

## Magazine Articles July / August 2003

1. One
2. Viveka or Discrimination - Swami Dayatmananda
3. A Letter by Swami Turiyananda - Swami Chetanananda
4. Holy Mother - A Talk - Swami Asehananda
5. The Message of the Upanishads - Swami Swahananda
6. Book Review - John Phillips

### One

One song can spark a moment,

One flower can wake the dream.

One tree can start a forest,

One bird can herald spring.

One smile begins a friendship,

One handclasp lifts a soul.

One star can guide a ship at sea,

One word can frame the goal.

One vote can change a nation,

One sunbeam light a room,

One candle wipe out darkness,

One laugh will conquer gloom.

One step must start each journey,

One word must start each prayer.

One hope will raise our spirits,

One touch can show you care.

One voice can speak with wisdom.

One heart can know what's true.

One life can make a difference,

You see it's up to You!

**(Anonymous)**

## **Viveka or Discrimination**

### **Swami Dayatmananda**

Awareness Discrimination, dispassion, control over body and mind, and intense yearning - these are the four prerequisites before one even steps onto the path of a spiritual life.

Viveka or discrimination is the very first and most important of these requirements.

Discrimination is the ability to correctly evaluate the lesser from the higher and choose the higher. Naturally it needs acute intelligence and a strong will. Discrimination is a very practical pursuit and not an armchair exercise. The test of true Viveka is the ability to give up what is tested and found to be of lower value. True discrimination is the

beginning of wisdom; it brings on right understanding, strengthens the will and gradually leads man to higher states of life and in the end to Self-knowledge.

Naturally it is not easy to possess Viveka. Its acquisition needs long preparation and intense struggle. First one needs to acquire awareness. Then one needs to go through honest and objective self-analysis in order to know the workings of one's mind, especially, of one's unconscious mind. Then comes the Herculean task of integrating the conscious and the unconscious. Only then does a person become an individual and have the needed energy to step forward into the higher realms of spiritual life. Perhaps this is the reason why Swami Vivekananda used to exhort often: `Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!'

So before one has Viveka one needs to practise self-awareness and self-analysis. Here are a few examples:

When told that the Oracle of Delphi had revealed to one of his friends that Socrates was the wisest man in Athens; first he wondered why; then he realised the Oracle might be right after all. He was the wisest man in Athens because he alone was prepared to admit his own ignorance rather than pretend to know something he did not.

One of the Upanishads declares, "He who thinks he knows does not know, and he who thinks he does not know knows."

Arjuna refused to fight and laid his arms down. Subsequently he realised that he was wrong, all the while he was only rationalising his decisions. Then he admitted that he was wrong, and earnestly begged for guidance. Only then did Krishna open his mouth and begin his teaching.

Even as a child Sri Ramakrishna was an acute observer. He used to observe minutely the

ways of people around him. This gave him an insight into the nature of people and the world. This power of observation came in handy when he was practising spiritual disciplines. Before he undertook any spiritual practice he used to question his mind as to the purpose of a particular training, whether it was prepared to go ahead without a backward glance. Only when he got a categorical `yes', would he undertake the discipline. This is why he succeeded in any practice in such a short time. Because of his purity and sincerity Sri Ramakrishna's own mind acted as his Guru. For instance, during his sadhana Sri Ramakrishna used to see a young monk exactly resembling himself with a sharp trident in his hand come out of his body and say, `If you do not fully give up all other thoughts and meditate whole-heartedly on your Chosen Ideal I'll pierce your heart with this trident'. Needless to say the young monk was none other than his own vigilant mind.

A few days before her passing away Holy Mother advised a despairing devotee: "My child, if you want peace do not find fault with any one. Rather find out your own faults." Without doubt this is one of the most useful disciplines.

The few instances given above are for the purpose of illustrating the fact that one needs to cultivate a constant habit of self-observation and self-analysis. This gives us a clue into the secret of greatness and wisdom. One who wishes to become wise and great or improve in any field of life cannot afford to live a life of self-forgetfulness.

Here is an interesting Zen story. There was a disciple who was with his Master for forty years. The disciple thought he was now well qualified to be a Guru in his own right. Humbly he asked the master his opinion. Now it was a custom for the disciples to leave their shoes outside the room before approaching the Master. The Master smiled and asked the man on which side of the entrance he left his shoes. The disciple could not remember! He hung his head in shame. The point is: how could one who does even such

a simple thing so unconsciously ever hope to be a master?

Psychology has advanced a great deal since its inception and tells us that what we call our conscious mind is like the tip of an iceberg. Most of us lead our lives like sleep-walkers. Buried deep in our being the unconscious part of the mind controls most of our life. Motives, desires, and fantasies, indeed, past impressions of innumerable lives, form conflicting complexes and control our thoughts, speech and actions, making puppets of us. Few of us dare claim that we live as free persons!

Again it seems in our age, quite a large percentage of people seem to be suffering from mental illness. The famous social psychologist Eric Fromm states that as many as one in three, in a smaller or greater degree, suffer from mental illness, specially in the developed countries. This in spite of living in abundance! This proves that material prosperity is no guarantor of a life of happiness and peace. Goodness, happiness, and creativity, the hall marks of progress, depend on the state of mind. After many years of intense study and observation Fromm concludes that what brings about human progress is a 'being mode of existence', and not a 'having mode of existence'.

Psychology wishes to make a thorough study of the mind in order to know its workings, and thereby help man achieve a healthier and higher state. Its aim is to make man a self-actualising or a mature personality. A person who is unified and harmonious not only enjoys peace and joy, he also contributes a great deal to the peace of the world. In fact only mature persons can bring about lasting peace.

It is difficult to define what exactly a mature personality is. There are many differing opinions about it. Whatever it be, it is something positive and creative, which makes life meaningful, and fruitful, and enriches it with peace, joy, and harmony. According to Maslow here are some of the traits which are consistently found in mature persons:

Mature persons accept themselves completely and unself-consciously; so also they accept others on their own terms; thus, they can forgive others' shortcomings. They are in touch with reality, and willingly accept reality more than others do. They lead a simple and open life and easily see through deception and hypocrisy and avoid them. They face problems head on and try to cope rather than avoid them. They are creative and spontaneous with their actions, ideas, feelings.

They have a definite purpose and goal in life. Hence they live in joyous expectation and hope. In other words life is not a bore and a drag. They are not afraid to be alone. They enjoy withdrawing sometimes into their privacy in order to be free to have their own thoughts and contemplation. They resent herd mentality and try to lead life according to their own set goals and ideals.

They live in harmony with themselves and with the world at large. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and try to be fair and resent unfairness and injustice meted out to others. They are content with the circumstances life puts them under but at the same time do not sit back but try to achieve higher ends. They are creative and try to do things differently.

From the above description it looks as though one is describing a saint. In a way it is true. One cannot become truly mature without becoming a saint. Sri Krishna describes the characteristics of a man of wisdom at the end of the second chapter in the Bhagavad Gita. Commenting on these verses the great Sankara says that what is natural to a man of self-knowledge should be assiduously acquired by others.

Not to speak of spiritual life, even to live in this world of duality with peace, joy and harmony one needs a great deal of maturity. The first steps in this are self-awareness and self-analysis. How these can be practised would be the content of our next article.

(to be continued)

## **Saints' Lives as Beacon-lights**

### **Swami Srutisarananda**

*(This article was previously published in Vedanta Kesari in October 1974)*

A poor brahmin was performing austerity for years to get the philosopher's stone. He had the desire to become rich. Appearing in a dream Shiva instructed him to go to Sanatana Goswami who was staying in Braja. The brahmin trekked his way to him. Goswamiji told him, 'One day I stumbled upon the Parasa (the philosopher's stone). Lest I may have to touch it again, I buried it in the sand yonder. Please take it for yourself.' The brahmin easily found it and happily left for home. After going some distance something troubled him and he returned to the saint. The brahmin told him, 'Sir, I find that you are quite indifferent to this most precious stone. You must evidently have got with you something more precious. I seek to know what that is.' Sanatanaji replied. 'You are right. Compared to the Lord, your Parasa is no more worthy than a pebble.' The brahmin threw away the Parasa and took shelter at the feet of the saint for the sake of attaining to that invaluable thing, the Lord.

Yes, God is the most precious thing one can get. The Gita speaks of a state having obtained which, one regards no other acquisition superior to it (VI, 22), and saints' lives point to it. Once a man grew eloquent on a saint's renunciation. The saint heard him

calmly and remarked at the end: 'Your renunciation is greater, for you have given up God for the world.' A saint is a multi-sided personality with God as the central point. He demonstrates in his life how to 'love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.' (St. Matthew, 22.37) Who is not aware of the historical examples of the God-attunement of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Chaitanya, Sri Nammalvar, Mira Bai and Tyagaraj? The Gopis of Vrindaban were paragons of this supreme love. They could not bear any separation from God. Many devotees have taken that love as the ideal and moulded spiritual life accordingly.

Sri Ramakrishna, the God-intoxicated saint of Dakshineswar, is a unique and modern example of this love, During the period of his sadhana he would sing, meditate and pray to God day and night. His love for the Divine made him oblivious of everything else. He would roll on the ground and weep for God. Seeing him people would think that he was having some colic pain or that his beloved one was dead. How could the worldly people know that his spirit was aglow with divine love? When Kali did not appear to him he wanted to cut his throat, unable to bear the torment of not having Her vision. Then Kali appeared to him. The mere utterance of God's name would produce in him tears and horripilation, and throw him into samadhi. If anybody talked about anything other than God before him he would feel as if he was on live coals. His direct disciples inherited this trait of his. Once Swami Ramakrishnananda was staying as a guest of the Maharaja of Mysore with an American devotee. One day a big official of the Maharaja came to see them and started with the American devotee a conversation on court affairs. The Swami grew restless, and was seen fidgeting in his chair. This surprised the visitor, for a yogi is supposed to be calm and steady. The visitor asked the Swami whether he was unwell. The Swami replied that the officer's worldly talk was making him restless. A saint rests in God and is restless with everything else.



It was deep and profound love that turned the scholar Nimai into the supreme Bhakta. After being initiated by Ishwar Puri in Gaya he would drench himself in tears for Krishna. He would cry, 'Where is my Krishna, the soul of my soul?' and saying this again and again he would weep and faint. Never had a mother greater love for her child or a chaste wife for her husband. He would completely forget the body which is so dear to all. Seeing a divine glow on him many people were attracted to him like bees to a full-blown lotus. They too began to do kirtan - singing and dancing - and created an atmosphere of intense spirituality. All those who came within that orbit were naturally elevated. He selected Nityananda and Haridas for the mission of propagating Namasankirtana. These two would go from door to door, fall at the feet of one and all and request them to chant Krishna's name. They had to face scorn, abuse and ridicule. Jagannath and Madhava were two notorious ruffians of Navadvip. On a certain occasion when they were drunk, Nityananda and Haridas went to them uttering Krishna's name. At this they flew into a rage. Madhava picked up a broken jar lying by the roadside and threw it at Nityananda. Blood started streaming from Nityananda's injured head. He, however, continued chanting the Lord's name unperturbed. Madhava wanted to beat him, but Jagannath intervened and protected him. Soon after, Nimai came on the scene and embraced Jagannath for shielding his disciple. His touch wrought a miracle. Jagannath, the notorious sinner, became a Bhakta. Madhava also surrendered himself. The residents of Navadvip realised the significance of Krishna's words: 'Even if a very wicked man worships Me, with devotion to none else, he should be regarded as a good man, for he has rightly resolved. Soon he becomes righteous' (IX, 30,31).

Inspired by Divine love, Venkataraman became Ramana Maharshi, the saint of Arunachal. He plunged himself in deep contemplation in an underground cave. It was infested with mice and insects which attacked his body and made sores, but Raman who was always in supersensuous touch with the Divine had no consciousness of them. If ever he had, he

only recognised God's messengers in them.

For Krishna Bhakti, Mira's name is a household word in the north. The flute of Krishna beckoned to her. She left the pleasures of the royal family in obedience to its call. She mixed freely with the saints irrespective of their sex. She would sing, dance and go into ecstasy in public places, in the midst of the saints and before her Lord Giridhari. This made her the target of vehement public and domestic criticism. It was all right for a princess to give donations for religious purposes like the construction of temples and the service of saints, but it was too much for her, the people said, to mix freely with all. Mira was bold as all saints are, and criticism could not deflect her from her path. Strong hints and suggestions to change her ways were given to her, but to no avail. Direct rebuke was resorted to, but it fell on deaf ears. Then the Rana, desiring to put an end to her life, sent poison to her, stating that it was Charanamrita. She drank it cheerfully and danced to the tune of the divine music of the flute of Sri Krishna which reminded her: No evil can befall a child of God.

Andal came under the influence of the same transcendental love. She practised Madhura Bhava. Krishna could not resist the call of her love and was united with her in a mystic marriage.

The same divine madness seized St Francis of Assisi, St Theresa of Avila and a score of others.

God more than reciprocates this mad love of the saints. In the Gita He holds the promise of looking after all their needs: 'Persons who, meditating on Me as non-separate, worship Me in all beings, to them thus steadfast wholly and constantly, I carry what they lack and preserve what they already have.' (IX, 22). The saints' lives bear ample testimony to this. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna, we are told how Mathur Babu and

others supplied his needs. During the period of sadhana when he had no body-consciousness, he was looked after by somebody. In the life of Ramana Maharshi also, we see that Seshadri Swami came to preserve his precious life. At the Tari Ghat station Swami Vivekananda was sitting hungry. Nearby a Bania, who had a positive dislike for Sadhus and who thought of them as idlers, was enjoying a sumptuous meal. Occasionally he was passing derisive comments on the sad plight of Swamiji. Soon after, a sweetmeat vendor, who was a devotee of Ram, came with dainty dishes and requested Swamiji to partake of them. He told Swamiji that Ram had appeared to him in a dream and asked him to prepare and carry the dishes for him. The Bania was dumbfounded and fell at the feet of Swamiji begging his pardon. While circumambulating Govardhan hill near Vrindaban a doubt came to Swamiji regarding the utter veracity of the statement of Sri Krishna quoted above. He determined that he would eat only what was offered to him unasked. Hunger gripped him, but he did not relent. Suddenly he heard somebody calling to him from behind. Desiring to test Providence he started running away from him. The man also ran after Swamiji and soon overtook him. He pressed Swamiji to accept the food he had brought and then went away. Swamiji burst into tears to see the Lord fulfilling His word even in these our times. Providential succour came to the Swami again through a lady (Mrs George W. Hale) when he was sitting helpless on the roadside at a fashionable quarter of Chicago in the days before the Parliament of Religions.

Even when the devotees are sleeping God is ever awake to protect them. It was midnight. Two thieves, set on by some jealous people, came to the hut of Tulasidas to steal the original copy of Ramacharitamanas. Tulasidas was sleeping, but they saw two young men equipped with bows and arrows keeping watch near the door. The thieves tried to get inside through the back door, but there also they saw the same young men. Whichever side they turned, they saw to their surprise the same two young men keeping watch. In the early morning they enquired of Tulasidas who those young handsome

gatemens were. After knowing that they were none other than Rama and Lakshmana, the thieves surrendered themselves to him and became his devotees.

The overflowing divine love of the saints easily conquers Kama (worldly desire), Krodha (anger), Lobha (greed), Moha (delusion), Mada (arrogance) and Matsarya (envy) and replaces them with the positive qualities of purity, calmness, simplicity, frankness, humility and service. Renunciation becomes a smooth and natural process to the saints. Lesser things are easily given up for the highest and the most glorious. Once a saint by name Ranka (he was so called because of his extreme and voluntary poverty) was going along, followed at a distance by his wife. On the road he noticed a bag of gold coins. Lest it might rouse a temptation in his wife, he started covering it with dust. When the woman saw this, she asked him why he was putting dust on dust! For lovers of God even gold is dust.

Seeing the same divine presence in all, the saints conquer hatred and anger. The Sufi saint Rabia was once asked, 'Do you love God?' She said 'Yes.' Again she was asked, 'Do you hate Satan?' With equal force she replied, 'No, my love for God leaves no room for hating Satan.' Saint Eknath used to go to the Godavari for a bath. On the way there lived a Pathan who would delight in harassing Hindus. When Eknath would return after taking a bath he would spit on him. Eknath would rebathe and return. Once the Pathan decided to test his patience and spat on him 108 times. Eknath had to take 108 baths. Seeing that his offence could in no way rouse the temper of the saint, the Pathan prostrated at his feet and begged his pardon. The saint replied, 'I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity of taking 108 baths in the sacred river.' He was calm and cheerful as usual, despite all the spitting on him.

Another great characteristic of saints is their complete dependence on God. Once Baba Farid, the Sufi saint, was seen leaning on his staff. Suddenly he became pale and threw

away the staff. On being asked the reason he replied, 'I saw God taking me to task for seeking another support.' Surdas used to tell a story. A sparrow sitting on a tree was pounced upon by a hawk from above and was about to be shot by a hunter from below. The sparrow prayed to God. A snake came there and bit the hunter just when he was about to shoot. As a result his misfired shot killed the hawk and the hunter died of the snake-bite. Because of their total dependence on Him, the Lord protected the honour of Draupadi, and kept Prahlad unscathed through all the ordeals of physical torture inflicted by his father's agents. He saved the life of Jadabharata by killing the wicked man who wanted to sacrifice him before Kali. We also hear of a similar incident in the life of Shankara in which it is said he was providentially saved from being sacrificed by a ruffian.

Surdas in a song says that of all the different types of strength - mental strength, strength of austerity, physical strength, strength of wealth etc., the supreme strength is strength of Divine grace; for by it one gains all the other strengths; by it sinners become saints. Bilvamangal, Augustine, Paul and many others gave up their vicious life and became saints.

God's grace comes through the channel of Satsang - the company of saints. The company of saints is purifying and elevating. All scriptures and men of God eulogise it with one voice. Shankara says: 'Life is fleeting like a drop of water on a lotus leaf. Even a short contact with a saint is enough to lift one from the ocean of worldliness.' It is said that a drop of water vanishes if it falls on a red-hot iron; falling on a lotus leaf it looks like a pearl, but it actually becomes a pearl if it falls into an oyster shell. Satsang, like the last one, turns men into saints. Once three bandits went to a Franciscan hermitage and begged food, but were refused food, and driven away by a brother. The bandits left cursing and vowing vengeance. St Francis, who was away at that time, returned and

heard of the whole incident. He immediately sent out the brother with bread and told him to search for the bandits and feed them. The brother, after a long search, found them and giving them the bread requested them to come back and meet the saint. They came, saw, and were conquered by the saint, through his power of love and winsome talk. He told them of their inherent goodness and they embraced the life of friars. Girish Ghosh, a great dramatist of Bengali literature, who admitted having committed all sorts of sins, was transformed by the magic touch of Sri Ramakrishna. Many more such examples can be quoted from the history of hagiography.

Saints are beacon-lights on the path of men's spiritual evolution. They are a perennial source of inspiration. In the world they create interest for spiritual things, and to aspirants they are spiritual tonics. They live on the borderland of time and timelessness, space and spacelessness, the human and the divine. With ease they come and go from one realm to the other. God is no longer a subject of philosophical discussion to them but a matter of direct experience. They live in poverty of material things, yet possess an abundance of spirituality. They are the humblest, yet the most exalted. They live in the world but are not of it. They radiate love, peace and joy. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and are models for humanity in respect of spiritual enlightenment.

**A Letter by Swami Turiyananda**

**Swami Chetanananda**

Almora, 22 January 1916

Dear Bihari Babu,

I received your letter yesterday after a long time. I heard about your father's passing away from Swami Shivananda's letter.

I am astonished to hear of your wonderful vision. It seems to me that the beautiful "luminous form" would have been a divine being who was kindly waiting to let you know that your departed father had gone through the highest course. It is mentioned in the Vedanta scriptures that an incorporeal being appears at the time of death of a virtuous man and accompanies his soul to a high realm. Or it may have been your father's subtle body. Whatever it was, you are undoubtedly a fortunate person to have had this wonderful vision.

Swamiji used to say that if a person sees a ghost his spiritual experience is greater than that of a scholar or an ordinary spiritual aspirant. Because the seer of a ghost undoubtedly has knowledge about the afterworld, whereas the knowledge of a scholar or an aspirant is limited to books. Such is the characteristic of a supernatural vision, what to speak of your divine vision! Only the gods have luminous forms. Know for certain, this vision will not be in vain.

I see that the old grief for your lost son has again arisen in your mind after the death of your father. What an inscrutable power of Mahamaya! You are well-versed in the scriptures and a man of discrimination and wisdom, still momentarily you are overwhelmed with grief. Referring to the grief for a lost son, the Master used to say: "Lakshmana went to Ravana when the latter fell dead on the battlefield, and exclaimed: 'O Rama, glory be to your arrows! There is no spot on Ravana's body that they have not pierced!' 'Brother,' replied Rama, 'the holes you see in his bones are not from my

arrows. Grief for his sons has pierced them through and through." However, you have taken refuge in the Lord. He will protect you.

"Proclaim it boldly, O son of Kunti, that my devotee never perishes," [Gita, IX.31] - these words are not a poet's imagination, nor a slogan, but the words of God. A devotee is not afraid of prarabdha [the results of past action]. As we have heard from the Master, "Because of his karma, a man was supposed to be pierced by a pike; but by God's grace, his foot was pricked by a thorn instead."

The more the mind becomes pure, the more a person realises that there is nothing outside, and that everything is within himself. The only barrier to the vision of God is the impurity of the mind.

There is a saying, "If I could give up hypocrisy, I would attain Krishna." The Master used to say: "God is near to that person who is simple. A man becomes simple due to the accumulation of a great deal of spiritual discipline in previous births." The spiritual path becomes clear to a simple soul. And again, the more a person is crooked, the more he has problems, and the farther he is away from God. "He is far beyond what is far, and yet here very near at hand." [Mundaka Upanishad, III.1.7]

Everything depends on the difference between simplicity and hypocrisy. Ethics alone do not help if the heart is not guileless. If we do not directly understand the term ethics, then it will be construed with so many meanings, interpretations and opinions. You said the right thing: One must be "absolutely pure and calm." This happens when a person shuns hypocrisy. There is a saying among women, "Every wife knows her husband's name, but does not utter it out of bashfulness." [It is an old custom in India that the wife does not utter her husband's name, out of love and respect, because "expression killeth."] This saying is absolutely true. Do we not know what has held us back and is not allowing



us to realise God? We know it very well - if not always, at least from time to time.

Again, what good is this knowledge? Our attachment for the world is so strong that we are hypnotized by maya; it is as if we are sleeping while awake. We don't really want complete awakening.

There is a beautiful story. Once a king suddenly declared in his court that he would give half of his kingdom to the person who could make him understand how to prepare puffed rice. Afterwards, when the king came to the inner apartment, the queen said to him: "Today you have made a great mistake. Someone will take away half of your kingdom." The king said: "My sweetheart, don't worry. You will see what will take place." The next day several people explained to the king how to prepare puffed rice, but the king said, "No, I don't understand." Then someone brought rice, a stove, a pan and other accessories and demonstrated how to make puffed rice in front of the king. But the king repeated the same thing, "No, I don't understand." What does this mean? It means if the king had said, "I have understood," then he would have lost half his kingdom. So he pretended. Our condition is also the same.

God is real and the world is unreal - if we were fully convinced of this, we would renounce the unreal for the real; but we are reluctant to sever our attachments. That is why we are sleeping while awake. You have said the right thing: "There is no other way than to hold onto God in the crisis of life." Krishna says in the Gita, "Come to me alone for shelter." [XVIII.66] This is the only way.

With love and best wishes,

Turiyananda

## Holy Mother - A Talk

### Swami Aseshananda

Friends, I must frankly express to you that I miss my dear brother, Swami Pavitrananda, very much, as those of you do who came in contact with him and feel his absence as the loss of a light in the midst of darkness. The Swami and I were very close friends during our college days. Together we sat at the feet of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna. I have seen Swami Pavitrananda arguing with Swami Turiyananda, and Turiyananda just smiling at him. At that time, I thought, "Who is this boy who is bold enough to argue with Swami Turiyananda, the great lion of Vedanta?" Then I came to know of him through Swami Akhilananda.

Swami Akhilananda and I studied in the same college. He was senior to me by one year. It was Swami Akhilananda who introduced me to Swami Brahmanandaji, the President of the Order. Almost every week we used to visit Swami Brahmananda and pay our respects. One evening, Maharaj was not present in Balaram Bose's house. Some devotees asked me whether I would like to go to Udbodhan to see Holy Mother. I asked Swami Akhilananda whether he would like to go. He said, "I have some business with a senior Swami. I cannot go, but you had better go. I have seen the Mother but you have not. It will be a good fortune for you."

The Udbodhan was about a ten or fifteen minute walk from Balaram Bose's house. At the Udbodhan I was seated in the office room when Swami Dhirananda, Krishnalal Maharaj, addressed me and said, "Young boy, I have seen you at Balaram Bose's house several times. Who will take your responsibility?" At that time I was studying Kant, Hegel and my favourite philosopher, Plato, whom I admired as the most outstanding philosopher of

Western thought. I liked Aristotle for his system of logic, but Plato I esteemed for his transcendental ideal. To Swami Dhirananda, I explained that I was a rugged individualist, like a young American boy. In St. Paul's College it was compulsory to read the Bible; I did not read the Bhagavad Gita. Swami Dhirananda kept quiet and finally said, "You do not know anything about spiritual life. In spiritual life there should be a mentor, a guide who holds the torch and shows you the way. Suppose you go to a cave temple which is all dark. If you are alone, you bump your head on the walls. But if you find a priest who holds a torch, then you can see the deity unhurt and be satisfied." I asked the Swami, "What do you mean? Kindly explain to me." He replied, "I mean Holy Mother upstairs. You should go and ask her grace to initiate you into spiritual life."

The year was 1917. In those days not much was known about Holy Mother publicly. No books were available depicting her life in detail, and no photographs of her were circulated. The Udbodhan House was built by Swami Saradananda for the convenience of Holy Mother and her relatives when she would come to Calcutta. The office room in which I was seated was downstairs. Upstairs was the shrine room in which Holy Mother lived. Women were permitted to visit the Mother every day, but the men were restricted to Tuesdays and Saturdays only.

Brahmachari Rashbihari, who served Holy Mother in the Udbodhan as well as in Jayrambati, came to the office room where I was seated and said, "Those who want to see the Mother should follow me." He advised us not to speak to Mother, but only to prostrate, touch her feet and return down by another staircase. So I followed him, came before Mother who was veiled, prostrated myself, touched her feet, and proceeded down the stairs. Seeing me, Swami Dhirananda inquired, "Did you ask Mother to shower her grace upon you, to accept you and give you initiation?" I said, "Maharaj, I was not permitted to speak." Then the Swami called, "Rashbihari, you take this boy to Holy

Mother, tell her that he goes to Maharaj and that she should kindly shower her grace upon him." Knowing that Rashbihari was a little orthodox, he explained that I was a brahmin boy, coming from a good family, that I was studying in college, etc. So I was permitted to see Mother again. This time she had no veil. Mother said to me, "Why, my child, you go to Rakhali; Rakhali can give you initiation. He is entitled to give, so why ask me?" I had the good fortune to say, "Mother, if you shower your grace, I will consider it a great privilege. It will be a God-send to me, my great fortune." Then Mother remained silent, and agreed saying, "All right, come after two days. Take your bath in the Ganges, do not take any breakfast, and come to the office room downstairs; wait there till I call you. I will perform Thakur's worship and will send someone to call you upstairs for initiation."

When I came downstairs and reported what Mother said to Swami Dhirananda, he was extremely pleased, so joyful, as if his joy were greater than my joy. That day, I had no idea that I would seek the grace of a great soul in the form of initiation. It was suddenly offered to me. I was then seventeen years old, and at that time I did not know the meaning of initiation. I took it for granted that Mother wanted to make me feel that she was very close to me, that she was my very own even though I was a stranger. To tell you the truth, I did not think at that time that Holy Mother was the Divine Mother herself. It was Swami Saradananda who later opened my eyes to that side of Mother's nature. Mother, as it were, kept all her power hidden. I simply felt she was very kind, very affectionate, very compassionate, but not that she was the Divine Mother come to earth in human form.

Afterwards, I reported my meeting with Mother to Swami Akhilananda. I said I did not know what initiation meant or what I was expected to do, or how to prepare for it. He said he would explain, not to worry. The evening before I was to go to Mother, Swami

Akhilananda and I went to the College Street Market. We bought some fruits, sweets, flowers, and a red-bordered cloth to be offered to the guru. That night I was a little worried. I had heard from Swami Akhilananda that the relationship between the guru and the student was forged by a sacred word, called the mantra. Swami Akhilananda told me that whatever mantra the guru gave in initiation was to be accepted. The student was not to give any suggestions. But I already had a certain way of thinking about my Chosen Ideal. If Mother were to change that, then what would I do? I could not keep quiet. I would have to speak out my mind. I would have to tell her, "Mother, I prefer this way." For some time I was in difficulty and could not sleep.

The next morning, Swami Akhilananda and I took a bath in the Ganges and went to wait in the office of the Udbodhan. The call came and I went upstairs. Mother performed the worship, but did not ask me to meditate in the beginning. Then she gave me the sacred word, and it rang a bell in my heart. I thought, "Mother must be great; she knows my mind." So I was satisfied. Then Mother asked me, "Will you take prasad, cooked food?" I said, "Mother, I have not asked for leave for the whole day, only half the day." So Mother gave me some fruits and sweets and then I returned down the stairs.

Many ask, "What is this initiation?" Mother used to give the reply, "Whatever I am to do for the disciple, I have done at the time of initiation." Those who have been initiated by the great Swamis of our Order should always remember that the guru lives in the mantra. With the repetition of the mantra, the spiritual form of the teacher appears. It is our faith that the mantra given by an illuminated soul has tremendous power. Can you imagine the power then, when the Divine Mother herself comes to this earth and imparts spiritual wisdom to seekers after Truth, to seekers after God?

Rashbihari Maharaj (Swami Arupananda) saw after my initiation that I did not receive a rosary. He said, "Mother has given you spiritual instructions, no doubt, but you do not

have any beads." I said, "Will you kindly help me?" He agreed provided that I would give him the money for purchasing. So I gave him about \$5, and he asked me to return in two days when Holy Mother would purify and sanctify the rosary. After the two days I returned, whereupon he said that for my sake he had examined all the beads to see whether they were mature or immature. I was amazed and said, "How do you examine beads for maturity? We examine people for maturity by their stability, but beads?" Then he described the method: you drop a bead in a bowl of water; if it sinks, then the bead is considered mature; if it floats on the surface, then it is immature. I then went upstairs to Holy Mother with the rosary. She showed me how to perform japa, repeating the Name on the rosary, and described how to think and meditate on the Ishtam, the Chosen Ideal.

In later years, Swami Saradananda gave me the spiritual awakening necessary to understand what I had received on those auspicious days from Holy Mother. When through her grace, I became Swami Saradananda's secretary, the letters he dictated to me gave detailed spiritual instructions to his disciples. If the disciple could not remember the mantra, the Swami would personally write the letter. Otherwise, I wrote all instructions. One day, after the Swami's meditation, I approached him, prostrated myself and said, "Maharaj, Holy Mother instructed me in a very simple way. She did not ask me to repeat the mantra for a fixed number of times in morning or evening, or for special days and all that. She did not give me any fixed method. Maharaj, I want a kind of step by step procedure. Could you please add something?" Then Swami Saradananda said, "You are the greatest fool. Holy Mother is the Divine Mother herself. All these methods and procedures are given by other teachers, but not Holy Mother. Whatever Holy Mother has given you is the last word in spiritual life. You cling to the mantra, repeat it, meditate and think of your Chosen Ideal; and when the longing for the vision of God comes, you will find that your mind will know it, that your mind will be fixed on

the Divine Spirit, and that all your desires will be fulfilled. Do you mean to say that I should add something to what Holy Mother has given? It is due to her grace that I am here even." Swami Saradananda then opened my eyes to the fact that Holy Mother was not simply a saintly woman. She was the embodiment of God as the Divine Mother, the dynamic aspect of Brahman. As fire and its burning power are inseparable, similarly are Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother connected in a spiritual bond which transcends our intellectual understanding and our philosophical wisdom. She was the example of the holy life, pure, simple.

If one desires to contact the Divine Spirit, life should be made holy, ideally as Holy Mother lived, a silent, simple holy life. She was not merely quiet and reserved; no, she had united her mind with the universal Spirit or consciousness and was poised in the Supreme Self. By her initiation, Holy Mother transmitted spiritual power to her disciples; she had the illumination which makes it possible. Hers was a silent, holy life, but her presence created a tangible spiritual atmosphere of grace and peace... a veritable tirtha or place of pilgrimage.

If you were to ask what Holy Mother represented, I would first say the Madonna ideal of the west - the ideal of the eternal virgin of absolute purity. Further, living her silent, holy life in a domestic setting with her relations, Holy Mother represented the householder ideal. Her life exemplifies how the lay devotees can aspire after and realize God. Mother achieved a great domestic harmony and deep spiritual poise while living close to her relatives who were concerned with worldly matters. They did not think in terms of Moksha or liberation; they wanted money and help to solve their many problems and difficulties. It is to Holy Mother that householder devotees can especially turn to for guiding light. To me, Sri Ramakrishna represents more the monastic ideal, as we see in the training of his young disciples. In Mother's life we find the ideal of

profound simplicity. From Mother I have learned these values: simplicity and purity. All great things in life are very simple. The mother's love that we enjoy as children is very simple. But despite Holy Mother's great simplicity, there was a subtlety which made her difficult to understand. We are prone to think in sensational, supernatural and uncommon ways. What seems natural is for us too ordinary. If given a mantra and told to wrap it three times around our head and do this and that, then we would believe it was really something. But if given in a simple way, do we understand its worth? Holy Mother was the ideal teacher who gave spiritual instructions in a simple way. Due to her grace I was able to think in terms of joining this Order and do my part in her work for the devotees. But I have understood very little of her. Sri Ramakrishna truly understood Mother, and the grand ideals she represented. That is why he spoke to Golap-Ma in the way in which she described to me one incident.

I joined the Order after Holy Mother's mahasamadhi (passing away), and I had the privilege of serving Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma, Holy Mother's companions. I can say it now, that it was not easy to serve them. They were very exacting. One day I said to Golap-Ma, "If I had joined the Order when Holy Mother was alive, I could have served her." Then Golap-Ma said, "Who could understand her? I have lived so close with her, and could not understand her." She then related this incident to me how one time she had heard from someone that Sri Ramakrishna left Dakshineswar and went to Shyampukur because Holy Mother was feeding him too much, which aggravated his illness. Holy Mother was then living in the Nahabat at Dakshineswar. As soon as she heard that, she walked all the way to Sri Ramakrishna and asked him, "Is it a fact that you are dissatisfied with my service, and that is the reason why you have come to Shyampukur?" Stunned, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Who said that?" Then Holy Mother told him that she had heard from so and so that it is Golap. "Let that brahmin woman come. I am going to teach her a lesson." When Sri Ramakrishna would become angry, none could approach him. Then Golap came the next



day. Sri Ramakrishna said to her, "Did you say that, did you? Go and ask pardon. If she becomes dissatisfied, then you will have no place here." Then he said, "Sarada-Saraswati, although she looks like Sarada (that means the name only), she is the Divine Mother Herself, the giver of knowledge and wisdom. She has come to impart wisdom, the knowledge of God, and to give illumination by her grace." Golap-Ma then told me that she cried all the way from Shyampukur to Daksineswar and fell at Holy Mother's feet and said to her. "Mother, please forgive me. I heard from so and so, therefore I repeated. I should not have done that. Forgive me. Thakur has become very angry. He will not allow me to see him anymore until you pardon me." Then Holy Mother patted her on the back saying, "Forget, forget. You are my daughter; a mother cannot be angry with her daughter. You tell Thakur that I am quite pleased with you." You see, Golap-Ma was so frank and outspoken that she landed into difficulty. It was Sri Ramakrishna who opened Golap-Ma's eyes a little to Mother's unique divine nature and calibre.

This spiritual knowledge which Holy Mother came to disseminate by the example of her life and experience is really beyond our faith or reason. Its nature is to awaken us from our "dogmatic slumber" of philosophy. Mother represents the divine wisdom that is born of transcendental experience wherein there is no distinction between subject and object. There comes a point where reason is unreason, and we realise that it cannot solve all problems. Reason divides between subject and object and further determines the categories of time, space and causation. Whatever we know through reason is coloured by the intellect. As long as we live in the world of time, space and causation, our knowledge is only partial and pragmatic. That is what is called maya. It is not illusion. It means what is relative to the state of our consciousness. The west has accepted two traditions: one theological, and the other scientific. But these belong to the category of lower knowledge and not the divine knowledge which Holy Mother represents. Holy Mother's life and spiritual experience transcend the realm of duality.

Her life demonstrated what man must seek and how to seek it. Great Teachers like Christ, Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother come to live the life and make the experience of God real to mankind. We must strive to live up to the spiritual ideal which these great luminaries present before us in their lives. Such great souls as Holy Mother come to give the supreme knowledge that the bounds of death can be crossed, to give the firm conviction that we can realise our true nature. Their lives are the highest blessing to mankind. Therefore, I believe that as long as I follow Holy Mother's footprints and am true to the mantra she has given me out of her infinite grace, then I will be able to do the work she has given me, at least to my own satisfaction. You see, unless a man is satisfied within himself, he cannot give real satisfaction to others. Only light can give light. And Holy Mother, being the Divine Mother herself, gave this light for the sake of mankind and its attainment of brahmajnana and liberation from relative existence.

I heard one time from Holy Mother's disciple, Chandra Mohandutta, that he was going to take his bath with Swami Shuddhananda, who later became the President of our Order. I was then working as the assistant to the manager of the office in the Udbodhan, and Chandra was attending to the packing of books. Swami Shuddhananda said to Chandra, "Well, you go to Mother, what do you ask her for?" Chandra replied, "I ask her for some sweets as prasad." Then the Swami said, "Have you come to Mother only to beg prasad? Have you come only for that? Mother is mukti-dayana, the giver of liberation. You ask Mother for brahmajnana and for liberation." Chandra said, "All right, Swami, I will do that." So, returning to the Udbodhan, Chandra went to Mother's room by the staircase in front of Golap-Ma's room. Mother was then performing the noon-day worship and was silent, as is customary while at worship. Mother saw Chandra and asked through a sign. "My child, what can I do for you?" Chandra said, "I got palpitation of heart. I was thinking that I would ask, 'Mother, please give me brahmajnana, the knowledge of Brahman - and if that is too much, then mukti, or liberation, or at least moksha.' But no word

would come. I felt as though I were suffocating. Then I somehow blurted out, 'Prasad, Mother!' Then Holy Mother pointed out a plate of prasada covered underneath her cot." Chandra said he took some rasgollas, sandesh and chum-chums and went away. He told Swami Shuddhananda, "Well, Swami, I was prepared to ask, but something happened, I do not know what." Therefore, it cannot be tutored; it must be the spontaneous yearning of the child to its Mother for deliverance from the bonds of maya. But Chandra was so very devoted to Mother, and Mother was so very fond of him. I believe that at the last moment he came into Mother's arms and took eternal refuge from this relative world.

It is because of Chandra that I became so very devoted to Swami Saradananda and dedicated to his service. Chandra told me one day that he went to Holy Mother and said to her in all sincerity, "Mother, I want to serve you." And Mother said, "No, my child, Sarala is there" - Sarala later became Bharataprana, the President of Sarada Math. "But you go and serve my child Sharat. If you are loyal, steadfast and sincere in your service to him, you will attain brahmajnana. Anyone who will serve Sharat in such a manner will reach the highest." And that is the reason why I did not like to go anywhere leaving Swami Saradananda. As long as this great soul would allow me to serve him, I wanted to be near him. The Swamis used to go to Allahabad for kumbhamehla, and Swami Saradananda one time asked me if I would like to go, that many Swamis would assemble. I said, "Maharaj, I am quite content here, I do not want to go anywhere."

To me, Swami Saradananda was like Mother, my mother. It was due to Mother's grace that the distance between Swami Saradananda and myself was removed, and he allowed me the great fortune to serve him. You see, the first day when I went to see Holy Mother, Swami Saradananda scolded me strongly for being careless and leaving my shoes at the threshold. I thereby became much afraid of Swami Saradananda and would avoid

meeting him. But I would pray to Mother to remove this fear when I would go to the shrine. Then, suddenly, one day the Swami called me and asked, "Would you be able to write letters for me?" I said, "Yes, Maharaj." "But one thing," he said, "do not disclose anything you write down ever to your best friend." I said, "Maharaj, if I be disloyal to your trust, then you can fire me." But I kept my promise. If anyone would ask me any questions, I would keep silent. When one of Swami Saradananda's disciples complained and requested the Swami to write the letter himself, he said, "But I am writing through a person who will not let out a single word, even at the cost of his life." Then I thought, "Well, how does he know that?" You see, trust begets trust.

These great souls such as Holy Mother and Swami Saradananda come down from their Himalayan heights, live with us as our mentors, as our torch-bearers and guide us to the supreme goal of God - realisation in this very life. So really it is very difficult for me to speak of such an ideal teacher as Holy Mother. I have simply touched her feet, have seen her face and have heard her voice. Now I look forward with the intense care and attention of my mind for her to take me across from the world of maya to the world of eternal sunshine, unflinching beauty and everlasting joy and truth.

The pang of separation from the Beloved Lord cannot be described in human words, nor comprehended by the logical mind, but it can be felt by a devoted heart. We can live without many things, but we cannot live without God. We must try to be true and dedicated to our ideal. With all humility and reverence, I say that anything I have been able to achieve in this life is due to the grace of Holy Mother. And, therefore, I commend you all to the care of Sri Ramakrishna, the modern symbol and expression of universal love, and to the care of Holy Mother, who will be your Divine Mother and accept you, whatever you are without asking any questions. They will lift your consciousness to the height where the Supreme Truth will be realised, where the sun

will ever shine and the darkness of maya disappear forever.

## The Message of the Upanishads

### Swami Swahananda

*"All the books contained in the Upanishads have one subject, one task before them - to prove the following theme: just as by the knowledge of one lump of clay, we have the knowledge of all the clay in the universe, so what is that, knowing which, we know everything in the universe? The Upanishads are the great mine of strength; therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world. The whole world can be vivified, made strong, energized through them. They will call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable and the downtrodden of all races, all creeds, and all sects, to stand on their feet and be free. Freedom - physical freedom, mental freedom, and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upanishads. In modern language, the theme of the Upanishads is to find an ultimate unity of things. Knowledge is nothing but finding unity in the midst of diversity. Every science is based upon this; all human knowledge is based upon the finding of unity in the midst of diversity. And if it is the task of small fragments of human knowledge, which we call our sciences, to find unity in the midst of a few different phenomena, the task becomes stupendous when the theme before us is to find unity in the midst of this marvellously diversified universe, where prevail unnumbered differences in name and form, in matter and spirit, each thought differing from every other thought, each form differing from every other form. Yet to harmonize these many planes in unending lokas, in the midst of this infinite variety to*

*find unity, is the theme of the Upanishads." Swami Vivekananda*

The Upanishads are the basic books of the philosophy of Vedanta. The Upanishads themselves are called the Vedanta, because they are the culmination of the philosophy of the Vedas, the holy books of the Hindus. The words veda anta mean "the end of the Vedas", in the sense also of occurring at the end of each Veda.

There are four Vedas, and every Veda contains some Upanishads. There were many Upanishads, but most of them have been lost through the centuries, because in the earliest days there was no written script and much of the material had to be handed down orally. And that is why the Veda is called shruti, "that which is heard," or handed down through hearing. Each of the Vedas has two parts: a ritualistic part, and a philosophical part, and each philosophical part has two sections, called Aranyaka and Upanishad. So the last portion of each of the Vedas is called Upanishad. The Upanishads are the main source materials for Indian philosophical thought. All the later philosophical and religious thought in India can be traced back to the Upanishads. Some of these Upanishads were before Buddha, who lived six centuries before Christ. The Upanishadic ideas were gradually spread throughout the world through Buddhism and other later systems.

About 180 or so Upanishads have been counted, but some of these are very recent and of non-Vedic origin. There is an Upanishad called the Allah Upanishad, written by Darashiko, son of Shah Jahan, a great Moghul emperor. Darashiko was the man who got the Upanishads translated for the first time into Persian, and from the Persian they were translated into German and Latin, after which they spread throughout Europe. Then there is an Upanishad called the Chaitanya Upanishad. Chaitanya (1486-1534) was a saint. In the 1960s a book called the Christo Upanishad came out in India. And there is also a Ramakrishna Upanishad, written about Sri Ramakrishna. The Ramakrishna

Upanishad was written by Rajagopalachari, the last Governor General of India, who was also a great thinker and writer. It is not exactly written in the pattern of the old Upanishads, but still, Rajagopalachari calls it an Upanishad. So, many of the works called Upanishads are of recent composition. Out of these 180 Upanishads, 108 are called orthodox, because several centuries ago, they were included in a list in the Sarva-darshana-sangraha of Madhavacharya.

Out of these 108 orthodox Upanishads, about twenty are very popular, having been written several centuries or even one thousand years ago and are often quoted by commentators and writers. Of these twenty, ten are considered very important, because Acharya Shankara, the greatest philosopher India has ever produced, who gave us the monistic philosophy of Vedanta, wrote commentaries on them. He gave this philosophy, culling out ideas from the first ten Upanishads, which are quite ancient.

Sanskrit is a language in which every item will have to have a meaning, and onto each item some specific meaning will be put. The etymology of the word upanishad can be traced to shad, a verb which means "to destroy"- that is one of its meanings. So, that which thoroughly destroys the bondage of samsara, transmigratory existence, is Upanishad. Can a book destroy this ignorance? Knowledge destroys ignorance. Upanishad means the knowledge contained in the book. So in a secondary sense the word upanishad refers to the book. But primarily, upanishad means, "that knowledge which destroys the ignorance which is the cause of transmigratory existence". Some other meanings have been also given to the word upanishad. In ancient days, knowledge would be transmitted orally, or verbally - there were no books, and books were very rare in later days. So a student would go to a teacher, sit near him, and learn from him. The word upanishad has also been interpreted to mean "that which takes one near the teacher". The Upanishads gave the truth - but how was this truth arrived at? Great thinkers, great men

and women of actual realization - saints or sages, as we call them - intuited certain truths in their moments of communion, and later recorded these truths, or transmitted them to later generations, but in the texts, recourse to stories and anecdotes is often taken to present a truth; in the Upanishads, you will sometimes see that local colours - the local cosmology and conceptions of those days - have become mixed in. Swami Vivekananda says that it is the knowledge aspect of the Upanishads - the record of the truths intuited by saints and sages in their moments of communion which is eternally true - which constitutes the true Upanishads.

In the Upanishads a few ideas stand out very prominently - the most important of these being the idea of Oneness. As Swami Vivekananda observed above, the one incessant question is, "What is that, by knowing which, everything else is known?" So the Upanishads' one basic idea is that behind this universe, behind everything that we see, is one substance. Call it the background substance, the unique substance - the Upanishads refer to it as Brahman or Atman - the one substance behind everything.

The Upanishads, along with the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahmasutras, are the basic books of Hindu philosophy. All the different schools of Hinduism have to agree to accept the teachings of these three books, and get their support from them. But different philosophies based on the teachings of the Upanishads gradually evolved.

Within Vedanta, three major schools arose: the dualistic school, the qualified non-dualistic school, and the non-dualistic school. Every philosophical system is concerned with three fundamental questions: what is the nature of man, what is the nature of God (the Ultimate Reality), and, what is the nature of the world? Religions rely upon philosophies which try to discover the nature of these three things. The dualistic school said that man, God, and nature are different, but that God is the source of all. God creates nature and man, and they are dependent on Him. The qualified non-dualistic



school took up a sort of middle position. It said, no, the ultimate truth is one. The Ultimate Reality is one, but the soul aspect can be described by a human analogy: a man has a soul and a body, so the soul of God is the summation of all the souls in the universe, and the body of God is the summation of all the bodies. But the strict monistic or non-dualistic system - the advaita vada of Shankara - said that all these three are ultimately one; man, nature and God are ultimately made of the same substance. Regarding man, the non-dualists' analysis was very simple: a man exists. He knows that he exists. He doesn't require any proof to establish that he exists. A hundred arguments that he doesn't exist can be brought against his conviction, but he is not going to accept it. So start an inquiry from that point. What are you, regarding which you don't have any doubt? You see, all philosophical thought patterns, all philosophical systems, start from the experience. On the basis of experience, a philosophy is worked out - with the help of logic, inference, and so forth. So, said the non-dualists, start with your experience. It is every man's definite experience that he exists. Now try to find out exactly what it is in you that exists. What is existence? There is a big discussion among the philosophers about the nature of existence.

D.M. Datta, a professor of philosophy in India, wrote an interesting article, "Does God Exist?", in which he pointed out that there are eighteen different possible meanings of the combination of these three words: Does God Exist? He did not give all the meanings in the short article. He asks, what exactly is meant by existence? What is actual existence? And what is meant by God? And then, does God exist? After writing the whole article, in the last line the professor mentions that all these arguments are also applicable to the question, "Does matter exist?" We take it for granted that matter exists, but it can't be proven because of logical fallacies and the logical difficulties of pinpointing the definitions. So most of our definitions are working definitions for our

day-to-day existence, for some sort of common understanding.

So, taking for granted that we know what existence is, the non-dualists said, "Now, what is that in you which exists, really?" Reality is that which is always real. If a thing is real today, and not real tomorrow, we don't call that reality. What is there in man which is always real? That is the simple question. Is the body real? The body dies after a hundred years; it is changing every day. So the body is not really a reality. It is temporarily real, of course. We often give the example of a mother who puts different dresses on her child. Today the child wears an African dress, tomorrow an Indian dress, then a Japanese dress, a Chinese dress - but aside from all these dresses, the child has a form of her own. Similarly, man has a body. The body is constantly changing. But what is it in him which is permanent? The body is evidently not permanent, so the status of the body is, at best, the status of a dress - like the African dress of an American girl. What about the mind? The mind is constantly changing. Is there anything beyond the mind? The Upanishads say, yes, there is something beyond. And what is that? It is the Spirit, the Atman. The Atman is behind the body and the mind.

Scientific and logical thinkers have come forward and said, no, we cannot accept this. Their position is called agnosticism. The agnostics' position is that there ought to be some truth behind what we see, but they don't know the nature of that truth. Their argument is that all our studies are based upon our sense experience, or the data given by sense experience. Inference is made on the basis of that experience. And through studies of the external phenomena, we really cannot go to the fundamental nature of things. That is one of the limitations of science, as you know. The philosophers of science put it that way.

But the Upanishads say, as have all religions in some way or another, that there is something permanent in man, and that is the Spirit. Man continues. This is a special

plank of the Upanishads - that the ultimate nature of man is not the body, not the mind, but the Spirit. If this is so, then the Spirit is the elemental substance behind this universe. Once you have reached that awareness, there is no death for you - no further change. The moment you know it, you are free. Bondage comes because of our wrong identification with limiting things: we consider ourselves to be the body, we consider ourselves to be the mind. Body and mind are limited. Body and mind are defective - and that is why all the limitations and defects come to us. It is a case of wrong identification, say the Upanishads.

The Vedantins have an interesting story to illustrate the idea that unless you are able to separate the truth from the untruth, the reality from the non-reality, you won't get at the truth at all. It is a story of a drunkard. A man was heavily drunk at midnight. He had the desire to eat some sweetmeats, so he went to the sweetmeat shop. He went on knocking on the door until the shopkeeper opened it. The drunkard asked the shopkeeper for some sweets. Since it is not convenient to argue with a drunkard - it's better to satisfy him - the shopkeeper produced the sweets. Then the man produced a ten rupee note. The shopkeeper said, "Oh, I can't give you change at midnight!" "It doesn't matter," said the drunkard. "Tomorrow I shall come back for the change." The drunk was in a good mood. So, he took the sweets and went away. Suddenly he said to himself, "I must remember the shop." He came back, took a look, and found that a bull was lying down in front of the shop.<sup>1</sup> The next day the drunkard returned for his change, and found that the bull was lying in front of a tailor's shop. So he went to the shop and asked, "Where is my money?" "What money?" asked the tailor. "Why, last night I bought one rupee worth of sweets and I gave you a ten rupee bill. Where are my nine rupees?" The tailor said, "Don't you see that this is a tailor's shop?" "Yes, I see. Just to cheat me of nine rupees you have changed the shop itself." "Why do you say that?" asked the tailor. "I have definite proof," said the drunkard. "That bull is lying down in front of the shop just

as it did last night."

So, Vedanta says, a man believes himself to be something else, because of proximity. He is really the Spirit, but because of his long identification with the mind and the body he thinks he is the mind and the body. And if anything happens to the mind and the body, he thinks it is happening to him. It is not. The mistake comes because of identification. The more identified he is, the more he suffers for it.

Another story is told, to pinpoint this idea. A man went to the cattle market. In India this old tradition exists even now. Some special markets are famous for special types of merchandise. In some special places cows are sold, thousands of cows, and thousands of people will come and buy them. One man went to that market. He talked, haggled, as is the custom, paid his money, took the cow and started to go home. On the way an accident happened and the cow died. Now who will feel sorry about it? The man who reared the cow for two years, and fed it with all affection and concern, or the man who had just bought it fifteen minutes ago? Naturally, it will be the man who paid the money, because he knows it is his cow. So when you feel for your body, and feel for your mind, it is because you feel identification. It is my body, my mind. Or you confuse it further: I myself am this body and mind. The suffering comes because of this identification. If you are wearing a shirt on your body, and the shirt catches fire, your body catches fire. But if you have removed the shirt and put it on a hanger, and the shirt catches fire, you don't catch fire. Similarly, by daily contemplation and analysis, you will be able to separate yourself from the body and the mind. Know that you are not the body and the mind, but the Spirit, and you assert your Spirit nature. From this position comes the whole spiritual view of life. All the things that we see around us are really the manifestation of the same Spirit, so our day-to-day living must be based on that outlook. That is the Vedantic position. Is it possible to do it overnight? It need not

be - you can learn it gradually. In every situation that point has to be remembered - I am not the body, not the mind, but the Spirit.

In the Ramakrishna circle, we accept the various aspects of spiritual training. But there is an extreme school in Vedanta which doesn't teach any rites and ceremonies, any ritual, any devotions, any pilgrimage, any other austerities - they only say, "Know thyself - Atmanam viddhi" - Know yourself, your real nature. What are you? If you go to a holy man of that sect with a problem, and say to him, "O sir, I am in great trouble. I am very much mentally upset and agitated, very much anxious and worried," he will smile and ask, "Who are you?" "Oh, I am Jack." "No, who are you really? Are you the body? Are you the mind? Where is the pain located? Is it in the body or the mind?" "It is in the mind." "But are you the mind?" "No, but the pain is in my mind." `That's all right, but you are not the mind." In this way he tries to make the man understand what his real nature is. It is not merely an ordinary understanding; it must be accepted in the heart. We can often theoretically accept an idea, but to translate it into action is not easy. This idea must be accepted wholeheartedly. Then only will it become a part of our nature.

Man turns to philosophical or religious thinking partly because of the desire to avoid the pains of experience. Life is comprised of both pleasurable experience and painful experience. For a pleasurable experience, you don't require a philosophy, or a religion, or any theory. You just float. It is only when things go wrong that you want an explanation. And that is why Sankhya, a philosophical system of India, begins with this aphorism: "Questioning comes in the mind of man only when he comes in touch with suffering." If there is no suffering, there is no questioning. But it is the law of nature that some time or other you will have to experience suffering. Of course, a very dull mind may require more hammering, but for a sensitive mind, it will be sufficient if it gets a little suggestion.

Consider a mind like Buddha's. He was the son of a king, a prince, healthy, a good fighter; he had a beautiful young wife, a little child, a palace, name, fame, and money - everything a normal man covets and often doesn't get. Buddha had everything. It was predicted earlier in Buddha's life that he would either become a great king, the greatest monarch of India, or, he would be the greatest spiritual leader of the world. So naturally his father, an affectionate father - wanted his son to experience enjoyment, so he kept him shut off from seeing or experiencing any suffering. He kept him always surrounded with enjoyable things, with singing and dancing, and so forth. But one day Buddha went out, and he experienced not his own suffering, but the suffering of other people - somebody who had become old, somebody who had become sick, somebody who had died - and Buddha said, "What is this? Suffering is such a reality," The Mahayana Buddhists say the gods contrived to make those suffering people come before Buddha's eyes. Just the mere sight of some suffering people created tremendous dispassion in his mind, and a spirit of inquiry - "What is this? Suffering is such a reality. I did not know." So one of the cardinal doctrines or truths of Buddhism is that dukkha, suffering, is a reality. A way to remove suffering is offered by Buddhism.

So when things go wrong, a philosophy is required. How much help can a man really get from this type of non-dualistic, Upanishadic philosophy, which says you are not the body, not the mind, but the Spirit? Man has got pain - physical pain and suffering, mental pain and suffering. How is he going to utilize the philosophy? The Vedantins say the philosophy is quite useful. Whenever an experience of suffering comes, analyze: Who actually is suffering? Are you, who are the Spirit, really suffering now? Whenever suffering comes, go on asserting, "I am the Spirit, not the body, not the mind." And ignore the suffering. This is one technique - the Vedantic technique, the philosophical technique - applied philosophy you can say. "Applied" Vedanta will be to remember in these moments your real nature - which is not the body, not the mind, but the Spirit.

Another method is the yogi's training. The yogi develops so much mastery of the mind

