

# Vedanta

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418 MARCH - APRIL 2021

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**Pranayama as Sadhana (Spiritual Practice)**  
*Swami Shivananda*

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**The Mystery of Human Vibrations - 1**  
*Swami Ashokananda*

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Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 15



**A SIDDHA STOPS THE STORM - 15**

Once, a great Siddha was sitting on the sea-shore when there came a great storm. The Siddha, being greatly distressed by it, exclaimed, "Let the storm cease!" and his words were fulfilled. Just then a ship was going at a distance with all sails set, and as the wind suddenly died away, it capsized, drowning all who were on board the ship.

Now the sin of causing the death of so many persons accrued to the Siddha, and for this reason he lost all his occult powers and had to suffer in purgatory.

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## Mantra Japa or Repetition of the Holy Name - 4

Thus, the *Shabda* manifesting as speech is said to be eternal. Electromagnetic waves are eternal and unchanging in their nature, but as their manifestation in radios, TVs and mobiles differs every moment in various ways, none of the manifestation repeats again! The ideas of a person desiring to speak get converted into letters by the *Pranic* effort of the person and become audible to the ears of others through the medium of sound as *Dhvani*. *Dhvani* (sound/voice) is thus the manifesting and different from the lettered *Shabda* that had risen in the heart prior to its manifestation as speech.

Before we proceed further, we have to try to understand a little of the Indian psychology of perception. Every moment a *Jiva* is subjected to innumerable influences that pour upon him from all quarters of the universe at different levels—gross, subtle, and causal. He reacts to a few that reach his consciousness and attracts his attention and are thus selected by his *Manas* or reactive mind. Mind receives the sense impressions and conveys it to *Buddhi*. While presenting it to the *Buddhi*, it (the mind) gets moulded into the shape of the object perceived. This is called mental modification (*Manasika vritti*). The object of Yoga is to suppress this *Vritti*. Thus, a mental *Vritti* is a representation of an external object and therefore as much an object as the outer one. The outer one is a gross object (*sthula*), and its mental impression is called the subtle (*sukshma*) object. But apart from these two objects, there is the mind that perceives it. So, mind has two aspects: one as the perceiver and the second as the formed *Vritti* that represents a perceived object that is outside. The physical object perceived and the mental impression exactly correspond. Thus, the mind is both

cognizer (*Grahaka*) and cognized (*Grahya*), revealer (*Prakashaka*) and revealed (*Prakashya*), and also denoter (*Vachaka*) and denoted (*Vachya*, expressing in words). The basic principle is that when the mind perceives an object, it is transformed into the shape of that object. So, when the mind contemplates on the Divinity (*Ishta Devata*) with a worshipful attitude through continued devotion at length, then it gets transformed into the exact likeness of that *Ishta Devata*. By allowing the mind to be occupied by the *Ishta Devata* for long, it acquires the qualities of that *Devata* and becomes as pure as the *Devata*.

This is the fundamental principle in all *Upasanas* or religious practices. The object perceived or conceived mentally (i.e., imagined) is called the *Artha* or *Indriyārtha*. It comes from the root 'Ri' (to get, to know, to enjoy/experience). *Artha* is that which is available to the mind, known to the mind, and therefore an object of experience or enjoyment. Mind takes the shape of the object and is its experiencer too: i.e., it is also the cognizer (*Grahaka*) and cognized (*Grahya*). That aspect of mind as the cognizer is called *Shabda* or *Nama* (name) and that aspect of mind as the cognized is called *Artha* or *Rupa* (form). The inner impression of an external object is also *Artha* or *Rupa* and the spoken speech of the inner experience is also outer *Shabda* or spoken *Nama* (name). Thus, the objects perceived, sensed, or conceived are *Rupa* and their simultaneous understanding that flashes in mind, the cognizer aspect of mind, is *Nama*. The *Shabda* and *Artha* aspects of *Mantra* are thus the subject and object aspect of *Mantra* and correspond to Vedantic *Nama* and *Rupa*. The concepts and concepts objectified are also *Nama* and *Rupa*. According to Vedanta, the whole creation is *Nama* and *Rupa*. They are identical like the fire and its power, milk and its properties; thus *Nama-Namni-Abheda*, name and the named, are identical.

Mind is the power (*Shakti*), whose function is to distinguish and identify. During perception of an external sense object or when an entity or an incident appears in the mind, we find three factors appear in mind: *Shabda* (revealer mind, mind as *Prakashaka*); *Artha* (mental *Vritti*, the impression in mind, i.e., the revealed mental objects, *Prakashya*); and *Pratyaya* (the corresponding feelings that arise in our heart; we may call it as *Bhava* or as *Bhavana*). *Pratyaya* or *Bhavana* should be deep so that *Shabda* (or *Nama*) and *Artha* (or *Rupa*) continue to remain in mind. Unbroken continuity weakens and destroys all *Vasanas*, the old acquired worldly tendencies.

Swami Saradananda says, "The power of the Mantra is tremendous. As a living seed holds the potential of the tree and is able to yield fruits and flowers in season, so the mantra has the power to bring spiritual progress and ultimately liberation from the world of suffering and death. The scriptures say that when the spiritual power is awakened, the mantra is seen in golden letters and sometimes is heard as clearly as a human voice. All these things are matters of experience. They cannot be known through intellectual understanding or mere discussion. One has to practice spiritual discipline for many years. In time, everything will be revealed from within oneself. The aspirant realizes God in and through the mantra which appears as the visible form of the Infinite Being, which is formless and nameless." He also wrote to one of his disciples, "The name of the Lord you receive at the time of initiation is sacred to you...Constant repetition of the mantra is keeping good company. It must be natural, like breathing. The repetition of the divine name will bring into your mind holy associations, the blessed qualities of God, and take away all the blemishes of the heart. The disciple must practice hard, with patience and determination, until he attains the direct vision of God within the sanctuary of his heart."

(*Glimpses of a Great Soul*, pg. 126 -127)

## Pranayama as Sadhana (Spiritual Practice)

Swami Shivananda

**B**y sadhana is meant the means to realize God or gain Self-knowledge. Sadhana is necessary for the followers of the path of devotion (*bhakti*) as well as for those of the path of knowledge (*jnana*). None can attain the goal without practising sadhana. The followers of the path of devotion cling to duality and believe that God dwells in different forms in *Goloka*, *Shivaloka*, *Vaikuntha* and other divine realms; their end and aim is to attain (after death) to those realms by the grace of God. They have to practise perform *puja* (worship), *japa* (repetition of the Lord's name), meditation, reverent study of the sacred Scriptures, and the like. When they advance a little in their path, they become fond of solitude and remain absorbed in the contemplation of their Chosen Deity, controlling their senses. They do not seek to be completely absorbed in God; they desire rather to retain the relation of the Lord and servant. But they delight in meditating on Him, repeating His name, singing His glories, talking with other devotees about Him, and serving all beings, seeing God in them. Thus, it is quite evident that their conception in the beginning of their sadhana, that God dwells in particular forms and aspects in particular worlds separate from this earth, is gradually chastened, and in the end they realize that this human heart is His abode and that it is the real Heaven. When the mind becomes purified by the process of sadhana, the blessed sadhaka (religious aspirant) realizes God in his own heart, and then all discussions of the unripe intellect about dualism, non-dualism and the like are resolved and he gains peace.

The follower of the path of knowledge (*jnana*) says, "Brahman alone is real and the world is a delusion" or "Not this, not this" (is

the nature of Brahman); his goal is to realize "I am Brahman." He practises the virtues of faith in the words of the guru and the Vedanta, desirelessness for the enjoyment here or hereafter of the results of work, inner control, control of the senses, forbearance and other disciplines. He does not want to go to the abodes of God, the heavens mentioned above, and enjoy pleasures. In his opinion, even these are ephemeral and within the realm of the mind. The jnani wants to go even beyond the mind, to attain the state "beyond the reach of words and the mind". He does not wish "to return to this mortal world, when the merits of virtues are exhausted". He knows that "he who sees the many here goes from death to death", that is, he who does not realize while living in this body that the individual soul and Brahman are One, undergoes births and deaths. The jnani who has become a jivanmukta, free even whilst living, sees the Atman in all beings and delights in serving them. Great, very great good is done to the world by him.

We thus see that whatever path a man takes to attain God-realization, he has necessarily to resort to sadhana. Various means are mentioned in the Sastras (sacred Scriptures) also. Pranayama is one of those means. We shall consider it as a means to realize God or attain Self-knowledge. Many at the present time practise pranayama for the sake of health and such other purposes. We hear also of instructors who teach it for these purposes. In my opinion, this sort of dry pranayama is very injurious and many, "like the blind led by the blind", are deceived, and some even meet with premature death.

To grasp the meaning of the word pranayama is very easy, so very easy that if it is explained, all will realize that they have been and are doing pranayama unconsciously every day, and that it is very easy to practise it. When you are reading a story full of thrilling incidents or intently studying the history of a strange

country or solving a difficult mathematical problem, you become so absorbed that you do not at all like to leave it unfinished. At such times, if you carefully watch your breath, you will find that its ordinary motion has decreased considerably, that you are drawing the breath in and out very, very slowly; it would seem as if the breath, ingoing and outgoing, is to a great extent stopped in the heart. When you read a sorrowful incident, the heart seems to be heavy-laden with sorrow, while it expands as it were when you read about a joyful incident. In both these conditions, the breath, ingoing and outgoing, is almost stopped. The heart sometimes becomes light to some extent by shedding tears while reading about a very sorrowful incident. Again, if you are reading of a joyful incident, you can lighten the joy by smiles as well as tears of joy. But the special thing to be noted is that the ingoing and outgoing breath, which is the effect of prana, is to a great extent stopped in either case. From these and similar facts, we can well understand that if the mind becomes controlled and concentrated on a particular subject, the ingoing and outgoing breath naturally begins to stop functioning, or in other words, a natural spontaneous pranayama results. Another remarkable fact is that if you try to watch at such times of absorption in a subject the motion of the breath, whether it moves slowly or rapidly, you will find that the mind will turn its direction to the breath and gradually regain its ordinary state. But you will be able also to see very well that the motion of the breath had almost stopped and that it is now resuming its normal state. If we consider this fact along with the conclusion mentioned above, we find that if the mind is wholly absorbed in any one subject, the motion of the breath, prana, naturally begins to stop. Hence, the mental state is the essential, and the control of the breath is but secondary.

We shall next see what pranayama is in the path of sadhana (spiritual disciplines). Is it also natural? Or should we do something artificial to practise it? This leads to the question whether sadhana itself is a natural process. The answer is that sadhana is natural and all the methods of sadhana prescribed in the Sastras are also natural. It is like hunger and thirst, which are natural cravings of the body. The means man resorts to, to alleviate them, though varied, are also natural. Everyone feels hungry at some time or other of the day. A man whose stomach is full cannot feel hungry simply because he sees another taking food. If he feels hungry, it means that he has not had a meal and that it is time for him also to take food: his duty is to seek for food as best he can and take it. If a person who is not hungry wishes to eat seeing another taking his meal, he should try to create hunger; by resorting to such methods, he will gradually fall ill. Taking purgatives, etc. for this purpose leads generally to such sad results in the end. Again, if a person never feels hungry, the inference is that he has some disease of which he should get cured by proper medicine. As a matter of fact, we find such a person being cured in this way.

As on the physical plane, so is it also on the spiritual. If a person, having obtained this human body, remains satisfied by catering to his sensual cravings and physical needs alone, that is to say, tries merely to gratify the senses by physical enjoyments, the natural conclusion is that, though he has got a human body, the animal tendencies still prevail in him. Those who have no inclination to worship God, perform spiritual practices, associate with the holy, study the Scriptures, and who also do not feel the higher emotions such as kindness and patriotism, do not deserve to be regarded as human beings yet. Hence, they find it difficult

to regulate themselves by the laws of human society and in fact do not follow them.

Eating, drinking, walking, studying, serving the parents, teachers and elders, entertaining friends, and relations, and so forth, are the natural necessities of human beings, and everyone fulfils them in some way or other. So also, the performance of sadhana is the natural spiritual necessity of a human being; and everyone worthy of that name does it in one manner or another. Some practise sadhana prompted by a natural spiritual urge. Others are inspired by their example and begin to practise sadhana sincerely, as they feel that it is time for them also to do so. Some others try out of season to imitate others who are doing sadhana, though they have no natural inclination and, as in the case of a person who tries to create hunger by artificial means, adopt such methods in the spiritual realm also as association with the holy, reading of Scriptures, pranayama, etc. But, as they have no natural prompting, they meet with false, hypocritical gurus.

On account of their ignorance of the true import of the Scriptures, they practice false pranayama and various other means, ruin their bodies by all sorts of diseases and are finally overcome by the all-destroying disgust for religion altogether. Their lives become a waste. There is no more terrible disease in the spiritual realm than disgust for religion. If a person is caught by this disease after a great deal of trials in the line, it is almost incurable. There is also a certain class of persons who are suffering from such chronic indigestion that they do not feel the least inclination to perform sadhana, even though they see many doing it. If a great God-man who, having himself crossed this terrible ocean of transmigration, ferries others across out of pure love and compassion, takes pity on such and makes them take the proper

medicine to cure their disease, then alone will they be saved. Then they will recover their natural spiritual yearning.

The important parts of sadhana are *japa* (repetition of the Divine Name taught by the guru) and meditation. By serving the guru, association with the holy, study of the Scriptures and similar measures, faith, and devotion in *japa* and meditation will increase, leading to control of the mind. Whether the path is that of knowledge or devotion, the spiritual aspirants have to practise *japa* and meditation. The jnani repeats the *Pranava* (Om), while the devotee does *japa* using any of the Divine Names, Siva, Tara, Hari, etc. Every sadhaka constantly remembers and contemplates on God and the principal aid to such remembrance and contemplation is *japa*, the reverent repetition of the Divine Name with love and devotion.

What, then, is the place of pranayama in sadhana? Can one realize God or attain Self-knowledge by pranayama? No, never. Sri Ramakrishna says, "If a person has such a yearning towards God as a mother has for her baby, a devoted wife for her husband, and a miser for his wealth, he will soon realize his goal." When the heart is tilled with such a yearning, the breath naturally stops. In such a state, whatever the sadhaka does, *japa*, meditation, singing the hymns of God, study of the sacred Scriptures and other sadhanas, he performs with perfect concentration, self-control, deep love and devotion. The natural restraint of the breath in this state is the real pranayama in sadhana. Otherwise, the mere stopping of the breath and letting it out slowly without any love, devotion or yearning for the Lord, does not conduce to the attainment of bhakti or jnana. In the Yoga system, Yoga is defined as the restraint of the waves of the mind-stuff, and it is also stated therein that, at that time of restraint, the seer, the soul, is established in its own nature, that is, in the nature of the Supreme

Self. To attain this state of Yoga, various methods have been mentioned. These methods are prescribed only for those who are devoted to the inquiry after their real nature. Those who have attained purity of mind by serving the guru, brahmacharya (chastity), hearing the import of the Scriptures from the guru and pondering over it, get an indirect knowledge of their real nature. Then they gradually become immersed in meditation, and pranayama comes naturally to them. To the impure unchastened mind, on the other hand, there will always persist doubts about the nature of the Self and Self-knowledge. When one gets the direct knowledge of one's real nature, one attains samadhi (Super-consciousness); that is the culmination of pranayama. In that state, there will not be the sense of difference between meditation, the object of meditation, and the person who meditates.

The sum and substance is that pranayama results naturally from japa (reverent repetition of the Lord's Name), and constant remembrance and contemplation of the Lord with the deep yearning of the heart. The spiritual benefit of such pranayama is incalculable. In practical life, also, such a state is accompanied by growth of mental strength, purity of character, expansion of the heart, compassion for all beings, steadfast devotion to the ideal, and other virtues. There is no doubt that the devotee becomes endowed by God's Grace with some measure of His divine qualities. The easy means to reach that goal are faith, devotion and association with the holy. The last is of primary importance and it can come about only by the special grace of God. The Upanishad says, "For God-realization one must take refuge with all humility and devotion in a guru, who is established in Brahman, and knows the essence of the Scriptures."

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.

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# The Mystery of Human Vibrations - 1

Swami Ashokananda

## I

The word "vibration" is almost a commonplace with people who have given up orthodox religious beliefs and are attracted to Oriental teachings. Not many of them, however, try to determine the true significance of the word. Often one hears that a person or a place has "wonderful vibrations". Those who use such expressions probably have some meaning in mind, but it is very doubtful whether it is always clearly formulated. In physics, "vibration" refers to rhythmic movement, which seems to be the basic form of all motion, in animate as well as inanimate nature. This rhythmic movement or vibration can be likened to that of the pendulum of a clock. All movements or activities, from the most extensive to the most minute, from those of the longest duration to those of the shortest, are basically rhythmic and are therefore nothing but vibrations. The infinite varieties of creation, of the visible and invisible universe, are due entirely to the varieties of vibration.

When we consider vibration in its cosmic aspect, we are at once reminded of the cyclic theory of the creation and dissolution of the universe. Creation and dissolution have been compared by the Indian sages to the exhalation and inhalation of a man. According to the cyclic theory, the universe comes into existence from the unmanifest and eventually goes back to the unmanifest. This process of manifestation and disappearance, of creation and dissolution, has always been going on and will continue to do so, cycle after cycle, through the infinite expanse of time. Sages call the periods of creation and dissolution the "days and nights of Brahma the Creator". It is during a "day" of Brahma that the universe is projected from His mind and is made manifest in

manifold concrete forms. But a time comes, as I have said, when the universe returns to the unmanifest state. Then, during a "night" of Brahma, there is no creative activity, no concrete manifold: the Divine Energy is as it were at rest. This, however, is not a true state of rest, for even in dissolution the universe remains in a subtle form, which means that there is still some subtle vibration. (The true rest is the transcendental Brahman or absolute Divinity, utterly beyond the state in which the world exists even in subtle form, and therefore devoid of any vibration whatsoever.)

The cosmic vibration is composed of limited vibrations projected from conscious entities. Since there is an infinite number of living beings in the universe, there is also an infinite number of individual vibrations. Cosmic vibration is an organic whole: its components, the individual vibrations, are organically related both to the whole and to one another. To understand this, one need only consider the example of a living body. The body is made up of many organs, every one of which has its own life and functions; and each of the organs is made up of innumerable cells, each in turn having its own life and functions. Now, the very existence and behaviour of the organs and cells, which are interdependent, depends upon the life and functions of the body as a whole; and the body as a whole is supported by the life and functions of the organs and cells. It is exactly the same in the case of cosmic vibration, which, as I mentioned, is composed of innumerable vibrations, some greater, some lesser. The lesser vibrations are in a sense autonomous, yet their very existence is made possible by the existence of the vibrations that are greater than they, and all—great and small—are dependent on the universal cosmic vibration.

There is a further analogy between cosmic vibration and a living body. The total life of the body cannot be said to be simply the sum of all its parts: that is, the sum of the subsidiary lives and functions

which constitute it. The total life of the body is both the sum of its parts and much besides; it is a distinct life that forever eludes whoever tries to find it by analysis, by merely studying the parts, for it is not to be found in the parts, individually or collectively. Likewise, cosmic vibration is both the sum of all its parts—the infinite number of limited vibrations constituting it—and a whole that vastly exceeds that sum. Of all vibrations the first and greatest is of course that of the Divine Energy when it projects the universe. We may picture this projection as a series of vibratory waves spreading in ever-widening circles until the creative impulse gives way to the dissolutorial impulse. We do not really know the extent of the creation: we are not sure how far manifestation is projected outward. We see the lowest form of manifestation as dead matter, but, conceivably, it may be even grosser than matter.

Our ideas of the lowest manifestation are of course derived from experience, which obviously does not subsume all details or phases of creation. In the vast series of outward-circling vibratory waves that we are picturing, the waves closest to the centre, God, represent the highest vibrations, the purest and most subtle state; the waves most distant from the centre represent the lowest vibrations, the grossest and densest state; and the waves midway between the lowest and highest vibrations represent the intermediate state, which is neither very gross nor very fine.

I should caution you here that in trying to comprehend these three ranges or divisions of cosmic vibration you should not visualize them as spread out in space, though I realize that my description of them may probably incline you to do so. The truth is that the vibrations are not like our concrete objects, each occupying its own space and excluding the others. Even the lowest vibrations which represent matter cannot be considered really concrete, as we are well aware from the revelations of science

concerning matter. The vibrations are modes of the Divine Consciousness; therefore, the various types of vibration, while distinct from one another, interpenetrate one another and exist simultaneously everywhere, though in varying proportions. For the sake of clarity in discussion and understanding, Indian philosophers have used three terms—sattva, rajas and tamas, each a "guna"—to designate the three types of vibrations I have mentioned. "Guna" means "strand" or "quality". As strands compose a rope, so the three gunas are said to compose the Divine Energy, out of which the infinite phenomena of the universe are formed. Also, gunas are considered to indicate the qualities of every phenomenon. Everything in creation is composed of the three gunas in varying proportions, with one or another always predominant.

The vibrations nearest the point of rest (the centre of the outgoing creative impulse) are represented by sattva, the quality of calmness and illumination. Anything in which sattva is ascendant is said to be sattvika. The intermediate position is represented by rajas, the quality of discontent and activity. Whenever rajas predominates in anything, it is said to be rajasika. The position most distant from the point of rest is represented by tamas, which is characterized by darkness, stagnation and inertia. The word tamasika is applied to whatever is dominated by tamas. Although the names sattva, rajas and tamas have been given to the three ranges of vibration, no one of the ranges is composed of any particular guna exclusively: each contains some amount of the other gunas. Thus, the vibrations nearest God, though essentially sattvika, have also slight qualities of rajas and tamas.

The different gradations of vibration create different kinds of bodies and minds, which make up the material and mental universe. Though the circling waves or vibrations of the creative

impulse may be of high or low frequency, near the centre or distant from it, all of them are as it were outside the transcendental God, and therefore none is perfect. Yet inhering in these vibrations and centred in the bodies and minds created by them are parts of God—the souls—which, though necessarily perfect, being parts of Divinity, seemingly assume the character of the particular vibrations which compose their bodies and minds. It is in this way that, apparently caught in the vibratory movement of creation—sattvika, rajasika and tamasika—consciousness assumes various kinds and degrees of expression, such as spiritual and ethical consciousness, ordinary intellectual consciousness, animal consciousness, consciousness more or less dormant in vegetable life, and consciousness seemingly fast asleep in matter. It is a picture of increasing obscuration of consciousness, which as a process is called involution (degeneration), resulting from the continuous outward movement of the Divine creative impulse.

If we consider vibration with respect to the individual soul, the first vibratory movement was the soul's apparent loss of the transcendental state. It is as if the soul had been swung away from its condition of rest towards the outermost limit of *tamas*, so that it became less and less what it originally was: its character was almost reversed. In other words, the soul was as it were reduced to matter. But by an opposite swing the soul is now seemingly trying to regain its original transcendental position: through the gradual process of evolution, it is seeking to recover its lost Divinity. We do not know how long the period of degeneration lasted, nor do we know all the states through which the soul passed to reach the lowest position. Of how the soul is ascending in its return movement, we do know a little. But the number of lives that it will take to complete this upward journey, the number of cycles of creation and dissolution, no one can predict. These two vibratory

movements that are basic to our relative existence, the swing away from the transcendental position or point of rest and the swing back to it, are repeated in our lives in countless ways, though in different forms and measures, in such phenomena as exhalation and inhalation, waking and sleeping, growth and decay, life and death.

It is because of the infinite gradations in the processes of involution and evolution that the infinite varieties of individual beings—Godlike souls, illumined souls, gods, angels, men, demons, animals, birds, plants etc. representing the different states of vibration as well as the various types of consciousness—have come into existence. And these beings, as I have indicated, are independent neither of one another nor of God and His vibration. So long as we think we are related to the dynamic aspect of the Divine, so long as we feel that our existence is a part of creation, we are bound to the infinite vibrations of creation and must share in their character and fortune. If an individual has a predominance of sattva quality, that is, sattvika vibration, it implies that his being, whatever his apparent position in the concrete world may be, is related to and sustained by the sattvika aspect of the cosmic vibration, and that it is also related to and sustained by the sattvika aspects of all beings. Thus, a man living on earth may have such a predominance of sattva in his nature that in reality he lives in the highest vibrations of God and closer to Him than even a celestial being who lives in an exalted heaven but happens to be predominantly rajasika. Hindus maintain that in a sense the earth is the best of all worlds, for here there is such elasticity in the relative proportions of the three gunas that no one of them can dominate the others permanently. Thus, though in our world tamas finds full scope for expression, so also does rajas, and sattva likewise can thrive in full measure, especially in individual lives. However, it is recognized that this earthly existence is pre-

eminently rajasika, i.e., rajas has here the easiest and most natural expression: the gunas do not have such scope for activity and expression in the other worlds which, along with our world, constitute the creation, the body of God.

According to the predominant guna in their nature, individuals live in one or another of the various worlds. Some belong naturally to the earth, others to higher worlds, and others again to lower. Thus, we are apparently bound to different forms of existence, determined by our essential gunas. Can we not sever this bondage? Not, as we noted before, if we remain attached to the creation. But if we live even as God lives, we can: for God is not bound by His creation. Though He manifests *tamas*, He does not become stagnant and dark. His consciousness is not restricted. Though He manifests *rajas*, He remains untouched by it. Nor does *sattva* affect Him. In God's case all three vibratory principles are mere expressions of being; they are not binding. Though the relation of the gunas to God is different from their relation to us, the fact remains that by nature we are the same as God. Nothing exists but pure spirit—the one Self, Atman or Brahman—and thus basically the soul and God are one. At present we are seemingly too mixed-up with the gunas to be aware of our true nature, but this does not change the truth that in essence we are the Self. It is only because we have, so to speak, withdrawn from the foundation of our being and are directing our consciousness to the surface of existence, that the gunas have a different effect on us from that which they have on God. If we can but realize our identity with God and live in the consciousness of that identity, the gunas will have as little effect on us as on Him. We shall then be *gunatita*, transcendent of all the gunas.

What I am telling you has been proved repeatedly in the lives of all the Buddhas and Christs who ever lived. Even Buddha is

active, but he is not affected by it. Even a Christ must sleep. The very greatest feel hungry, thirsty, fatigued. But though such feelings are expressions of *tamas*, they do not affect a Buddha or a Christ as they affect us. A truly enlightened person does not sleep as we do; he instinctively enters into deep meditation and feels upon waking that he has descended from a higher state. It is only the surface of his being that sleeps. The *gunas* do not influence the illumined ones.

## II

The Lord says in the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "I have created the four castes in accordance with the distinctions of *guna* and *karma*." Whether we accept this statement literally or not, there is no denying that all men can be classified into types closely analogous to the three *gunas*, and that it is not too arbitrary a classification. Every person has a predominance of one or another of the *gunas*: he is essentially *sattvika*, *rajasika* or *tamasika*. If he is *sattvika* he is very fortunate, having gone beyond the terrible disadvantages of *rajas* and *tamas*—though perhaps the word "fortunate" is not quite apposite, since it is through his own effort that he has reached the *sattvika* state. *Rajasika* and *tamasika* persons are certainly not fortunate, their lives being full of struggle and suffering. I do not mean that a *rajasika* or *tamasika* man is permanently fixed in his condition. Every soul not only has the power to realize an increasingly higher condition but eventually does so.

The general course of improvement is this: the *tamasika* person tries to build up *rajasika* interests, feelings and tendencies; the *rajasika* person tries to develop *sattvika* interests, feelings and tendencies; and the *sattvika* person tries to reach the transcendental, beyond the sphere of the *gunas*—in other words, he tries to pass beyond all vibratory movements. *Tamas* is like a gramophone which has run down and makes no music, no

harmony, but just a discordant wail. So slow is the vibration on the tamasika plane that it creates only dense darkness. In some respects, the state of tamas may be called similar to that of the moon which has lost its heat and cooled off. Yes, that suggests the state of tamas. When the number of tamasika people in a community is large, that community may become tamasika, and its life, having little initiative or activity, is dull, sluggish and backward. Innumerable people are predominantly tamasika from the time of their very birth, but apart from these, many become so in the course of their lives. We may say that all men, unless they are spiritually developed, tend to a state of tamas as they grow old. Gradually they are less active, both mentally and physically. Their bodily heat is reduced; they become as it were frozen. Yet it is not alone by growing old that we tend to become tamasika. Contact with predominantly tamasika things and people may also cause us to sink into tamas. Like someone with a contagious disease, the tamasika person infects others. There is no gauging the evil effects of this dark energy on other minds and lives. The wise therefore say that a tamasika person should be avoided by those who are seeking to attain a higher condition.

Whether old age, evil contacts, or a man's own natural propensities cause him to succumb to the tamasika state, once he sinks into tamas, it becomes the arbiter of his life. He cannot think, feel or act properly; all that is high and great in him is obstructed. When even a good person is caught in the state of tamas, he becomes changed in his thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes, appetites, ways, habits—in everything. He tends to become slovenly and filthy and gravitates towards others who are idle, dull and unkempt. More likely than not he becomes a resident of the slums. You will find upon enquiry that such a person probably has made a philosophy of his tamas: that he claims to have found

peace and stability in it. Often, he says, "I am satisfied with only a pair of overalls, two meals a day, and a place to sleep. That is all I want." This is typical of the attitude of tramps and hoboes in general. Their declaration that they have found peace and its concomitants is laughable, for real contentment is never gained in *tamas*—it is a false state of contentment. True contentment and stability can be aspired to only after one reaches the state of *sattva*.

Though *tamas* is at the opposite extreme of the vibratory waves from *sattva*, these *gunas* have an apparent similarity. The state of stagnation (*tamas*) gives an illusion of stability. In other words, *tamas* has the appearance but not the worth of *sattva*. It offers stability only in semblance—not truly but falsely—in a world diametrically opposed to stability. The tendency to seek the mere appearance of the highest state—when one has failed to realize its reality—is universal. Conquest of life is peace; death also is a kind of peace. Men who fail to conquer the forces of life and find no peace sometimes seek peace in death, mistakenly thinking that death and peace are synonymous. Usually, the *tamasika* person looks half asleep; he does not wish to struggle for anything higher. Change, whether within or outside himself, seems distasteful to him. This being true, he not only refuses to exert himself but opposes any effort of others to release him from his condition, just as a sleepy man dislikes being disturbed. If hard pressed, the *tamasika* man may pretend to accept advice, but he will do nothing whatever to comply with it. *Tamas* has the unfortunate peculiarity of rejecting cure.

(To be continued in the next issue)

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## The Need of The Modern World

Swami Madhavananda

From time to time, sages have appeared in different parts of the world, particularly in India, who have again and again brought before our gaze the underlying unity of the universe. But such is our proneness to evil, such is our forgetfulness, that we have not paid the necessary respect to these great teachings. As early as the days of the Rig-Veda, a great sage in the depth of his heart realized the eternal Truth and proclaimed in unequivocal language: "Truth is one, sages call it by various names." Now that is the Truth, and it could not be expressed more simply and more directly. But though the same Truth has been reiterated again and again in different lands in different languages in different ways, still we see the present state of things in the world. Buddha gave his wonderful life of purity and renunciation for this world, gave his sublime teachings for us all, and still we see that strife has not vanished from the world. Christ did the same thing. He also laid his life on the Cross, but his noble teachings have not been followed as they should have been.

In the same way, other great Prophets and saints have expressed the Eternal Truth in beautiful words, but still we see that this world is not a proper place for decent people to live in. Even before our eyes, blood is often shed between brothers and brothers, and still, we want to say we are all living in a civilized world. It seems to me it is high time that we pay proper attention to those great Truths expressed by the seers of the world in different ages and try to see where the mistake lies, because at no time in the history of the world was there greater need for unity, for peace and for concerted action towards general betterment than now; because now, in this twentieth century, our wants have

multiplied, our desires have gone up by leaps and bounds, and we are trying to exploit science for the satisfaction of our desires. But just as a powerful gun may protect people's lives against robbers, similarly, in the hands of a person not of good moral character, in the hands of a ruffian, for instance, that same gun may be a veritable engine of destruction. Therefore, while science is giving us new discoveries, giving us better ways of adding to our comforts, we do not exactly know how we can make use of those advantages. Hence there is more need at the present time of looking over those ancient sayings of our Prophets, the Prophets of all countries, and we must try to see where the mistake lies.

In our age, Sri Ramakrishna gave expression to those noble thoughts which were again and again repeated in ancient India. This is the purpose for which great personages are incarnated in the world. They pick out from the traditional lore of spirituality those gems that are best suited to the requirements of modern times, in order to remove our obstacles and miseries, and take us directly and in the most expeditious manner to Peace and Blessedness. Sri Ramakrishna was perfectly aware of the conditions in the midst of which he was born, and he left for us all his beautiful messages of the harmony of all faiths. Not only that, by his own glorious life of God-intoxication he has shown how every individual, man or woman, ought to live a life here in order to attain the maximum benefit from human existence. Creature comforts can be had in any birth; probably animals can enjoy sense pleasures much more intensely than human beings can. So, it is for man to know something higher, something nobler, something that will be really worth the name, and Sri Ramakrishna, like all his great predecessors, has pointedly drawn our attention to the fact that it is not by imitating animals, not by pandering to

our propensities, that we are to rise in the scale of existence, but by self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, by living for others.

In other words, it is not a life of the senses that we are to live, but a life of mergence in God for Peace, or at any rate, a life that will be in direct touch with some aspect of Divinity. By this he was not saying anything new because the Vedanta philosophy, which represents the quintessence of the Vedas, and which was preached thousands of years ago, has laid down the fundamental truths, of which all the scriptures and teachings of different religions have been explanations, as it were. One remembers the great words of Sri Krishna, "Whenever religion declines and irreligion prevails, I manifest Myself," and "Through whatsoever path man approaches Me, I reciprocate his devotion in that very way." In these words, there has been laid for us a beautiful procedure by which we can terminate our miseries, and Sri Ramakrishna, instead of being book-bound—in fact he did not care for books at all—by dint of direct realisation exhorted us repeatedly not to care for things of the world, but to find out our relationship with God. He did not believe that man can achieve the highest by living a life of the senses; rather it is by fleeing away from the senses and turning his gaze inwards that he can see the Eternal Life shining.

The Vedanta philosophy, of which Sri Ramakrishna was the latest exponent, preaches the unity of all existence. No matter how clouded our vision is at the present moment, the Vedanta definitely says that there is no multiplicity of souls. There is but one Atman, the all-pervading principle. Just as the same sun may be reflected in millions of little water-drops, and each of those reflections appears to us as a little sun, so the same infinite God, call Him Atman, Brahman or what you will, is reflecting Himself through all this multiplicity of souls. But in reality, it is the same one God. There are not two Gods in the universe, and whether we

are aware of it or not, there is always an essential union between us and God, because otherwise no power on earth could remove that state of things—no power, no amount of knowledge would unite us with God again.

Vedanta is a very scientific religion: taking its stand upon the bedrock of realisation, the realisation of different saints and sages, it has proclaimed that in every one of us there is the capacity to realise the Godhead. In other words, for material things, we may have to undergo much labour and exertion, and sometimes our labours may end in vain, but in the matter of realisation of God, we are bound to succeed in the long run, because it is something that is already in us. Just as in a room that is screened off there may be many things which we cannot see so long as the screen is there, but if there is a small aperture in the screen, we see part of the contents of the room, and if the aperture increases, or if the screen is entirely removed, then we see those things exactly as they are. Similarly with God-realisation. In other words, all those blessed qualities for which we aspire—infinite life, infinite knowledge, infinite bliss—are in us already. Only we have forgotten all about them, and the remedy lies in bringing back the knowledge—de-hypnotizing ourselves, as it were. Hence, I said, it entails much trouble to acquire things of the outside world, in which one may even fail in the end, but with regard to internal realisation, realising our own nature, the result is certain to come. Therefore if we are really sensible of our miserable condition, if we are not satisfied with the present state of things in the world, if we really want to improve the existing conditions, it is up to us to reconsider our position thoroughly and see where we are wrong, and Vedanta says that it is by ignorantly separating things and people, by raising walls of division between one class and another class, between one race and another race, that we are suffering so

much. Take the case of the last two great wars, for instance. What caused them? The idea of separateness due to ignorance. Each nation thought that its existence was at stake—thought that without such and such a possession it could not live in the world. So, these wars came into the world, and the state of things has not changed an iota even now.

Vedanta asks, where are you seeking eternal happiness, eternal peace, eternal knowledge outside of yourself? Even if you go on doing it, do you think you will get them at any time? Therefore, for the attainment of real peace, Vedanta asks us to turn our gaze inwards. Instead of frittering away our energies in trying to acquire riches which last for a few days only, or to get a little book-learning which will hardly add to our real knowledge, Vedanta asks us to go within ourselves and try to see what is there. It says, just as a musk-deer roams about in search of the beautiful odour it smells, but finds it nowhere, because that odour emanates from itself, so we are roaming about here and there in search of little pleasures pertaining to this sense or that sense, simply because we do not know the real source of the joy that drives us maddening onwards. Therefore, the proper course for attaining peace, happiness, light and knowledge is to turn our gaze inwards, to be introspective and to see what is already there. Sri Ramakrishna, in this materialistic age, proved by his wonderful life that the claims of the old religions are not false, rather they are literally true. Those who have read the wonderful life of Sri Ramakrishna know how through different paths of practice he came to the same truth, the unity of the Godhead, and how armed with that knowledge of realisation, he proclaimed that Truth is one, though sages call it by various names. Therefore, it is possible for us also, at least partly, to scale some of those heights that Sri Ramakrishna scaled completely in the course of two or three days.

The first thing that is necessary is a great yearning for Truth, for real Bliss. At the present moment, we are also yearning for happiness: but not knowing the real source of it, we are seeking it in the outside world. Sri Ramakrishna, like the true seer that he was, pointed out that such happiness cannot last long, that death is the terminus where we must part with everything earthly, and that unless we acquire here something which will enable us to overlook the claims of the outside world and make us free, real happiness, real peace, real knowledge can never come to us.

Having got that yearning within us, we must have perfect sincerity. That is the chief condition. We may be born very low in the social scale, we may not have any book-learning or material wealth, but if we have this true sincerity in us, if we have a real thirst for peace and happiness, these will come to us through the realisation of God. In other words, it is by sincerely treading the path laid down by the great seers of the world that we can attain that Eternal Truth which they realised for themselves in times past. Another thing on which Sri Ramakrishna laid great stress as a means to realisation is non-attachment, detachment from lust and idea of possession. One of the Upanishads says, "Whatever there is in the world must be clothed with God." In other words, instead of seeing a diversity of creatures, only physical bodies separated by a thousand divisions, we must see the unity that is behind them all, see the unity of the Godhead; and if we are really sincere, if we are really hankering and are not led away by our physical bonds and cravings for things of the senses, God-realisation will be an achieved fact for us. It may be even in the shortest possible time. One of the scriptures graphically says that it takes only so much time to realise God as it would take a mustard seed to drop from the horn of a cow.

We may think that since even our ordinary pursuits demand so much of our time and energy, God-realisation, being the highest achievement, must necessarily require a far greater amount of time and exertion. But Sri Ramakrishna in one of his beautiful similes says, "If a room has been dark for a thousand years, it does not require another thousand years to remove that darkness. All that we have to do is to strike a match and the darkness vanishes." Similarly, the eternal ignorance that has been keeping us in the dark, that has made us think that we are limited or powerless, can be removed in a moment if we can light the lamp of true knowledge. By turning our gaze inwards and by praying to the Atman sincerely, we can make the Almighty, powerful though He is, reveal Himself in just that form which appeals to us.

There is no hard and fast rule as to which way will suit us all. Sri Ramakrishna's advice is, "Choose your own path according to your inclination and capacity." We may choose any path that we like and for which we deem ourselves fit. If we persevere, if we are not distracted by mundane things, our search is bound to end in success and even in a shorter time than we imagine. Sri Ramakrishna was an object-lesson of this great truth. Time and again, while giving discourses on Divinity, he would be lost in a trance or Samadhi, the highest state of concentration, when one forgets the world. As in dreamless sleep we forget all about the world, so in that state of supreme absorption, he forgot all about the world; and he declares that it is possible for us to realise that state, provided only we are willing. He says, God hears our prayers, no matter how silently they are uttered, and some day or other, He will reveal Himself to us in accordance with our earnestness.

Thus, he has given us a message of great hope and encouragement. We need not think that we are despicable or low.

We must banish those words from our dictionary. It is we ourselves who attach importance to sin. We are the children of God. We cannot be sinners. It is a sin to call ourselves sinners. That is the proper attitude according to Vedanta, and if we really aspire after Truth, we must take our stand upon the basic unity of God, and armed with that knowledge, we may go boldly into the outside world again, to serve mankind in different ways. That is the explanation of the great lives of personages like Christ and Buddha. Their humanity was entirely gone, only divinity remained. But that faculty of achieving union with God has not ended with them. In fact, our scriptures say that there will be more Incarnations. We can realise for ourselves the eternal oneness with God and translate the same to the service of mankind. This is the secret of the great power of the Christs and Buddhas of the world. How is it that an ordinary man can move even a mountain? This essential union with the Godhead is the secret of power. In the ocean there are little waves, and each wave is different from the others; but when the wave loses its identity in the ocean, merges in it, it becomes the ocean. Similarly, we who consider ourselves as little souls can melt our ego in the great Ocean of Divinity, a substratum that is always behind us, from which we can re-emerge possessed of superhuman power. At that time, even if we were ignorant before, we shall come out transfigured as sages. Then our words will have power enough to move mountains. Therefore, no matter how unpropitious our present circumstances may seem to be, let us never lose courage, let us always struggle on and on.

Those periods during which we strive for little things, without knowing the real source of peace, are lost to us, whereas even a little effort for the realisation of our own nature is fraught with the greatest consequences to ourselves and others, for it helps thousands of weary souls to cross this ocean of misery. Therefore,

my prayer to all is—have that knowledge which comes of the realisation of your own Self, and with that inspired vision of a Rishi come out into the world and try to remove the misery that you see everywhere. Through you, wonderful things will then be done, but until that blessed moment comes, do not slacken your energies. Let us think within ourselves that others have finished doing their part in the world, and we alone are yet to do our part in this great task. With that belief, and a firm faith in ourselves that we are the children of the Almighty, that we are eternally one with Him, let us proceed for the amelioration of the condition of the world. Let us first realize God in our own selves, and out of that realization will come infinite power—power that will move the world. Then only will our eyes be illumined, and we shall see the greatness of all scriptures of all faiths and understand that it is we ourselves who misinterpreted them.

Therefore, while there is life in us, let us make a determined effort to realise the great God that is always united with us, that has never been away from us, and then, coming out into the world, let us share the results, the successes, with everyone that is on the face of the earth. Let us then be prepared like Buddha to lay down our lives for the sake of a little kid, for we shall feel no difference between ourselves and the kid. God will be both inside us and outside us. Even misery will vanish. It will all be a divine play in which we are to join. May God help us to achieve this in this very life, may He give us the necessary patience and perseverance, purity, and determination to carry out this object. Through His grace may we be helpers in removing misery from the world in the best way possible, so that it will be gone for ever, and not just temporarily relieved.

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## Principles Versus Commandments

Dr. Umesh Gulati

Unlike every other religion, which is built on some historical character like Buddha, Christ, Mohammad, and so forth, Hinduism is based on principles. As Swami Vivekananda (or Swamiji) put it (Complete Works, Vol.3, 183-84), “..no person, man, or woman, can claim to have created the Vedas. These Vedas are the embodiment of eternal principles; sages only discovered them. Who were these sages? No one knows who these sages were, their names or their fathers’ names, and so forth? These sages were the preachers of principles, and they themselves became the illustrations of principles they preached.” “The glory of Sri Krishna,” Swamiji said, “is that he has been the best preacher of our eternal religion of principles and the best commentator on the Vedanta that ever lived in India.”

So, what Hinduism is, can be summarized in a few principles. But we need to be clear first about what we mean by principles. The dictums like ‘truth alone triumphs’, etc., asserted by the Upanishads are not commandments, which need to be followed at the risk of being punished by God or some military authority if not carried out. These dictums are not like rules either, which prescribe a special course of action and tell a person what to do and what not to do. These dictums are based on principles, which are aids and instruments in judging possible courses of action. Principles do not tell us specifically what to do but rather what to think about in deciding what to do. For example, if I say that I love people because my Master had ordained so, and not doing so would be a sin, it would be personality-based moral code. On the other hand, if I say that I love people because love is the basis of life, it would be a principle-based moral code.

As you all know, Swami Vivekananda travelled to the USA in 1893 to spread the message of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, on harmony of religions. He also came to this country especially to attend the first World Parliament of Religions that was held in Chicago from September 11 to September 27, 1893. His first lecture on the opening day of the Parliament on religious harmony won him great love and respect of the more than 5000 people in the audience. His 'Paper on Hinduism' presented on September 19 was remarkable in setting out the principles of Hinduism, especially its respect for and acceptance of every other religion.

The closing words of that 'Paper' breathe the spirit of the universal and common humanism, not only of him and of his great guru Sri Ramakrishna, but also of the Indian spiritual tradition. He said: '... If there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite, like the God it will preach; and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna, and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which would not be Brahmanic [Hinduistic] or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these and still have enough space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being .... It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centered in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature.

'Offer such a religion and all the nations will follow you. Ashoka's Council was a council of the Buddhist faith. Akbar's, though more to the purpose, was only a parlour meeting. It was reserved for America to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion.' (Complete Works, Vol. 1, 19)

Swamiji elucidated further his conception of a universal religion in two of his subsequent lectures delivered in California in 1900. Speaking on 'The Way to the Realization of Universal Religion', at Pasadena, he said (Complete Works, Vol.2, 377):

'I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhist temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and his Law. I shall go to the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light, which enlightens the heart of everyone.

'Not only shall I do all these, but I shall also keep open my heart for all that may come in the future.... The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books, are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them.'

Finally we would like to quote from two paragraphs from his address at the final session of the Parliament of Religions on September 27, 1893:

'... But if any one here hopes that this unity [of all religions] will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others, to him I say, "Brother, yours is an impossible hope." Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. ... The Christian is not to become a Hindu or Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve the individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.'

'If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this. It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and chastity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart. ... "Help and not Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissent.'"

At any rate, these principles of the Hindus are set not only to promote the general welfare of all beings, but more importantly, they are also set out to help one in spiritual realization. For example, truthfulness forms one of the five principles in Patanjali's five-point 'yama'. But yama also includes 'non-injury' or non-violence. There can be situations when following the 'truthfulness' principle might conflict with the 'non-injury' principle. In that case, the scriptures enjoin upon us to think and think deeply if following the letter of the law (speaking the truth principle) would not injure one or other members (beings) of society. If the answer is yes, that is, it would indeed hurt one or other members of society, then wise men advise us: speak the truth but speak the pleasant truth in a way that it does not hurt or injure anyone.

A case in point would be when a butcher who was leading a cow to his slaughterhouse to slaughter her but lost her because it wandered away. Suppose a man standing at the crossroad had seen the direction in which the cow had gone. If the butcher asked that man the direction in which the cow had gone, should the man tell the butcher the truth? If he did, then wise men would say that the sin of slaughtering the cow would be on that man's head. Therefore, in that case it would be okay not to tell the truth!

Among the divine or moral qualities that are mentioned in our scriptures, especially in the Bhagavad-Gita (16.2-3), are truthfulness and non-injury and the absence of pride of one's caste or race, wealth, knowledge, etc. Let us illustrate this by an incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda when he was in the US to attend the first World Parliament of Religions that began on September 11, 1893 in Chicago. It is here that day the Swami began his famous address with the five words: 'Sisters and Brothers of America,' which evoked a thunderous and standing ovation for over two minutes from nearly seven thousand people in the audience. After the conclusion of the Parliament, the Swami was in great demand to give lectures in different parts of the country.

Being an Oriental, his skin seemed dark to an American, and in the South, he was often mistaken for an African-American; sometimes he was insulted. (Please remember that during that time, Afro-American people had no civil liberties in the US.) But the Swami invariably received the rude remarks and rude glances with a grand indifference of a Yogi (who the scriptures say remains indifferent to praise or blame). After all, what was race-prejudice to a man who saw in every man his brother? Once an African-American porter, who had seen the Swami being welcomed by a reception committee, came up to him and said how happy he was to see that one of his own people had become a great man, and added that he would like to have the privilege of shaking hands with him. The Swami warmly clasped his hand and exclaimed, "Thank you! Thank you, brother!"

In barber shops of northern and southern states the Swami was not infrequently refused service. Several times in important cities of the south he was refused admittance to a hotel because of his dark colour. But when the same hotel proprietors who had turned him away read his lectures in the papers or heard his name spoken

with deference everywhere, they were embarrassed, and would run up to him to apologize.

Long afterwards, a Western disciple, referring to these incidents, asked him in surprise why he had not told them who he was. "What!" he replied, "rise at the expense of another? I did not come to earth for that!" What broadmindedness, and what strength of moral character! Indeed, being a true non-dualist or monist, he saw himself in all beings, and all beings in himself; indeed he identified himself with one and all.

Once again, if the Swami had told the hotel proprietors or the Afro-American porters his true identity, he would not have told a lie but the truth. But how would it have reflected on his character, a monk and a Swami who believed in the principle of the unity of all existence, while this world of name and form is Maya only? To him the separateness between humans and non-humans, between whites and African-Americans and Orientals, between Indians and Americans, was only apparent and unreal. In reality, we are all one. In other words, although the Swami did not deny being an African-American (which he should have if he had followed the letter of the law of speaking the truth), yet by acting the way he did, he depicted and upheld the other great virtue and principle, the absence of pride, which is the hallmark of every saint. Swami Vivekananda indeed was a saint of the highest order.

One other thing we need to be clear about is the concept of God, and the relationship between God and man and woman in Hinduism, which is very different from monotheistic religions. Says Swami Vivekananda: "Two ideals of truth are in our scriptures; the one is what we call eternal, and the other is not so authoritative, yet binding under particular circumstances, times, and places. The eternal relations between souls and God are embodied in what we call the Shrutis, the Vedas. The next set of

truths is what we call the Smrtis, as embodied in the words of Manu, Yajnavalkya, and other writers, and also in the Puranas, down to the Tantras.

...“Another peculiarity is that these Shrutis have many sages as the recorders of the truths in them, mostly men, even some women. Very little is known of their personalities [emphasis is added], the dates of their birth, and so forth, but their best thoughts, their best discoveries, I should say, are preserved there, embodied in the sacred literature of our country, the Vedas. In the Smrtis, on the other hand, personalities are more in evidence. Startling, gigantic, impressive, world-moving persons stand before us, as it were, for the first time, sometimes of more magnitudes even than their teachings.

“This is a peculiarity which we have to understand—that our religion preaches an Impersonal-Personal God. It preaches any amount of impersonal laws [emphasis is added] plus any amount of personality; but the very fountainhead of our religion is in the Shrutis, the Vedas, which are perfectly impersonal [emphasis is added]; the persons come in the Smritis and Puranas—the great avatars, incarnations of God, prophets, and so forth. And this ought to be observed that except our religion, every other religion in the world depends upon the life or lives of some personal founder or founders. Christianity is built on the life of Jesus Christ,

...

“It naturally follows that there must be in all these religions a good deal of fight about what they call the historical evidences of the existences of these great personalities. If at any time the historical evidences of these personages in ancient times became weak, the whole building of the religion tumbles down and is broken to pieces. We escaped this fate [the fights between all those religions that have personal founders], because our religion is

based not on persons but principles. ... Krishna is not the authority of the Vedas [emphasis is added], but the Vedas are the authority of Krishna himself. His glory is that he is the greatest preacher of the Vedas that ever existed. ...

“How is it possible that one person as Mohammed or Buddha or Christ can be taken up as the one type for the whole world; nay the whole of morality, ethics, spirituality, and religion can be true only from the sanction of that one person, and one person alone? Now the Vedantic [Hindu] religion does not require any such personal authority. Its sanction is the eternal nature of man, its ethics are based upon the eternal, spiritual solidarity of man, already existing, already attained and not to be attained. On the other hand, from the very earliest times our sages have been feeling conscious of the fact that the vast majority of mankind requires a personality. They must have personal God. ... [So, the Hindus accept a personal-Impersonal God.]

“The personal God is necessary, and at the same time we know that instead of and better than vain imaginations of a Personal God, ... we have in this world, living and walking in our midst, living Gods, now and then. ... Sri Krishna is much greater than an idea of God you or I can have. Buddha [too] is a much higher idea, ... than the ideal you or I can conceive of in our minds; ... our sages knew this, and, therefore, left it open to ... worship such great personages, such Incarnations. Nay, the greatest of these Incarnations [Sri Krishna] goes further: ‘Wherever an extraordinary spiritual power is manifested by external man, know that I am there; it is from Me that that manifestation comes.’ ...

“That leaves the door open for the Hindu to worship the Incarnations of all the countries in the world. The Hindu can [and does] worship any sage and any saint from any country whatsoever, and as a fact we know that we go and worship many

times in the churches of the Christians, and many times in the Mohammedan mosques, and that is good. Why not? Ours, as I have said, is the universal religion. [Emphasis is ours.] It is inclusive enough; it is broad enough to include all the ideals. ...” (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, “Sages of India”, v.3, 248–51).

Besides, we need to emphasize one more thing here before we go any further. And that is the word ‘Hinduism’ is not a Sanskrit word, nor does it stand for the name of the religion of the so-called Hindus. Nor is it derived from the name of the founder of this religion. For, and rather interestingly, Hinduism did not have any founder, as we have said above that Hinduism is not based on any personality but principles. Nor does Hinduism have a central organization. In fact, the very words, Hindu and Hinduism, did not originate from the land of the Hindus. In the past this word merely referred to those who lived on the eastern side of the river Sindhu (Indus), now in Pakistan. The ancient Iranians mispronounced the name Sindhu and called all the people living on the eastern side of that river as Hindu. So, this is how this word has come down to the Hindus, and during the Muslim rule in India they took that name themselves.

The Hindus themselves would have liked to call their religion as Sanatana Dharma, or eternal religion, but not many took up this name. Swami Vivekananda suggested that they (Hindus) should be called either Vaidikas, followers of the Vedas, or better still, Vedantists, followers of Vedanta, which is the knowledge portion of the Vedas. Unfortunately, only a minority of intellectuals has taken up this suggestion, so the words Hindus and Hinduism have become enduring. Again, the religion of the so-called Hindus is based on the Vedas, which contain impersonal spiritual laws discovered by ancient sages whose names are not known, and as pointed out above, our religion is based on principles, not on

personalities. Nonetheless, many holy people and sages that followed the ancient sages have verified these laws; and can be verified by people even today by anyone who is ready to follow the spiritual discipline necessary for its verification. As such, the principles underlying our religion are not opposed to science.

Swami Vivekananda said in one of his lectures in America that religion is a science or a study of humanity's struggle to grasp the infinite, but it was seldom taught so in the West. He explained this scientific approach in Vedanta in that lecture, "Religion and Science":

"Experience is the only source of knowledge. In the world, religion is the only science where there is no surety, because it is not taught as a science of experience [or realization]. This should not be so. There is always, however, a small group of men who teach religion from experience. They are called mystics, and these mystics in every religion speak the same tongue and teach the same truth. This is the real science of religion.... Religion deals with the truths of the metaphysical world, just as chemistry and the other natural sciences deal with truths of the physical world. The book one must read to learn chemistry is the book of nature. The book from which to learn religion is your own mind and heart." (The Complete Works, Vol.6, 81)

Another reason that Vedanta is consistent with science is that, like science, its code of ethics is based on scientific principles of cause and effect, that is, what we call the laws of nature. We give here just two verses from the Bhagavad-Gita (9.4 and 9.5) in support of our assertion. Sri Krishna says (B.G: 9.4): "All this world is pervaded by Me in My un-manifested form; all beings abide in Me, but I stand apart from them; (9.5): Nor do beings exist in Me (in reality), behold My divine Yoga! Bringing forth and supporting the beings, My Self does not dwell in them."

At any rate, some of the things for which the non-Hindus consider our weakness, on the contrary, give our religion the strength. For, having no founder of the Hindu religion has allowed this religion to incorporate into its tenets fresh experiences of saints and sages, and remove anything that is contradicted by modern discoveries. As such, Hinduism has remained ever fresh. In the words of one scholar, Hinduism is ever aging, but never old. There are, however, certain words that have become part of the vocabulary of our religion and culture. One is the word dharma. This word means something that supports, and what supports a nation are righteousness, morality and spirituality. So the essence of everything is dharma; our dharma is spirituality, which means that behind this world of names and forms lies the divinity or God.

Another important word is darshana, which means seeing or realization. Darshana also means philosophy, but unlike Western philosophy, which is more speculative, darshan in Hinduism implies thought or view that is based on experience and subject to verification by other saints. In other words, Hindus are concerned more in 'seeing' and realizing God or the Ultimate Reality, rather than just believing in its existence. For the word 'seeing' expresses that perfect quality of immediate conviction, which is independent of other media and wherein intellect and feeling alike directly and clearly get the vision that is the aim of Vedanta. Shankaracharya, perhaps the greatest philosopher of India, said that various people would express the Reality in different ways, but what is the real nature of Reality depends on one's own realization or experience.

Three Schools of Vedanta: One might have noticed that we have used the words 'Hinduism' and 'Vedanta' interchangeably. Interestingly, there is no agreement about the word Vedanta. For there are indeed at least three different schools of Vedanta, which

provide us with the meaning of this important word. The first school is the dualistic or Dvaita school of Sri Madhavacharya. The dualists believe that God, who is the creator of the universe and is its ruler, is eternally separate from nature, eternally separate from the human soul. God is eternal, and so is nature and all the human souls. Nature and the souls manifest and change, but God remains the same. Besides, dualists assert that this God is personal in the sense it has qualities, human attributes. He is merciful, just, He is powerful, etc., etc. In short, He is the repository of an infinite number of blessed qualities.

The real Vedanta philosophy begins, according to Swami Vivekananda, with what is known as qualified non-dualistic or Vishishta-advaita school; the principal exponent of qualified non-dualism is Sri Ramanujacharya. This school asserts that effect is never different from the cause. If the universe is the effect, and God is the cause, it must be God Himself—it cannot be anything but that. Thus, say the qualified non-dualists, God is both the efficient and the material cause of the universe.

Therefore, God is not only the creator of the universe, but He is also the material out of which the universe has been projected. A good analogy given in the Vedas is that of a spider that spins out thread out of its own body and lives in that web. So the whole universe is the body of God. In other words, the whole universe and the souls are the body of God, and God is the Soul of all the souls. As from the blazing fire, fly millions of sparks of the same nature, even so from this Infinite Being, God, these souls have come, say the non-dualists.

Now we come to the school of Advaita of Sri Shankaracharya, the fairest flower of philosophy and religion that any country in any age has produced, where human thought attains its highest expression. This advaita or non-dualist Vedanta is too abstruse,

too elevated, to be the religion of the masses. For Advaita says that God is both the efficient and material cause of the universe, but it goes beyond it and says that God is both the creator and also the created. He Himself is the Universe; there is but one Existence, the Infinite, and the Ever-blessed One. In other words, all that exists is the Atman, Infinite, beyond the known and beyond the knowable.

The Atman is neither 'he' nor 'she'; there is no sex in the Atman, the Self. It is the names and forms, the bodies, which are matter and are superimposed upon the Self; and they make all this difference. If one takes away these differences of names and forms, the whole universe is one. They are not two, but one everywhere. You and I are one, not two (Advaita). Whom do I worship, and whom can I worship. "I worship", says the advaitist, "myself and I salute to myself; I bow down to myself. I am the Infinite Being; I am the Self, the Self in me is the same Self in you, in everyone else and in every being and thing."

Last but not least, Hinduism is the world's only religion that allows its tenets subject to reasoning and logical analysis, rather than just a dogma to be believed and accepted without putting it to any logical test or its verification. The very fact that during or after the discourse of any speaker or Swami for that matter questions are raised and answered indicates that Vedanta allows its principles to be put to test and analysis.

## **Book review**

### **Swami Vireswarananda - A Divine Life (Part I)**

'Swami Vireswarananda – A Divine Life' is published in two volumes by the Swami Vireswarananda Smriti Committee, West Bengal, India. It was first made available in Bengali and Hindi, and then in English: this book review covers the English edition, which was first published in November 2014, twenty-nine years after the passing of Revered Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, the 10th and second-longest serving President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

This unique biography of Swami Vireswaranandaji's life and service covers two volumes, of around 1100 pages in total, providing a very detailed account of Revered Maharaj's life, spanning 93 years (1892-1985). Volume I takes the form of a life story, written by Swami Chaitanyananda, followed by a series of letters written by Swami Vireswaranandaji to people of all walks of life on such diverse subjects as spiritual instruction, and advice on family, work and personal matters, even health issues, among others, which provide a glimpse into the wide-ranging capabilities of this long-serving monk—and which can help the reader even today. The main section is a very comprehensive selection of reminiscences primarily from senior monks of the Order—swamis—from all over the world, including from the 11th, 12th, 14th and 15th presidents and three vice-presidents. Each memory is unique, each providing the reader with a different perspective of, a different insight into, the 'multiplexity' of this spiritual leader..... And, not least of all, a remarkable collection of photographs manages to convey Maharaj's life story in images, the places he visited and the people he met throughout his long service.

Volume II takes a similar format, encompassing the second set of reminiscences from senior and junior nuns from the Sri Sarada Math

and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission as well as from people all over India, but with the addition of a wonderful 'collected works' section comprising a collation of Sayings, a question-and-answer section, and a series of Essays written by Swami Vireswaranandaji. Beautiful group photographs adorn the chapter on Sayings—again, here every picture tells its own story.

The reader can thus choose how to use this 'Compendium', to dip in and out of the content of both volumes at will, wherever they feel they are led or inspired, in order to tailor more personally a deeper understanding of this inspirational monk and great reformer.

*"For us, Sri Ramakrishna alone is everything. He is our 'goal, the sustainer, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the refuge, the friend'."*<sup>1</sup>

## Volume I

### **Mould one's life according to the ideal of the Holy Trinity**

Swami Vireswarananda was born Panduranga Prabhu on October 31st 1892 in Chennai to Krishna Prabhu and his wife Netravati Bai. It is believed his family was originally from the Gaudiya Saraswata Brahmin clan. The first volume of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* changed the course of his life when he was given a copy of the book, instead of the book he wanted, in 1914. After graduating from Presidency College, Madras, in early 1916, he joined the Ramakrishna Order at Chennai and was initiated by Holy Mother in June of that year in Jayrambati, and subsequently received his monastic vows from Swami Brahmananda in January 1920. Swami Vireswarananda was present for the cremation of Holy Mother on 21 July 1920 at Belur Math, and has provided detailed eye witness accounts of the occasion.

Prabhu Maharaj, as he was known, had the rare privilege of close contact with direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He knew personally nine of them, but kept particularly close company with Swami Brahmananda and Swami Shivananda, which may account for the

fact that he was very much a traditionalist, and a strict disciplinarian. We can read his thoughts about some of these direct disciples in Swami Chaitanyanda's life story.

**Vireswarananda's life was an example of how work is transformed into worship...**

In terms of the Order, he progressed from Manager of Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, to President of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, and Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math, among which some of his responsibilities were for relief work programmes. As Acting General Secretary, he was also instrumental in raising the funds and organising the establishment of the first ever women's monastery, the Sri Sarada Math, before becoming General Secretary of the Order. Prabhu Maharaj was finally appointed 10th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission on 22 February 1996. He spent 19 years as president, the second-longest reigning president after Swami Brahmananda (21 years).

After presiding over the first Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in 1926, which was arranged by Swami Saradananda and which heralded in extensive change, one important decision made by the new president was to hold a second convention, in 1980, with a view to building on this progress. In his benedictory speech, Swami Vireswaranandaji said: "... *Ramakrishna's message is unique.... It is not only unique; it is destined to usher in a new order of society all over the world, which shows that his message is not only for India, but for the whole world....*" <sup>2</sup>

In many of his addresses and speeches, made at diverse gatherings, meetings, inaugural assemblies, sanghas, and consecration of new temples, for example, as he travelled extensively all over India in his new role, he stressed that all activities, all schemes and work projects, must bring benefits to society; he believed in unity and would constantly address such diverse issues as monasticism and its duty to society today, and how all work

should be taken up in the spirit of sadhana. His spiritual message was that behind every being is the Atman: *"Not only in India but all over the world, this idea of Atman is the new revelation. People have been trying to find out a base for a common world all over. But they have not been able to find out any base. But Sri Ramakrishna has given this base; if you believe that every human being is divine, behind every one is the Atman, then there is no dispute; in spite of all the difference, it will be one humanity, one world."* <sup>3</sup>

Prabhu Maharaj introduced many philanthropic activities and was closely involved in rural development and relief programmes, as well as the 'Pallimangal' and 'Janashiksha' welfare schemes, among others. He had a great belief in expansion and consolidation, and in education—the training of youth in self-employment, for example—and was renowned for his clear foresight, and organisational and administrative capabilities. He also authored many books. In the midst of this, as a monk he led a very spiritual life of sacrifice and austerity, and it is recorded that he initiated around 75,000 devotees, although the actual total is believed to be well beyond this number.

Swami Vireswaranandaji was twice diagnosed with cancer of the throat, once in April 1983 and again in May 1984, but was cured both times. However, in early February 1985 the pain in his throat returned, and from there on in his overall health began to decline. He developed severe chest pain and breathing problems on 12th March and entered Mahasamadhi on 13 March 1985, Sri Sri Thakur's birthday that year, at Belur Math.

*'In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the sage Artabhaga questions Yajnavalkya: "When this man (of realisation) passes away, what is it that does not leave him?" "Name," answered Yajnavalkya.'* <sup>4</sup>

### **The Motherly Heart....**

The last portion of this book contains some 64 reminiscences from senior monks and makes up the bulk of the content of Volume I. It

is accompanied by a beautiful set of portraits of Swami Vireswaranandaji, entitled "Revered Maharaj in different moods....", taken from throughout his lifetime, and clearly showing the tireless energy and underlying spirituality of this unassuming man.

It is these writings of the swamis that met him and worked with him that give the most insight into the various activities and issues that make up the daily life of a leader of the Ramakrishna Order, and he seems to have been 'an inexhaustible source of inspiration' to them. There are stories, among many others, telling how he played a leading role in the progress and expansion of the Order over the 19 years of his presidency, and giving further details of his remarkable ongoing relief work in the form of the Pallimangal Scheme for economic, educational and cultural development of rural India. Revered Maharaj himself relates to one storyteller a very poignant memory of his initiation with Holy Mother, and gives a personal glimpse into the events surrounding her passing and cremation. By all accounts, 'he was the embodiment of the lofty ideals he followed all his life', and an example of 'how work is transformed into worship' seen in his exemplary service record, life of renunciation, and purity. He also had a keen sense of humour: he was very fond of tea, and he invariably always kept a small cup of tea 'ready', and once joked that his cremated body could be put out with good tea!

(To be continued in the next issue)

- Book review by Jaqueline Power

### References:

- 1 Prologue, Life of Swami Vireswarananda, Volume I
- 2 Editorial note to the English edition, Volume I
- 3 Swami Chaitanyananda: Swami Vireswarananda – A Divine Life, Volume I
- 4 Swami Chaitanyananda: Swami Vireswarananda – A Divine Life, Volume I

Prânâyâma is not, as many think, something about breath; breath indeed has very little to do with it, if anything. Breathing is only one of the many exercises through which we get to the real Pranayama. Pranayama means the control of Prâna. According to the philosophers of India, the whole universe is composed of two materials, one of which they call Âkâsha. It is the omnipresent, all-penetrating existence. Everything that has form, everything that is the result of combination, is evolved out of this Akasha. It is the Akasha that becomes the air, that becomes the liquids, that becomes the solids; it is the Akasha that becomes the sun, the earth, the moon, the stars, the comets; it is the Akasha that becomes the human body, the animal body, the plants, every form that we see, everything that can be sensed, everything that exists. It cannot be perceived; it is so subtle that it is beyond all ordinary perception; it can only be seen when it has become gross, has taken form. At the beginning of creation there is only this Akasha. At the end of the cycle the solids, the liquids, and the gases all melt into the Akasha again, and the next creation similarly proceeds out of this Akasha.

- Swami Vivekananda

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By what power is this Akasha manufactured into this universe? By the power of Prana. Just as Akasha is the infinite, omnipresent material of this universe, so is this Prana the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of this universe. At the beginning and at the end of a cycle everything becomes Akasha, and all the forces that are in the universe resolve back into the Prana; in the next cycle, out of this Prana is evolved everything that we call energy, everything that we call force. It is the Prana that is manifesting as motion; it is the Prana that is manifesting as gravitation, as magnetism. It is the Prana that is manifesting as the actions of the body, as the nerve currents, as thought force. From thought down to the lowest force, everything is but the manifestation of Prana. The sum total of all forces in the universe, mental or physical, when resolved back to their original state, is called Prana.

- Swami Vivekananda

