kedarnath and Badri in the Himalayas. This pilgrimage was of great educational

value to Nivedita. She found that the people, in spite of crushing poverty, could face life cheerfully because they had not lost their faith in religion. Besides this, she saw her Master at close quarters and learnt many lessons. She began to imbibe his spirituality combined with deep reverence for his mother country. Every word he uttered and every action of his were of special import to her. Through him she came to know of his illustrious teacher Sri Ramakrishna. But she could not think of him as a separate person. To her they, the Master and the disciple, were a single soul, each contributing to the other. So she used to call herself as 'Nivedita' of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Order.

Soon came the time when Nivedita had to take up her task of serving Indian womanhood. In a most humble way, a small school was started on the Kali Puja day of the year 1898, with the prayerful blessings of Sri Sarada Devi, who is "Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood." Born educationist as she was, Nivedita easily won the affection of the pupils who attended the school. In her own characteristic way, her method of instruction was often seasoned with delightful stories culled from the Indian epics and touching anecdotes from the history of India. Her purpose was to arouse a strong national consciousness. She wanted the lost India to come back and be again the same old land of glory. If her Master gave the vision of his Motherland regaining her lost throne, Nivedita took up the task of working for that. The students who had the good fortune to study under her were seeing before them a great marvel. To her, the great nation with all its ancient traditions was a living reality. So, whenever she began to speak of the heroic women of India, she used to be filled with admiration that very soon she was silent, lost in the meditation of the heroine. The illustrious Swami had earned the name of 'the patriotic monk of India' and there appeared the true disciple of his, to whom even the adopted land was a blessed one. The very dust of the country was sacred to her. Even trifles of the ordinary Indian home opened to

her new visions of the land and its immense potentialities for future greatness. She repeatedly told the students, “India should be your thought, your dream and your worship. She should be your holy mantram.”

We are told that with these words she would actually take out her beads and make the Japa!! Her identification with India was so complete that she never felt herself as a foreigner. It was always about “Our Land” and “Our People” that she spoke. The institution which has grown up since then stands as a befitting memorial to the beloved daughter of India, with the name Sister Nivedita School, guiding the lives of hundreds of girls in a typical Indian setting with the best that could be had from the West.

But it was a time when the awakened India wanted badly people who could infuse the national spirit in young minds. Nivedita had all the necessary qualifications—genuine love for the land, a capacity to present before her listeners the ideals they had to adopt, and the spirit of renunciation and service. Very quickly she was found associated with the struggle for freedom for India. She led a very active life, touring the length and breadth of India and arousing young minds by her lectures. This terrible strain on her badly affected her already shattered health, and in the year 1911 her earthly career came to a close when she was just forty-four.

Worshippers of the Divine Mother gather rare flowers and fruits to offer at Her feet. These are collected with much care and dressed up with all love, for they stand as expressions of devotion. Swami Vivekananda loved India with all his heart. It was as if the personification of the Divine Mother to him. He gathered a very rare flower full of charm and fragrance in a distant land and left it as a noble offering at the altar of Mother India. No better offering could he make than Nivedita, who possessed the rare combination of the heroic temper and motherly heart.

(Reprinted from Vedanta, January-February 2011)

Reminiscences of Swami Saradanandaji - 2

Swami Bhuteshananda

Construction of Mother's House (Udbodhan)

He constructed the Mother's house with borrowed money. In those days money was lacking, there was no rich devotee who could give thousands of rupees for Mother. But it was absolutely necessary to construct a house for her and it had to be situated near the Ganga because Mother did not like to stay away from the Ganga. At first the Mother lived in rented houses. But there was not enough money to pay high rent or to take a house permanently on rent. Moreover, she did not live in Kolkata always. When she came, it would be difficult to find a suitable house each time. The Mother had to live in many places like Baghbazar, Ghusuri, Belur. Sharat Maharaj thought, this should not go on; a house must be erected for Mother. But where to get money? With great difficulty some money was collected and the major part was borrowed. Thus the construction work started. In those days even borrowing money was not easy; it could be had only from the devotees. And the responsibility of borrowing money was a great one for the monks. They themselves did not have any provision for food and shelter—how could they dare to borrow money? Who would repay? And who would care to lend them money? Sharat Maharaj had personality, he had sincerity and he had influence upon the devotees. So by borrowing money he constructed the Mother's house, and what hard labour he had to do to repay the loan! The situation then was not as it is now. Devotees were there, but most of them belonged to the lower middle class. Very few were in the upper middle class. Hence their capacity was very limited. In those days perhaps the cost of construction of a house was no more than ten to twelve thousand rupees, but even that was a staggering

amount. Those who have visited Udbodhan have surely seen a small room to the left of the entrance. That was his sitting room. It was there that he met the devotees and wrote articles for the Udbodhan magazine. Swami Premananda has compared him with Ganesha, stout, calm and reticent.

Sri Sri Ramakrishna-lilaprasanga is his invaluable contribution. He said that he wrote it with the object of repaying the loan incurred in constructing the Mother's house. Such an intensely thoughtful book was written in that small room sitting in a marketplace, as it were! There was a small desk. On it were done all works like writing letters, articles, books, etc. There was no solitary place at all where literary work could be done peacefully. So many old men and women, so many crazy persons would gather there and he gave his attention to all. No afflicted person returned from him without getting compassionate treatment, be he a monk or a householder. His compassion and consolation filled everybody's mind with peace. With such calm, silent sympathy he listened to their tales of woe that it itself lightened their load of sorrow. He had infinite compassion for one and all. Day after day this scene used to be repeated there. We youngsters did not like those talks. We used to go there to hear about Thakur, but instead of that the talks related to worldly sufferings would go on and on.

His Love and Concern

But he was not indifferent to the aspirations of youngsters who went to him. That is why sometimes he would call an aged monk named Swami Purnananda. He was a doctor in his pre-monastic life. So Maharaj addressed him as doctor. He would say, 'Doctor, like to come?' If he was in good mood he would replay, 'Yes Maharaj, coming.' Otherwise he would say, 'Maharaj, today I am not feeling well.' If he came the conversation would take a turn.

While worldly troubles were being discussed, Doctor Swami would come and start religious topics. Later on we realised that Sharat Maharaj's sympathy was not for those alone who were spiritually thirsty, but his heart wept also for those who were burning in the fire of worldly sufferings. So he gave enough time for them. This we realised much later. But at that particular time we failed to understand this. Moreover he gave shelter to a band of crackpots and for each of them what great sympathy and pity did he have! One day he said, 'Look, that old woman's insanity seems to have increased. She is not eating at all; bring some medicine for her.' Thus a number of strange persons used to come to Udbodhan, have their meal there and behave crazily. Even among them he was concerned about that old woman who was not eating! There was a Brahmachari who went off his head later. He would keep standing near Maharaj with a huge turban on his head and a stick in his hand. He thought he was the gatekeeper there. Various such abnormal persons used to be there.

In the matter of service he had equal concern for everybody. Some old women had some old ornaments and some cash as their sole property. Where to keep these? Having none in the family to rely on, they deposited these with Sharat Maharaj. He kept these in an iron safe in separate bundles with their names written on them. The day before he had a stroke he called a monk and said, 'Take care of the things that are in this almirah. See to it that everyone gets back one's own items without any mistake.' Next day he lost his power of speech as a result of the stroke. But to the last day he was conscious of this matter.

He gave shelter to one and all without judging their fitness. This made some monks of Belur Math to complain, 'Maharaj, you have given shelter to these wicked persons.' Sharat Maharaj replied, 'Yes my children, I too know that they are unfit for sympathy, but

where will they go if I don't give them shelter? They have no other place.' So their shelter there remained permanent. Thus, those who had nowhere to go had their place with him. It is not that these persons always behaved respectfully even with him. Care they received without any measure, but still they could not become fit recipients of his love. He came only to give, never expecting anything in return from anybody.

His Detachment and Humility

Another specially memorable incident revealed his detachment. After the demise of Swami Brahmananda a new abbot was to be selected. Some said, 'Sharat Maharaj should take up this responsibility. In fact for all practical purposes it is on him alone that this responsibility has been resting so long.' He replied, 'Swamiji has made me Secretary, I shall act as Secretary only. I don't want to be the President.'

Swami Shivananda was elected President. Shivananda Maharaj had such an unlimited confidence in Sharat Maharaj that it was he who could guide the Sangha properly. We have seen many instances of this confidence. One incident may be cited here. Shortly after the founding of the Saradeswari Ashrama, the foundress Gaurima came to the Math one day and told Mahapurush Maharaj, 'Maharaj, we are going to circulate an appeal for helping Saradeswari Ashrama. Prominent citizens of Kolkata will sign the appeal, and we would like to have your name also in it.' He said, 'You see, I have no objection if my name is put there, but you should ask Sharat Maharaj. If he agrees, then do it.' That is to say, even the decision regarding inclusion of his name in an appeal was left to Sharat Maharaj. The Sangha gradually expanded. It was felt by some that those who had become old could not be depended on any more. Now they all had become

physically incapable. So some younger ones should be given the responsibility of running the Sangha. To discuss this issue the first convention of the Math and the Mission was held in 1926. Many had strongly objected at that time saying that they did not want new administrators. They would rather work under those who had directed the Sangha so far. When such discussion was going on, Sharat Maharaj called a meeting of the monks and said, 'The reason for which we want to make this change is that even in our absence the Sangha may run smoothly. So we intend to form a group of new administrators who will be capable of shouldering the responsibility of directing the Sangha in future'. Realising his intentions, the Sangha accepted the proposal. Thus, a working committee was formed and it was entrusted with the responsibility of management. From the day he handed over the work to that working committee, he became totally indifferent. Thenceforth Swami Saradananda, that indefatigable worker, immersed himself completely in japa and meditation as if he never had any responsibility on his head. That mood continued till the last day of his life. If his advice was sought in any matter, he gave it briefly. But directly he did not intervene in the work of the Sangha. It was as if he had returned to his life of sâdhanâ at Dakshineswar. Such was his absorption in japa and meditation that everyone hesitated to disturb him except on very important occasions. His daily routine at that time was like this—in the morning after taking bath in the Ganga he did japa or meditation which lasted up to two to two-thirty p.m. Then he took his food, rested and talked with the devotees. There was no more any thought of work.

His Extraordinary Calmness

One day the following incident took place. Sharat Maharaj was going to Belur Math from Baghbazar by boat. In those days one

had to go to Belur or Dakshineswar from Kolkata by boat. At that time a storm broke out. The boat was about to sink. But Maharaj remained unperturbed and went on smoking his chillum, sitting in the boat. Dr. Kanjilal was his companion. In great rage he threw away the chillum into the water and exclaimed, 'The boat is sinking, and you are sitting here smoking!' Presently the storm stopped and the boat reached the bank. Then he said, 'I was smoking, no doubt, but you people were merely fussing, could you save the boat that way?' Just as that storm could not agitate him, so also the storms that raged over the Sangha in those days could not disturb him.

He was the calm, steady leader of the Sangha. He carried the burden of the Sangha all along, yet one could never feel that he was finding it difficult. In honour or in dishonour, in happy or unhappy situations, he never lost his equipoise. This was the extraordinary speciality of his character. That was why later on Swami Premeshananda, comparing him with Ganesha, said in a song, 'Sharat is steady and calm, as if Gananatha.' He remained steadily at one place, there was no vacillation, and no wave could disturb him. Yet this calm and quiet man was the controller of such a big Sangha! Seeing him who could think that he was engaged in such a huge task! The fact is that, those who are very great are not aware of their own greatness. Those who observe from a distance say, 'What a great personality!' Before I finish I shall narrate another incident.

His Foresightedness

It was the birthday of Sharat Maharaj. All of us greatly desired to worship him with flowers. But he was sitting with such a grave countenance that none dared to go first and break his grave mood. We were all eagerly waiting at a distance for someone to start and

bear the brunt. At that moment a small girl from the house of a devotee arrived there. The monks tutored her, 'Go and make pranam to Maharaj after offering this flower at his feet.' The girl readily went forward and did as she was told. It was noticed that his graveness had lessened. Then all of us had the courage to go forward. He understood our trick. Surprisingly, behind that crust of graveness what great softness, affection and sympathy remained hidden! Only those who had reached near him by penetrating through that crust had realised this. This feeling of affection is found only in a mother to some extent, not in anybody else, but even there 'to some extent' only, I should say. One incident happened in my own life. Once I went to him to ask a question. As soon as I asked it, he remarked, 'Do you have to ask me everything? Shall we live forever?' A little later he explained, 'My son, try to get answers of all questions from your own inside. Remember, if you always depend on others, you won't receive answers from within yourself. And we shall not be here forever.' As if he prepared us by advising us not to look towards him all the time. It was natural for us to look upon him as our refuge. But he wanted us to be self-confident. I realised he urgently desired this because they (Direct Disciples) were soon to leave this world. That is why I say, as soon as the Guru who is outside establishes the link with the Guru inside, his responsibility is fulfilled. On this holy day in the course of this blessed reminiscence we earnestly pray, 'May their lives act as the beacon light always on our path. May we not stray from our goal. Keeping our eyes fixed on the goal and relying on their words of assurance may we move forward'. Their blessings are always showering on us.

Meditation according to Spanish Mystics

Swami Paratparananda

[In the galaxy of mystics Christianity has produced, the mystics of Spain are stars of the first magnitude. We meet the names of St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross in even casual references to Christian mysticism. Swami Paratparananda, a former head of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Buenos Aires (1973-88) and the editor of Vedanta Kesari Magazine from 1962-67, explains here, citing chapter and verse, the philosophy and methodology evolved by these scrupulous Treasurers of the Soul.]

The most outstanding figures among the Spanish mystics are St. Theresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross. They were contemporaries and lived in the sixteenth century. Both of them belonged to the Carmelite Order and were instrumental in the toning up of and reforming of the Order which was then in a declining state. St. Theresa also founded sixteen convents and fourteen monasteries, and in her position as directress of a large number of novitiates had to constantly write letters to guide them on their spiritual path. These letters, along with an autobiography which the saint was asked to write by her confessors, have been published in book-form.

St. John of the Cross was a well-learned person who has left behind some beautiful verses depicting the spiritual ascent of the soul and its union with God. Explaining the significance of these verses, he has written a long commentary which has served as a source of inspiration and guidance to the earnest seekers of the Christian community during the last two centuries.

When one goes through these works one rarely comes across the word "meditation", and when it occurs it is used in the sense of imagination, ideation or phantasy.¹ Yet, its usefulness and

efficacy, as a preparatory stage, are not deprecated or discarded. However, the Spanish mystics speak much of mental prayer and contemplation as means to union with God, which may be, for all practical purposes, interpreted as meditation as we understand the word today. For example, to St. Theresa prayer is not simply a mere utterance of some words but an intimate conversation with the Beloved.

In a letter to the nuns, she says: "Try to think and understand, my children, with whom you are talking or going to talk. Even in a thousand lives of ours we shall not be able to know in what way the Lord deserves to be treated, this Lord in whose presence even the angels tremble. Everything is subject to Him; He can do anything and His mere wish is action. It is reasonable that we take delight in His grandeurs and be aware to whom we are espoused and what grand life will be ours."² Here she compares the Lord to a beloved husband and says that one who has taken up the spiritual path is already married to Him. Then she places before the nuns the duties of a truly devoted wife in the world and how their own life and thoughts should be: "In this world when a woman marries, she knows to whom, his status in life and what he is. Now, my children, we who are already married to Him before the formal ceremony and are to be taken to His abode, shall we not think of Him? Those who are married to men here do not discard these thoughts. Why then should we not try to know who this person is, who is his father, what is that land where he will take us, what are the riches that he promises to give, and so on? Also, in what way shall we be able to please him and in what way we shall transform our state to conform with that of his? In the world, a woman who desires to be devoted to her husband, is not required to know everything else than these things even if the husband be a very low person. Should we then give lesser

importance to our Lord than they do to men? Further, if the husband is of a jealous nature and wishes that the wife has no contact with anyone, it will be strange indeed that she should not think how best to satisfy him in this respect, for in him are all the things that one could desire! To know and understand these truths is mental prayer."³

As we know, it is extremely difficult to concentrate on any particular subject for a long time unless we have a keen interest in it. And interest or taste for a thing unfolds itself only when we find ourselves involved in, feel an intimate relationship with, or affinity to, the subject. In the spiritual world too this theory or rule applies, so in thinking of God or meditating on Him one has to establish a certain relationship with Him, if one is to make rapid progress. The mental prayer, as described above by St. Theresa, for the reason just mentioned, can be termed as a type of meditation. It helps the individual to dive deep into the mystery of the divine relationship and be aware of the benefit he receives in developing such an attitude of mind. The natural bent of the human mind is to seek a return for whatever one does; even a philanthropist is moved to act by some hidden motive, for example by a desire for name and fame. So unless a man gets convinced that the sacrifice he is going to do, by discarding the things of the world and giving up even the appetite for them, will bring him in the long run immense benefit, he will not take to spiritual life in the real sense of the term. Hence arises the necessity for deep reflection over the lasting gain that one gets from one's constant contact with God. The purpose of the mental prayer cited above is to maintain one's mind continually on God, which is also what meditation signifies. For this reason, it may not be an error to call such a kind of prayer as meditation.

There is another form of prayer practiced in almost all religions, viz. vocal prayer. The Christians have a prayer which begins with the words "Our Father who are in Heaven" and so on taught by Jesus himself. Advising the nuns as to how one should practice this prayer, St. Theresa says: "The Master taught us by setting an example that this prayer be repeated in solitude, although it was not necessary for him. From this it is to be understood that it is not possible to talk with God and the world at the same time, i.e., praying to God and simultaneously listening to what is being talked about or to think of things of the world, though sometimes and in some cases this latter cannot be avoided because of the infirmity of the body or illness. Others should try to be alone when they pray, so that they can be aware with whom they are and what response the Lord has to their prayers. Do you think that He is silent because we do not hear Him? Well does He respond to the heart when we ask from the bottom of our heart. And it is of much benefit that we should consider that it is to each one of us individually that the Lord teaches this prayer and that the teacher is never so far from the disciple as to necessitate the latter to call him aloud; rather he is always very near to the disciple. For this reason, my advice to you is that it is good for you that you repeat this prayer of the Lord in a proper manner and with diligence.

She continues: "You will say that this type of praying amounts to reflection or meditation, and that you are not able to do it or do not want to do it, but prefer to pray vocally, because you have little patience and are ill disposed to take any trouble, which latter are necessary in the beginning for the withdrawal of the mind. You are right if you stipulate that the above form of praying amounts to mental prayer, but I certainly do not know how you can separate the vocal prayer from the mental, if the former is to be practiced well, knowing or being conscious with whom we are talking."⁴

She adds that one should try to pray with caution and with the introspection cited above so as not to end in something superficial and unhelpful. "I have proved it", she continues, "and found that the best way is to try to have the thoughts directed towards Him to whom the words are addressed."⁵

Such a prayer well done, they say, dulls all the outgoing tendencies or faculties of the mind such as understanding, memory and will. That is to say, the intellect refrains from seeking to understand the external objects, the memory desists from bringing to the surface of the mind thoughts that would divert its attention from the main purpose or object in view, i.e., God, and the will abstains from wanting to do anything that contradicts or affects adversely the spiritual life of the individual.

"The self then understands that the Divine Master is teaching it without having recourse to words, suspending the functioning of the faculties of the mind. For if these latter were to be active, they would do more harm than good. Then they enjoy without understanding how; the soul is enwrapped in love but does not know how it loves; knows that it enjoys what it loves but does not understand how it enjoys. Well does it understand that it is not that kind of enjoyment that the common or ordinary intellect conceives; and the will merges in the soul without knowing how, but at the same time is able to perceive that this good is not something that could be achieved by all the efforts that one can make in this world. It is a gift of the Lord of the world and the heaven. This, my children, is perfect contemplation."⁶

To understand better what has preceded and what is to follow, it is necessary to know some of the principal concepts of the Spanish mystics. St. John of the Cross speaks of the spiritual night as the immediate means for the union of the soul with the Divine. The soul has, according to them, three potencies of faculties, viz.,

understanding, memory and will, whose supernatural objectives are the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity or love, respectively. These three virtues are the means by which the soul unites with God, each one creating a vacuum and darkness in its respective faculty: faith in understanding or intellect, hope in memory, and charity or love in the will. The understanding is to be perfected in the darkness of faith, memory in the vacuum of hope and the will buried in the lack of all sensual love, to go towards God. When these faculties are perfected in the above-said manner, one can clearly perceive what a great necessity there is that the soul, to travel safely in this spiritual path, should pass through this dark night, leaning on these three virtues, which empty it of all the things of the world. For the soul can unite with God in this life neither through reasoning, nor by enjoyment, nor through imagination, nor through any other sense organ, but only through faith, hope and love. Faith tells us what we cannot understand by the intellect or reasoning, and even if the intellect comes to grasp the certainty of the things manifested through faith, it is not able to understand clearly, rather finds itself groping in darkness.

Hope of uniting with God, without doubt, empties and darkens all memory of things of this world and the next, because hope is always of something one does not have and does not see. Charity empties the will of its resolutions to gain or obtain all external objects; it compels us to love God above all things, which cannot be done except through severing the love to these and directing it all to God. Thus, these three virtues put the soul in the darkness and emptiness of all things of the world. And this is the dark spiritual night referred to above as the immediate means for union with God—to be blind towards things of the world, to renounce them totally.

Now we have seen what vocal prayer, mental prayer and contemplation are according to the Spanish mystics, and how the first two go side by side, to be practiced simultaneously, to be effective. The third one, contemplation, is meant for a very few and is a gift from God.

How to practice vocal prayer is next dealt with. First of all, one should examine one's conscience and do other purificatory acts. "Then, my children", advises St. Theresa to her nuns, "seek company, because you are alone. What company is better than that of the Master, who taught the prayer that you are going to recite? Imagine that the Master is beside you and you will discover with what love and kindness He is teaching you. Be not without such a friend as long as you can. If you get habituated to bring Him near to you and He perceives that you do it with love and are trying to content Him, then He will never fail you; certainly He will help you in all your efforts, He will be with you everywhere."⁷

The practice recommended here helps to put the mind in a state of concentration. Even an aspirant who is not able to discriminate or reason about theological problems is asked to cultivate this habit. For, to fix the mind on one subject for a long time is a difficult task and cannot be accomplished without years of hard practice. Admonishes St. Theresa her novitiates: "I do not ask you that you develop profound and intricate reflections about the Lord; I do not ask you anything more than that you look at Him. What is it that impedes you to direct, even though it is for some moments if not more, your soul's eyes towards this Lord; well can you look at things very ugly, and can you not look at the most beautiful thing that can be imagined? Your Lord, my children, never takes His compassionate eyes off you, even though you might have acted a thousand times vilely against Him. Is it then too much to ask that

you take off your eyes from the external objects and direct them, sometimes at least, toward Him? Listen, He does not expect anything else from you than this much.”⁸

“Further, in the world they say that if a woman were to be considered as devoted to the husband, she should manifest sorrow in his sorrow, and happiness in his happiness, though in reality she may not feel so. Look, from what servileness you have been saved. But this sympathy the Lord truly shows towards us; He assumes the role of the servant and desires you to be the mistress, to serve you at your pleasure. If you are cheerful you will see Him in His glorious state of resurrection, majestic, handsome, victorious and cheerful, like one who, in a battle, has conquered a great kingdom which He desires to give you along with Himself. Is it then too much to expect of you that you look at Him, once in a way; Him who gives you so liberally?”⁹

These, says the saint, should be one's thoughts while praying.

What is the prayer that helps the soul to draw within itself? Jesus prayed: “Our Father that art in Heaven” and so on. Commenting on this St. Theresa asks: “Do you think that it is of little importance to know what is Heaven and where to seek your heavenly Father? I tell you that for dispersed minds it is most important to understand this, not only to believe in but try to know it through experience, because it is one of the things that influences the understanding and helps to withdraw the soul into itself. You know that God is everywhere, omnipresent. It is evident, they say, that wherever the king is there his court is; similarly, where God is, is Heaven. No doubt you can believe that where God is, there all grandeur is. St. Augustin says that he searched for God in many places and finally found Him within himself. Do you think it is of no consequence for one with a dispersed mind to know this truth and perceive that it is not necessary to go to Heaven to speak with

the Eternal Father, or to be sumptuously feasted by Him; that it is not even necessary to speak aloud? In however low a voice one may speak He will certainly hear us, for He is very near; one does not require wings to go in search of Him. What one has to do is to retire into solitude and see Him within oneself; treat such a good Guest as one's own and not as a foreigner, and with great humility speak to Him as one's own father, relate to Him one's difficulties, and seek solutions for these, knowing well that one is not fit to be a child of His."¹⁰

This prayer, accompanied by such thoughts as above, though practiced vocally, helps to control the mind within a short time and does much good. It is called gathering of thoughts because the soul withdraws all its faculties and enters into itself with the Beloved, God. "The Divine Master comes to it within a much shorter time than by any other method, and blesses it with silent prayer. There the mind absorbed in itself can think of Christ's Passion, imagine there His presence and not tire itself trying to seek Him on Mt. Calvary and so on. Those who could in this way shut themselves up in this small heaven of their soul, where dwells He who made it as also this earth, and are accustomed not to look at nor be where the senses would be distracted, should be sure that they are treading an excellent path and will not fail to drink the water of the fountain of life."¹¹ They are like those who go by boat, which with a little favourable wind reaches its destination in a few days.

Those who begin to practice thus have, so to say, already put to sea; who, though they have not left the land for ever, do what they can to free themselves from it by gathering their senses into the mind, at least during those moments. If the gathering of the senses is real and genuine, one feels it clearly because of the transformation that occurs in oneself: the self seems to rise beyond

this play of the world, to become aware of better times, and feels like a person who enters a fort to defend himself from the adversaries. Further, by such a withdrawal they shut their eyes to the things of the world, i.e., these latter have no power of attraction for such a man. On the other hand, his inner eyes open to the wonders of the self. Thus, whoever treads this path, if his prayer is constant, will overcome the lure of the worldly objects, defeat the baser instincts of the body and strengthen his mind. And though in the beginning one cannot feel this change, it being so slow as to be imperceptible, yet if one persists in one's effort, say the Spanish mystics, one would clearly feel how the mind gains control over the senses. They may go out again but would not be able to do any harm as before, because they go out as prisoners on parole or obedient subjects, who return immediately they are called back. With the repeated gathering of the senses by this method of prayer, God pleases to dispose that the soul be in perfect contemplation or total absorption.

Let us conclude with an idea that the Spanish mystic placed before the novitiates to help them withdraw their minds into themselves: "Suppose within you there is a palace with immense riches, edifices of gold, inlaid with precious stones, in short fit for such a Lord, and that you are responsible for its structure (indeed, there is no structure of such beauty as a pure soul, full of virtues, which shine like gems) and that in it dwells the great King, who has condescended to be your Father and is seated on the precious throne of your heart. This may appear to be childish but is necessary for us so that we may grasp firmly the fact that there is something in us more precious than all the precious things that we see in the world outside. Let us not presume that we are empty within. I consider it impossible that we could give ourselves up to the ephemeral things, if once we become conscious of the presence

of such a Guest within, because we shall then see how paltry these things of the world are.”

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(Reproduced from *Vedanta Kesari*, November and December 1979)

Nine Means of Devotion

Swami Swahananda

The *Bhagavata* (VII. 5. 18) speaks of nine aspects of bhakti in a well-known verse. They are:

1. Hearing the names of God or His Incarnation chanted or sung by others, or songs in praise of, or the narration of, His charms, pastimes and attributes.

2. Chanting or singing His names, narrating or singing His charms.

3. Remembering or thinking of His names and charms.

4. Showing respect to Him by visiting the sacred places associated with His pastimes, looking at His images or pictures depicting His pastimes, serving and keeping company with His devotees and showing respect to things connected with His memory.

5. Worship of Him in images by offering flowers, sandal paste, food, etc. 6. Bowing down before Him or His images at the place of worship.

7. Serving Him in the attitude of a devoted servant.

8. Comradeship—to think that one is His loving and intimate friend, and He too is such, and to behave towards Him accordingly, generally through His images.

9. Resignation to the Lord, devoting oneself entirely to His services. According to the devotional schools, these steps belong to *vaidhi* or scriptural devotion. Through their practice an intimate feeling for God generates, which leads to *Prema* bhakti.

The *Adhyatma Ramayana*, which is sometimes described as a *Bhagavata Ramayana*, speaks of nine other means of devotion. Whereas Sri Rama is the Incarnation in the *Ramayana*, Sri Krishna is so in the *Bhagavata*, about whose glory of which these books

speaking. Contemplation of God and these Incarnations are of the same value, is the considered opinion of the scriptures. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* is based on the non-dualistic philosophy and so considers *jnana* mixed with *bhakti* as the most profitable spiritual discipline. It gives high priority to devotion as a *sadhana*, which ultimately leads to knowledge and release. These nine steps to devotion have been given as the advice of Sri Rama to Tapasi Sabari, who said that she was quite unfit to have His *darshan* being only a low-born maid. Sri Rama then replied (III. 22-30): "Manhood or womanhood, caste or station in life does not give the fitness to worship Me; devotion alone is capable of doing so. Even with sacrifice, gifts, austerity or study of the Vedas and performing rituals, men are not able to see Me, if they are not devoted to Me. So I shall tell you in brief the means of that *bhakti*. Contact of holy men is said to be the first *sadhana*. The second is talk and discussion about Me. The third is repeated thinking about My qualities. Explaining the scriptures dealing with My words is the fourth *sadhana*. Unreservedly to worship the Teacher as Myself is the fifth. Pure nature, *yama*, *niyama*, etc. and steadfastness in My daily worship constitute the sixth *sadhana*. Repeating of My *mantra* with other accessories is the seventh. Reverencing good devotees, seeing Me in all beings, detachment in external things along with *sama*, etc. are the eighth. Discrimination about Truth is the ninth.

These are the nine means of *bhakti*. Whoever, man, woman or other creatures, are endowed with these means of devotion will have *bhakti* along with *Prema*. As soon as this loving devotion is generated, there is the realization of My Nature. Whoever realizes My Nature gets released in this life itself. Hence know *bhakti* to be the first means of *Mukti*. Those who are first endowed with the means of *bhakti* gradually perform the other means too. So they can have *bhakti* and then *Mukti*."

The scheme of bhakti prescribed in the above verses is in line with the well-known views of scriptures and saints. *Sadhu-sanga* or contact with holy men is very important to generate detachment and devotion. By their association alone, the amorphous spiritual ideas of an aspirant become crystallized.

When study, ritual and the like cannot satisfy us, it is the advanced *sadhakas* who can transmit a little of their conviction, zeal and steadfastness to us. About its importance, this *Ramayana* says in the words of Agastya: "Contact of holy men is the root of Release.... For by holy company a taste develops in hearing about Him; from it arises devotion to the Eternal God; from devotion clear knowledge, and from the latter Release arises. This is the path followed by the wise." (III, 3.36&39-40).

The second means is talking and discussing about God and His Incarnations. The exploits of Sri Rama in the *Ramayana* and of Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavata* are all very inspiring and ennobling. We get clear ideas about spiritual verities through them. When virtue declines and vice prevails, the Incarnations come down to the world to regenerate and reinstate the religious values. By constantly handling these ideas, we become convinced and one-pointed attention develops. About the importance of hearing and discussing about the exploits of the *Avatara*, Sri Krishna says: "He who thus knows, in true light, My divine birth and action, leaving the body, is not born again: he attains to Me, O Arjuna." (*Bhagavad Gita*, IV.9)

The third means is repeated thinking about the qualities of God and His Incarnations. The *Atman* is repeatedly to be heard, thought upon and contemplated, says the *Upanishad*. After a theoretical understanding of the real nature of God, man and things, it should be imprinted on our mind by deep reflection to remove the hoary hold of *Maya*. As you think, so you become, is the principle. By

repeated thinking of the *sattvic* qualities, we moreover imbibe those qualities which are essential for spiritual progress. Patanjali, the great scientific writer of yoga, says that the Highest can be realized, *samadhi* can be obtained through contemplation of God.

The fourth sadhana is explaining the scriptures dealing with the words of God and His Incarnations. Studying the scriptures oneself and explaining them to others have been the recognized methods even from the Upanishadic age. In trying to explain, things become clearer.

The fifth means is the worship of the *Guru* as God Himself. This idea has been accepted by all the systems, and more strongly by the devotees. The *Vedas* declare that knowledge must be received from a *Guru*. No amount of study is of any avail. And to make the *Guru's* words most fruitful, there must be great faith in his words of wisdom. About the importance of the *Guru*, Swami Vivekananda says: "This insufficiency of books to quicken spiritual growth is the reason why, although almost every one of us can speak most wonderfully on spiritual matters when it comes to action and the living of a truly spiritual life, we find ourselves so awfully deficient. To quicken the spirit, the impulse must come from another soul. The person from whose soul such impulse comes is called the *Guru*, the teacher; and the person to whose soul the impulse is conveyed is called the *Sishya*, the student."

The sixth *sadhana* consists of a pure life, daily worship and practice of the eightfold *yoga*. This *yoga* has been forcefully presented by Patanjali, which has been incorporated by almost all the systems in their discipline. *Yama* and *niyama* are external and internal cleanliness, *asana* is steady posture necessary for long meditation forgetting the body, and *pranayama* is control of vital breath for physical and psychical purification and strengthening. The next three steps constitute concentration. *Pratyahara* is trying

to gather the mind, *dharana* is focusing on a point or the chosen Deity, and *dhyana* is to remain in the thought without break. *Samadhi* is the mastery of the mind and its complete mergence. To bring the mind under control, elaborate formal worship has been prescribed. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* in a different chapter gives a detailed description of it and this method is even now prevalent.

The seventh means consists of repeating the *mantra* bearing the name of the chosen Deity. This has acquired the greatest importance in most of the disciplines. The Divine formula received from a *Guru* has special potency and by repetition of it all spiritual benefits are derived. Many are the sayings regarding its supreme efficacy. A well-known verse asserts that it is by *japa* alone without doubt that spiritual success is achieved.

The eighth *sadhana* according to this book consists of a few things. Showing respect to good devotees of God has been accepted as part of the spiritual discipline, for by this and by contacting them we imbibe the divine qualities they possess. Seeing God in all beings is an advanced stage of *sadhana*. The *Gita* points out that the same-sighted yogi sees God in everything. When all creation is His or He manifests Himself as all beings, it is quite in the fitness of things that this recognition itself should be a part of *sadhana*. Detachment of external things or *vairagya* is an equally important discipline. This is the other side of seeing God in everything. *Vairagya* and practice are the methods by which the Highest is achieved, says the *Gita*. *Sama*, *dama*, etc. also are included in this *sadhana*. The *Advaita* system speaks of six treasures of *sadhana*, viz. *sama*, *dama*, *uparati*, *titiksha*, *sraddha* and *samadhana*: controlling the internal and external organs, withdrawing from the senses, bearing all sufferings without any reaction, faith in the words of the *Guru* and the *Vedanta*, and concentration of the mind on the Goal.

The ninth means of devotion consists of discrimination about Truth. It is an important discipline according to *Vedanta*. In fact, according to some this is the only *sadhana* that is necessary.

These are the nine-fold means of bhakti, says the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. By practicing these, bhakti is perfected and from samadhana *Vaidhi Bhakti*, the aspirant passes to *Prema Bhakti*, full of love and void of motive. As a result, *Brahma-jnana* dawns, showing that *Bhakti* is the root of *Mukti*. Thus, in the above-quoted verses, the *Adhyatma Ramayana* harmonizes the claims of the followers of knowledge and devotion, of discrimination about the real nature of things and worship of the Deity, as also of the Impersonal and the Personal. Pure knowledge and pure devotion are the same, said Sri Ramakrishna, and by the realization of the one the other also is realized. The modern prophet of harmony thus substantiates the position of the author of the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. By satisfying the intellectual and emotional elements in our nature, it is sure, this nine-fold discipline will be able to give the maximum spiritual benefit.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, June 1961)

The teachers of the science of Yoga, ... declare that religion is not only based upon the experience of ancient times, but that no man can be religious until he has the same perceptions himself. Yoga is the science which teaches us how to get these perceptions. It is not much use to talk about religion until one has felt it. Why is there so much disturbance, so much fighting and quarrelling in the name of God? There has been more bloodshed in the name of God than for any other cause, because people never went to the fountain-head; they were content only to give a mental assent to the customs of their forefathers, and wanted others to do the same. What right has a man to say he has a soul if he does not feel it, or that there is a God if he does not see Him? If there is a God we must see Him, if there is a soul we must perceive it; otherwise it is better not to believe.

- Swami Vivekananda

Vedanta

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

Phone: (01628) 526464

www.vedantauk.com

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

The science of Raja-Yoga, in the first place, proposes to give us ... a means of observing the internal states [of the mind]. The instrument is the mind itself. The power of attention, when properly guided, and directed towards the internal world, will analyse the mind, and illumine facts for us. The powers of the mind are like rays of light dissipated; when they are concentrated, they illumine. This is our only means of knowledge. Everyone is using it, both in the external and the internal world; but, for the psychologist, the same minute observation has to be directed to the internal world, which the scientific man directs to the external; and this requires a great deal of practice. From our childhood upwards we have been taught only to pay attention to things external, but never to things internal; hence most of us have nearly lost the faculty of observing the internal mechanism. To turn the mind as it were, inside, stop it from going outside, and then to concentrate all its powers, and throw them upon the mind itself, in order that it may know its own nature, analyse itself, is very hard work. Yet that is the only way to anything which will be a scientific approach to the subject.

Swami Vivekananda

