

Magazine Articles September / October 2007

1. **Divine Wisdom**
2. **Editorial**
3. **Blanca Schlamm - Atmananda (1904-1985)**
The Odyssey of a Western Seeker
Hans Heimer
4. **Prayer and its Fulfilment - Swami Bhavyananda**
5. **Leaves of an Ashrama: 23 - Grinning and Bearing It**
Swami Vidyatmananda
6. **The Power of Words - Clement James Knott**
7. **Passion Transformed - Swami Chetanananda**
8. **Seeds (continued) - Swami Yatiswarananda**

Divine Wisdom

"Why should the universe be unreal? That is a speculation of the philosophers. After realizing God, one sees that it is God Himself who has become the universe and all living beings.

"The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness - all was Consciousness. "I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss - the Bliss of Satchidananda. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him also I saw the Power of the Divine Mother vibrating.

"That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine MOther. I clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything - even the cat. The manager of the temple garden wrote to Mathur Babu saying that I was feeding the cat with the offering intended for the Divine Mother. But Mathur Babu had insight into the state of my mind. He wrote back to the manager: 'Let him do whatever he likes. You must not say anything to him.'

"After realizing God, one sees all this aright - that it is He who has become the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. But what remains when God completely effaces the ego cannot be described in words. As Ramprasad said in one of his songs, 'Then alone will you know whether you are good or I am good!' I get into even that state now and then.

"A man sees a thing in one way through reasoning and in an altogether different way when God Himself shows it to him."

Steadfastness Editorial

Steadfastness or absence of fickleness is one of the most important spiritual qualities. In most persons the mind has been allowed to run wild and follow its own sweet will and desires. The mind is like a spoiled child who is indulged by his parents or it is like a badly trained animal. Control of the mind is a thing unknown to most of us. It is said the average attention span of a modern mind is no more than twenty seconds.

Importance of the mind and its control

No question has been asked or answered as frequently as how to control the mind. Our feeling of well-being depends on the state of our mind. The mind plays a most crucial role in human life. The Gita tells us that "mind is our best friend when kept under control and becomes our worst enemy when we lose control over it."

If we do not restrain and direct the mind towards a higher goal we will never feel the sense of fulfilment and joy of life. Inability to restrain the mind can lead to mental sickness. What could be more revealing than the fact that one person in four is mentally sick in the developed nations! The mind uncontrolled and unguided is a dangerous instrument that may bring harm to ourselves and to others, whereas a controlled mind will save us from the dangers of life and will free us from all bondage. A controlled mind brings success in every field of life.

Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation, of happiness and unhappiness, of success and failure, of health and sickness, of good and evil. Sri Ramakrishna says: "It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. If you are in bad company, then you will talk and think like your companions. On the other hand, when you are in the company of devotees, you will think and talk only of God."

There is a well-known saying that even after one obtains the grace of three (the grace of God, the Guru, and holy company) one comes to grief for the lack of the grace of "one" (one's own mind)!

There is no greater blessing than a mind that is filled with righteous, noble, positive and strength-giving thoughts, and no greater treasure than a mind filled with joy, peace and harmony. Such a mind is the key to success, health, wealth, power, prosperity, and, of course, to spiritual progress.

Realization of God or Self-knowledge is the goal of life according to Vedanta. Only a pure and controlled mind can liberate us and lead us to God-realization.

No wonder so much of importance is given to the study and control of the mind.

Patanjali, the author of Yoga Aphorisms defines Yoga as "The control of mind-stuff."

Why is the mind so restless?

The mind is restless because it is weak and impure. On the surface the mind seems to be so fickle and restless because it is filled with innumerable desires. So it is natural for us to conclude that when all the desires are fulfilled the mind will automatically become calm and tranquil. Nothing is further from truth. Giving in to desires is like adding fuel to fire. However many times we may fulfil desires the mind will never become satiated; on the contrary desires will only become all the more stronger.

The mind is restless because it knows, instinctively, though unconsciously, that we are all Divine, Infinite, and Immortal souls. The mind will become tranquil only when it attains perfection, Self-knowledge or God-realization.

Conquest of Mind

Swami Vivekananda says: "How hard it is to control the mind! Well has it been compared to the maddened monkey. There was a monkey, restless by his own nature, as all monkeys are. As if that were not enough some one made him drink freely of wine, so that he became still more restless. Then a scorpion stung him. To complete his misery a demon entered into him. What language can describe the uncontrollable restlessness of that monkey?"

It is difficult to control the mind, but there are definite guidelines that slowly but surely help us in controlling the mind.

1. Have a definite noble goal in life. A person without a goal is like a rudderless boat adrift in the sea of life. A fixed goal is a great help in restraining the restless mind.
2. The mind can be controlled by Abhyasa and Vairagya. Abhyasa is constant effort to fix the mind on God or the Self. Vairagya is dispassion or non-attachment to sense objects.
3. Sit alone and watch the thoughts of the mind as a witness. Do not identify yourself with the thoughts. Let us not think of the past or the future nor allow the mind to build images. Let us try to live in the present. Then the mind will gradually become calm and comes under our control.
4. Another way to control the mind is to do a thing which the mind does not want to do and deny a thing which the mind hankers after very much.
5. Regular practice of simple Pranayama or breath control helps make the mind steady and one-pointed.
6. In this age the easiest way for controlling the mind and attaining liberation is through japa and meditation. Japa is singing the Names and Glories of the Lord. Japa of the Mantra of our chosen deity and contemplation of the divine destroys the impurities of the mind, makes the mind inward and helps concentration, eventually leading to control of mind and attainment of God-realization.
7. Regular study of spiritual books, a bit of austerity, and, above all, cultivation of holy company goes a long way in the control of mind.
8. The quality and quantity of food we eat has a great influence over the mind. Sattvic food (milk, fruits, etc.) calms the mind. Rajasic food (hot, spicy, sweet foods etc) excites the mind.
9. Retiring into solitude now and then can help greatly. Swami Brahmananda has this advice: "The easiest way to purify and steady the mind is to retire into solitude, control all cravings, and engage yourself in contemplation and meditation. The more you occupy the mind with holy thoughts, the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment. Just as a cow yields much milk when it is well fed, so when the mind is fed spiritual food it will yield greater tranquillity. Spiritual food consists of meditation, prayer, contemplation, and japam.

"Another way to steady the mind is to let it wander, but to keep a steady watch over its wanderings. After a while the mind itself becomes tired and comes back to find peace in God. If you watch your mind, your mind will in turn watch over you."

10. Selfless service according to one's capacity is very helpful in purifying and controlling the mind.

11. Finally let us not forget that mind can be brought under control by the grace of God alone. Sri Ramakrishna says: "Bondage and liberation are both of Her making. By Her Maya worldly people become entangled in 'woman and gold', and again, through Her grace they attain their liberation. She is called Saviour, and the remover of the bondage that binds one to the world."

Swami Dayatmananda

Blanca Schlamm - Atmananda (1904-1985)

The Odyssey of a Western Seeker

Hans Heimer

When I first read the book 'Death Must Die' on which this article is based, I was deeply impressed. I was born in Vienna in 1927, 23 years after Blanca's birth, with a very similar background to hers. Being a Jewish boy aged 11, I too had to leave Vienna in 1938, because of the incorporation of Austria into Germany by the Nazis. My father who was a follower of Jiddu Krishnamurti (JK), attended the annual international summer camp in Ommen, Holland, as well as lectures and discussion groups in Austria. He also organised regular readings from JK's books in our apartment with a small group and instant translations from the English books into German. Because of this association with JK, I am sure that Blanca and my father knew each other and she may well have been a member of that small group and have known me as a child.

JK's teachings strongly attracted and helped to sustain my parents, especially his constant condemnation of war, persecution and the other shortcomings of Western civilisation. Later on I too became a follower of JK, whose teachings were a step in my own quest towards self-realization. Only when my knowledge matured, did I realize the limitations of JK's philosophy and my struggles to overcome these were very similar to Blanca's.

Blanca's Youth, 1904-1930

Blanca was born on 7th June 1904 in Vienna, the daughter of a wealthy Jewish businessman from a Polish family and her mother was from a Czechoslovakian family. There were early tragedies in her life. When Blanca was two years old her mother died after giving birth to a baby girl. This girl, Blanca's beloved younger sister, died of diphtheria when she was 17 years old, shortly before Blanca's 19th birthday. Blanca and her sister had been lovingly cared for and provided with the comprehensive education that their father wished for them. They had one tutor who spoke only French until the children were fluent in that language, and then another who only conversed in English. They had music lessons at a young age and were taken to concerts and operas. Aged eight, Blanca already showed outstanding musical talents. The best available grand

piano was bought for her and she took her practice very seriously, becoming a prodigy and giving her first acclaimed public recital when she was 16 years old. At an early age Blanca became interested in literature and read widely.

Before the First World War, Vienna was the capital of a Central European empire, with a very rich cultural and intellectual life; the city of Freud, Klimt, Mahler, Kreisler, Mach, Wittgenstein and Popper. After the war, the empire was dismantled by the victorious allies and a poverty-stricken Austria was the result. Blanca's family became poor and Vienna became the oversized capital of a small, mostly agrarian state.

When she was 16, while walking alone through a park, pondering the senseless destruction around her, one of the defining moments of her life occurred. "Suddenly, all matter - trees, rocks, the sky, water - was vibrantly alive and filled with a divine light in which there was no separation between the seer and the seen, but only an ecstatic unity which was by definition eternal love. For one timeless moment all this was overwhelmingly revealed to her and this revelation was to be the driving force of her life from then on¹. It is interesting to note that the great Austrian physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach (1838-1916), had a very similar experience aged 17-18, which completely shaped his subsequent life and philosophy.

Many people in Vienna were disillusioned and some had turned to the Theosophical Society (founded in 1875) to satisfy their thirst for knowledge and certainty. The leaders of the Society had proclaimed the young Jiddu Krishnamurti (JK 1895-1986) as the 'Vehicle' for the anticipated 'World Teacher'. The Society made JK the head of one of their internal groups called 'The Order of the Star in the East'. JK had been educated and trained by the Society to fulfil this role and had started his world travels, visiting Vienna in 1923. He was an intelligent, charming and attractive young man.

Blanca had been brought up to critically examine statements and views presented to her, the mind being considered the ultimate arbiter. She had been attracted by the teachings of Theosophy, had joined the Vienna branch and had quickly reached the innermost circle of the branch. It was at that stage she decided to keep a diary to record her spiritual work and progress. The first entry is 'Vienna 21st April 1925' when Blanca was nearly 21. The diary was written in English and, with breaks, contains some 800 entries.

The Theosophical Society celebrated its 50th anniversary at its headquarters in Adyar, Madras in December 1925, with more than 3,000 delegates from all parts of the world. Blanca attended this, on her first trip to India. There she met the leaders of the Society and was enthusiastic about Theosophy and her progress in this system of belief. She returned to Vienna in February 1926 from where she moved to Huizen in Holland where she became organist to the Liberal Catholic Church, a Christian group in the Society. Nearby was Ommen, where the Order of the Star held an annual summer camp attended by members from all parts of the world and by the Society leaders including JK. Blanca threw herself into the various activities of Theosophy including attendance at Ommen. She became more and more attracted to JK and his teachings. At the 1927 camp JK declared that he had become united with the 'Beloved' (the Universal), his individual self having been destroyed.

At the 1929 camp, JK made his famous speech, declaring that "Truth is a pathless land and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever". He then dissolved the Order of the Star in the East. At one stroke, JK had destroyed the foundations of the Theosophical Society, its hierarchical structure, as well as the search for and reliance on external assistance in spiritual growth. This iconoclastic approach, which JK followed for the rest of his life, caused enormous distress and division to members of the Society. Blanca was terribly upset at many of her previous beliefs being shattered, but she was very impressed by JK's actions and words and decided to terminate her church commitments and returned to Vienna in 1930. The last entry in her diary for that period is 'Huizen,

17th August 1929'.

To India as a Teacher (1930-1943)

The years 1930-1935 were spent in Vienna, giving piano lessons, performing, and continuing with the devotion to JK's teachings. JK had started an experimental school situated in a beautiful pastoral spot on the Ganges on the outskirts of Benares at Rajghat, for students and teachers to live according to his philosophy. There was a shortage of suitable teachers, so Blanca was requested to go there. She arrived in India in 1935.

Blanca's teaching ability was highly praised. In addition she gave classical music recitals of piano on All India Radio. In trying to implement JK's teaching, which denied all authority and gave apparent freedom to teachers and pupils, Blanca began to see the shortcomings of his philosophy. By the year 1939, when she saw JK for the last time before the Second World War (which JK spent in California), at his Rishi Valley school in South India, she had reached breaking point and felt she could not give him her previous full support. However, both his teaching and personality continued to influence her until the last time she saw him in 1961.

In 1942 Blanca decided to go to Tiruvannamalai, South India, to see Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, hoping that he would be able to give her the peace of mind she had been unable to obtain from JK's teachings. She stayed for about six weeks. After an interval of over 12 years, her diary recommences with an entry 'Ramanashram, 17th May 1942'. Whilst there, Blanca felt peace and the power of the higher Self; talked to other seekers; visited the mountain Arunachala and had various visions and dreams. She greatly benefited from the experiences she had there, but the mental obstacles caused by her upbringing, experience of Theosophy and JK's teachings still remained. Aware of these obstacles and with tears in her eyes, she asked Ramana Maharshi why she could not get rid of her egotistical resistance to His teaching. His reply was: "Take the resistance into your heart and keep it there!" The entries in the diary show that Blanca did not fully understand that the heart was Ramana's term for the innermost Self, whereas Europeans view the heart as the seat of the emotions. It appears that the latter interpretation was uppermost in Blanca's mind and it would take many more years before she fully understood Ramana's meaning. Throughout the rest of her diaries Blanca makes reference to Ramana with deep reverence and affection, but her destiny was to become the disciple of another guru.

Initial Discipleship and the Last 12 Years at Rajghat (1943-1954)

The guru whose disciple she was about to become was Shri Anandamayee Ma (1896-1982), referred to by her followers as Ma (Mother). She was one of the most outstanding religious figures in modern times, and was the last great representative of the Hindu renaissance that began with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886). Ma was born in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and had from her childhood exhibited the most amazing spiritual maturity and beauty. Her consciousness was completely non-dual and she considered her mission to be the preservation of genuine Hindu religious and philosophical traditions which were under attack from the materialism of the West. She had more than 30 ashrams in India and Bangladesh (after partition), and spent her adult life travelling and visiting each as the spirit moved Her. She had an ashram at Bhadaini in Benares, near to Rajghat where Blanca was teaching.

Blanca wanted to visit Ramana Maharshi in Tiruvannamalai again, and possibly also Sri Krishna Menon, another highly respected guru who lived in Trivandrum, South India. However as she still had German nationality during the war (Austria having been annexed by Germany in 1938), travel restrictions were imposed on her by the authorities, and she could not go.

In the summer of 1943, whilst Blanca was at the hill station of Almora, she was urged by a friend to visit Ma who was there with some of her devotees. Ma addressed a few words to Blanca, but as the former spoke Bengali and not English, there was no opportunity for a conversation. Blanca noticed that she had not been treated as a stranger, rather as though she were an old friend and she was impressed by Ma's joy and beauty, also the inward beauty and purity that shone in the faces of some of her devotees.

Later that year, Blanca met Ma again in Benares, but Ma was in the middle of a large crowd of singing and dancing devotees, which disturbed Blanca; nevertheless she felt that there was something very special and fascinating about her.

Another person who played an important part in Blanca's spiritual Odyssey, was Lewis Thompson, an English poet of genius and a spiritual seeker in the same age group as Blanca. His quest had taken him from Europe to Ceylon and India, where he had met and stayed with many of the outstanding gurus of the time. He had a very artistic, sensitive and unworldly nature, as well as a critical and razor-sharp intellect. As a result of his experience, he had an intuitive ability to distinguish between true and false gurus. In the winter of 1944, Lewis came to stay at the Rajghat school as he was anxious to resume his spiritual enquiries and to meet Ma and other teachers in Benares. He was the only other Westerner with Blanca at the school, so a friendly relationship started. This lasted till Lewis's death in 1949 and had many ups and downs. Blanca admired her friend's poetic ability and great spiritual knowledge, but was appalled by his changes of temperament and inability to look after his worldly wellbeing. Conversely Lewis was free in his criticism of Blanca's spiritual endeavours, but supplied Blanca with sound advice on those spiritual topics of which she was ignorant. They were spiritual soul-mates and because of Lewis's unworldliness, Blanca helped her friend financially like an older sister. It was Lewis who persuaded Blanca to pursue her relationship with Ma.

Through the good offices of a translator Blanca had her first lengthy and private conversation with Ma on 24th March 1954. Ma did not commonly give spiritual instructions but only to those persons with whom she felt a spiritual connection, a connection which was divinely inspired rather than the result of her personal desire or will. Under these circumstances, any instructions which she gave were designed to meet the specific needs of the enquirer. These instructions entailed the transmission of a subtle but quite profound power which the recipient would be enabled to follow. For Blanca this was the beginning of the guru-disciple relationship.

Blanca first explained her spiritual history and background. She then asked questions as to how to resolve the conflicts in her mind; very similar to the question she had addressed to Ramana Maharshi. Ma explained that as long as the mind was turned outward to the world, conflicts were inevitable. It was necessary to turn the mind inward, dwelling on that which is permanent, to make it steady and quiet. She explained that at this stage of Blanca's life it was not necessary to withdraw from worldly activities, but the time would come when solitude became imperative. For the present spiritual practice, Ma recommended meditation building up to three hours daily, breathing exercises, enquiry into what is permanent and what is fleeting and discrimination between these. Blanca should keep a daily spiritual diary, recording her experiences, her feelings and the changes in her outlook. All her experiences should be viewed as a spectator, both the ups and the downs. Blanca was questioned about her attachments and told Ma that music was the strongest. Ma felt that this was not a problem. She also encouraged Blanca to discuss these matters with Lewis. Blanca had the impression that Ma wanted to help Lewis, using Blanca for that purpose. Conversely, it may be that Ma had asked Lewis to help Blanca.

Blanca recorded in her diary after the interview that Ma was completely convincing. Blanca felt that it was not another person talking to her, but her higher Self talking with her normal self. Ma's words were the outer expression of something taking place at a

much deeper level. It was an experience beyond words, but all the more real for that. Blanca immediately followed Ma's instructions with some success, but within three days doubts arose in her mind, due to the conflict with JK's teaching at that period, which deprecated formal meditation.

The diaries now record her continuous spiritual practice, her frequent talks with Ma and Lewis, her frequent visits to various of Ma's ashrams and her many difficulties. These difficulties arose because she could not reconcile JK's teachings with those of Ma. Her European background was offended by the dirt and noise and by the lack of privacy and proper sanitation. Her classical music background initially prevented appreciation of the Indian devotional music and singing. Finally, the orthodox Hindu rules made her feel unwelcome and an outcast in some of the ashrams. There was much pain, and tears flowed on many occasions.

Blanca had been trained since childhood to judge for herself and therefore found the requirements to obey the guru's instructions, whether she understood the reason for these or not, to be contrary to her personality. This and what she considered to be the unfairness and unreasonableness of some of her surroundings, caused Blanca's strong temper and anger to rise, leading to friction with some of the ashram's inmates. Sometimes she suffered from lack of sleep due to the lack of privacy and the constant travelling.

In November 1945, Blanca experienced an inner change, which made her more reconciled to her many problems. She had an unearthly vision of Ma when she was in her company, which reminded her of her mother who had died when Blanca was two. Ma now became her mother and her beloved. She was the ideal of all her devotees and personified what Blanca had longed for, for the last 15 or 20 years. Ma gave her a new name, Atmananda; this is how she is referred to in the rest of this article.

In May 1946 she was allowed 14 months leave of absence from Rajghat; she wanted to follow her quest more fully, without having to attend to her teaching duties. She started to live in the Calcutta ashram and to travel to various other ashrams with Ma.

Atmananda who was fluent in English, French and German, started to learn Hindi and Bengali, so as to be able to talk to Ma and to integrate with the new life. She was given a mantra initiation by Ma and learned to treat outer events as part of an external drama. She was also able to converse inwardly with her guru, which helped her in the many periods when she could not be together with Ma. Gradually Atmananda's ego began to shrink, although many difficulties still arose in daily living.

Atmananda had many friends in India and the West with whom she conversed and corresponded. These friends followed her experiences with great interest and some of them wanted to know about Ma for themselves. At this stage she decided to apply for Indian citizenship, which in due course she obtained. In July 1947 she returned to Rajghat.

Because of her problems, she discussed JK and his teachings many times with Ma. Ma had no difficulties with JK's teachings on self-awareness, observation and analysis, but for her this was only one of many important spiritual practices. Her view was much wider and deeper than that of JK. Ma's advice to Atmananda was to continue with her spiritual practices and to remember that she belonged to Ma; apart from that she could read or think about JK's teachings whenever she liked.

At the end of the Second World War, JK recommenced his international speaking trips. In December 1948 he was in New Delhi and had a meeting with Ma in the garden of the home of Atmananda's childhood friend Kitty, wife of the prominent Indian politician Siva Rao. The diary summarises the conversation between Ma and JK as follows. Ma said, "Pitaji (respected Father), why do you speak against gurus? When you say one does not need any guru, sadhana (spiritual practice) etc., you automatically become the guru of those who accept your view, particularly as large numbers of people come to hear you

speak and are influenced by you". JK then replied, "No, if you discuss your problems with a friend, he does not thereby become your guru. If a dog barks in the dark and alerts you to a snake the dog does not thereby become your guru!" This conversation sheds light on one of JK's peculiarities. At his public meetings he always emphasised that he was not talking at his audience, i.e. making a speech, but was simply carrying on a conversation with them. In most cases this was a ludicrous assertion, because JK's talks were mostly one-sided leaving little opportunity for anyone to respond. Even if there was a response, JK nearly always made negative comments about any questions or remarks addressed to him. It seems that this policy of JK was the result of his claim that he was not a teacher, having abandoned that role in 1929. Ma by her remarks, showed to JK that this attitude of denial was a self-delusion.

In January 1949 JK came to Rajghat and met Atmananda for the first time since 1939. She had been terrified anticipating the meeting, but though they treated each other politely, she found him to be at a lower spiritual level than Ma. She felt that JK was the Theosophical Messiah, a Westerner who had only a limited understanding of the depth and breadth of the Indian religious and philosophical tradition. Later, JK made negative remarks about her association with Ma and suggested she should leave Rajghat.

However, another five years were to elapse before this took place.

In June 1949 whilst she was at Ma's Solan ashram away from Benares, Lewis died in Benares. She knew he was penniless and believed he had died from overeating after a period of starvation. She was extremely upset and believed that for a period after his death he was still near her to give her guidance and comfort. Lewis had made her his executor and had left her a small image of the child Krishna. In 1950 Ma taught Atmananda the ritual of worshipping this image, using a mantra, sandal paste, water, fruit and flowers; she then performed this ritual daily. It brought to her memory that in 1929 when she left Huizen, she had said that she would never perform rituals again. She had clearly moved on since then. She adopted Indian dress, learned Hindi and Bengali, began to appreciate Indian music and felt less out of place in the ashrams.

Full Discipleship (1954-1985)

Atmananda's increasing involvement with orthodox Hindu society inevitably changed her ability to continue at Rajghat. Exactly nine years after her first lengthy interview with Ma, on 24th March 1954, she was asked by the school manager to leave the school and join Ma in an ashram. Although this was her desire, the practical problems which such a move involved, i.e. no longer having a regular income, losing independence, facing the difficulties of living permanently with non-Europeans etc., had to be surmounted. After discussion with Ma, in whom she trusted completely, Atmananda, aged 50 in June 1954, left Rajghat and her professional life as a teacher and musician.

From that point on, her diary entries become less frequent. She continues with the life and travelling she has experienced since she accepted Ma as her guru, but there are new tasks which she readily fulfils. She becomes the editor of the English version of the ashram magazine, a faithful and almost single-handed duty which she carries out for 30 years. She also translates other publications of Ma and assists other authors concerned with Ma's teachings. She inwardly thanked her dead father for having provided the foresight and means of learning so many languages. She became a translator for Ma of the many Westerners who more and more took an interest in Ma's teachings, and of the smaller number who wished to join the ashram. When Atmananda first stayed at the ashrams, she had only Ma to protect and defend her against the problems which arose for her in the strange surroundings. Ma did this task carefully, but was not always available when the problems arose. Now when Westerners came into the ashrams, Atmananda with all her experience and ability, was able to smooth the path for others, to stand up for justice and fairness and help her Indian fellow disciples understand the

difficulties which the Westerners faced. She was at the centre of the small group of Western disciples. She was very glad to have that position, because she realised that the ability to converse and exchange confidences with people of similar background, was invaluable.

The last entry in her diary describing her own views, is from Hardwar, 12th February 1962: "Much happens daily in terms of consciousness... To concentrate on the divine in everyone helps solve the problem, whereas reacting only increases the negativity. One should feel that whatever comes is sent by God. Nevertheless, I still get irritated at times. In the evening I could do good work on the new book. How rich life is - so much happens in a single day, although outwardly there is nothing special".

The last entry in her diary is from Kishenpur (Dehradun) 23rd July 1963 and records a conversation between Ma and a French priest.

In 1965 a Dutch devotee had a tiny but charming stone cottage constructed for Atmananda in Ma's ashram retreat of Kalyanvan near Dehradun. It is situated at an altitude of around 2,500 feet in a beautiful tranquil garden surrounded by ancient pine and jackfruit trees, with a view of the mountains. This was all and more than Atmananda ever dared hope for and she remained delighted with the place until the end of her life. Every afternoon she would walk a mile or so to Ma's Kishenpur ashram to lead the devotional singing which was faithfully attended by a group of local devotees.

Dehradun is a fairly sophisticated community and she had many friends there.

In 1979, on Ma's instructions, Atmananda went to the pilgrimage town of Gaya to attend the rituals there to mark her formal entry into the final stage of renunciation in which one is completely dead to the world. Outwardly though, she kept this a secret. Ma died on 27th August 1982 and was buried at her ashram in Kankhal (Hardwar). Atmananda was not distracted by the gloom which descended on many of the ashram inmates, but instead appeared to be fired by a new intensity in fulfilling her duties.

In 1983, Atmananda's book 'As the Flower Sheds its Fragrance' was published which dealt with her experiences of Ma. She was also responsible for translating and assisting with the publication of three volumes of Ma's sayings in English.

On 24th September 1985, aged 81, Atmananda died of diphtheria in the rest house for pilgrims near the Kankhal ashram; it was the same illness that had killed her younger sister aged 17 in 1923. She died in the sitting position on her bed, softly repeating the name of her guru. At her funeral, she was given the full traditional honours due to her as a Hindu renunciate and her body was submerged in a special area of the Ganges reserved for that purpose. She was probably the only Western woman accorded that honour.

Prayer and its Fulfilment

Swami Bhavyananda

Prayer plays a very important role in human life. It is an expression of want, a desire for fulfilment. The very first cry of a baby is a kind of prayer springing from the heart of that helpless being in search of succour. Everyone at some time or other has to pray, so

long as there is a feeling of limitation and helplessness.

In religion, prayer is an appeal by the finite to the Infinite, by the visible to the Invisible. It is, as it were, a request to God, and above all a kind of communion with Him; it establishes a relationship between a soul in distress and the omnipotent Almighty. Prayer is really religion in practice. As medicine helps to cure a disease, prayer purifies a sick soul. Only the vain, the proud, and the ignorant may say that there is not need of prayer, putting forth the argument that nature takes care of everything. However, when they face seemingly insurmountable difficulties, the denial cannot stand and they yield to a higher Power. The moment they find themselves helpless, they bow down in all humility and send forth their prayers with sincerity.

Alfred Lord Tennyson says in his *Morte d'Arthur*: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." The power of prayer should not be minimized. Dr. Carl G. Jung has rightly said: "Prayer, for instance, reinforces the potentials of the unconscious, thus accounting for the sometimes unexpected effects of prayer."

It is not unusual to find that some people condemn prayer saying that it makes men lazy and unenterprising. That is not true. It is well expressed by Alban G. Widgey in his book, *What is Religion?*: "The objection sometimes urged by adherents to Naturalistic Humanism that resort to prayer diverts men from efforts of their own is radically false. More men have felt an increase of power through prayer for their attainment of human welfare than have ever thereby been diverted from it."

The need for proper conduct is not minimized by prayer. Rather, it inspires and gives strength to conduct. It is rightly remarked by Archbishop Temple that: "The right relation between prayer and conduct is not that conduct is supremely important and prayer may help it, but that prayer is supremely important and conduct tests it."

Ignatius says: "Work as though everything depends on you and pray as if everything depends on God." Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* that "none can remain even for a moment without doing work; everyone is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature." We have to prompt that action in the right direction through discrimination and prayer. "Action", writes St. Thomas Aquinas, "should be something added to the life of prayer, not something taken away from it." One of the reasons for this recommendation is strictly utilitarian; action that is taken away from the life of prayer is action unenlightened by contact with Reality, uninspired and unguided; consequently, it is apt to be ineffective, even harmful.

Brother Lawrence's life was one of constant prayer and service. "The time of business", says he, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament." He further adds in one of his letters: "As for my set hours of prayers, they are only a continuation of the same exercise."

Prayer makes a man thoughtful, introspective, humble; and above all he gains faith in himself and becomes steady and strong. Fulfilment through prayer is especially significant with reference to spiritual aims, the overcoming of temptations to sin, and the strengthening of capacity for development of character, service to others, and finally devotion to God. Mark the words of Jesus: "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak."

Some may direct the prayer to God as Absolute, some to God as manifested; some again may prefer to direct their prayers to the founders of their respective religions, as the one who is enlightened or illumined. Their beliefs may vary but their prayers stand as common means of fulfilment. Prayer is the first step in religious life; then come worship, introspection, and contemplation. Even meditation, as practised in some religions, is a kind of intensification of prayer. When prayer becomes steady and one-pointed it culminates in deeper meditation, where the spiritual aspirant comes in close

contact with his Chosen Ideal.

In content or form prayer is of four kinds: (1) petition, (2) intercession, (3) glorification, and (4) contemplation. Men in distress, men in need of material gain, or men with a sense of guilt, petition God to fulfil their needs. This is quite common in our day-to-day life. Again, men pray for forgiveness when they commit sins that trouble their minds. With such sincere prayers they feel much consoled and they are helped to correct themselves properly. Secondly, it is quite natural for men to feel for others, as they do when they seek intercession. In so doing, they take resort to prayer without any selfish motive. God really responds to such unselfish prayers. People also pray to God in adoration. Here one glorifies God whose grace and beauty is perceived in the very expression of nature. One uses one's creative or artistic talents to praise the Lord in all His glory and grandeur. In the Vedas of the Hindus there are many hymns addressed to God describing His glory in the sun, His beauty in the dawn, and His wondrous expressions through nature with its well regulated seasons. To an aspirant, all these adorations are reminders of the greatness and supremacy of God, the Creator of all. Finally, there is prayer in the form of contemplation. Here one does not seek anything; one's heart is too full to indulge in any sort of adoration. Here, more or less, one feels a sense of identification with God. This is an intensified form of prayer.

The above four kinds of prayer are different special manifestations of love. In petition, at the root is love of self; in intercession there is love of neighbour; glorification signifies the real love of God in all His grandeur; in contemplation lies the inherent love of Truth and ultimate union with God. Here prayer becomes meditation, not seeking, but merging in, the divine Ground.

In reference to the intent or motive of prayer, Sri Krishna says in the Gita: "Men of virtuous deeds are of four kinds who pray to God - the man in distress, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth and finally the man of wisdom." The religious literature of the world is full of numerous accounts of individuals whose prayers have been answered according to their individual aspirations. Every religion has produced men and women of saintly character and realization who resorted to prayer as a means to illumination.

With a sense of guilt some people pray, and their minds are purified by sincere prayers. In the life of St. Augustine it is clear that he led a very questionable life, but he resorted to prayer combined with repentance. In his Confessions we note how he prayed to God for forgiveness as he remembered every event of his life. Finally he was blessed by God; and he attributed his spiritual illumination to God's grace.

The highest type of prayer is used by the men of wisdom who belong to the already mentioned contemplative group. According to Sri Krishna: "Of them, the wise man, ever-steadfast in devotion to the One, excels; for supremely dear am I to the wise and he is dear to Me. Noble indeed are they all that pray, but the wise man I regard as My very Self; for with the mind steadfast, he is established in Me alone as the supreme goal. At the end of many births, the man of wisdom takes refuge in Me, realizing that all this is pervaded by the innermost Self or the Over-soul. Very rare is that great soul" Such personalities may be rare, it is true, but they are the movers of the world. Saints like Socrates, Eckhart, Shankara, Chaitanya, and other great souls belong to this supreme group.

All religions insist on prayer for spiritual development. The earliest portions of the Vedas, the main scriptures of the Hindus, begin with prayers addressed to the supreme Godhead, the Brahman, which literally means the Vast or the Infinite. The Indo-Aryans clearly understood the need for prayer. One of their most important prayers, repeated daily by the Hindus is this: "We pray to that supreme Effulgence of the radiant Creator; may He inspire our intellect." In Buddhism, we find that prayer to the Buddha, the illumined one, has become the core of that religion. Judaism and Christianity are

centred in prayer; and Islam is a religion of continuous prayer.

In the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, prayer plays a very prominent part in spiritual life. People of various creeds and temperaments used to seek religious instruction from him. Through the medium of simple parables he enlightened many a hungering soul; but real spiritual awakening he brought by way of prayers in the form of songs. He prayed to God as the Absolute, as Manifested, as Father, Mother, Beloved, Friend, and so on. Whenever an inspiring prayer-song was sung he was transported to the highest state of spiritual absorption, which is known as nirvikalpa samadhi. He always advised the devotees to pray. Once a gentleman asked him: "Sir, I do not believe in God; how can I pray?" The reply came: "Pray to Him like this: 'O Lord, if you really exist, please reveal Yourself to me. I do not know anything; please enlighten me.' God, the all-merciful, is sure to hear the prayer and enlighten the heart of the devotee." Thus even non-believers can get solace from prayer, not to speak of believers, who will attain greater devotion and finally God-realization.

Next comes the most important question: How to pray? It is generally found that many people pray regularly but complain quite often that their prayers are not answered. This may be attributed to the lack of sincerity and seriousness. It is rightly said by a famous saint: "Lips utter the prayer but the heart does not feel the same." Many times prayers are said mechanically without the mind being conscious of their meaning. Aldous Huxley properly puts it: "By constantly repeating the same fixed prayers we become too familiar with those words. Not that familiarity breeds contempt, but - it is equally bad - a kind of reverential insensibility, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words." Hence, there is the necessity of pondering over the meaning of the prayer mentally while repeating it verbally. Prayer being communion with God, it should be in secret. One should follow the instructions given by Jesus: "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Eckhart once remarked: "Prayer is the practice of pure Being and glorying therein. Never pray for any mortal thing, my children; if you must pray for anything at all, pray for God's will and nothing else, for in that you have found everything. God is one, and anything extra that is sought for, or found, is not God but a mere fraction."

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Pray to God in any way you like; He is sure to hear you. He can hear even the footfall of an ant. Be not a traitor to your thoughts. Be sincere. Act according to your thoughts and you shall surely succeed. Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard. God is extremely attentive. He has heard every time you have prayed to Him. He will surely reveal Himself to you." He again warns us not to indulge in worldly thoughts while praying, and he insists that the devotee strive for devotion and wisdom. Many times we do not know what we actually need. We must leave it to God, who knows best what is good for us. There is a fine story to illustrate this:

Once there was a washerman who was very devoted to God and spent his time in honest labour. One day he had to carry a load of clothes; and while carrying them the load became heavy. Finding it difficult to go on, he prayed to God: "O Lord, if you give me a horse, I shall be very thankful." At that very moment some soldiers passed that way on horseback. They stopped at that place while a mare gave birth to a colt. The soldiers did not know what to do with it; then they saw the washerman and ordered him to carry the colt to the nearest camp. So the poor man had to put the colt on his shoulders along with the bundle of clothes. Then he exclaimed: "Oh, Lord you have misunderstood me!" This sort of thing is happening to many of us in this world. We pray for something and when we get it we want to get rid of it as soon as possible. Jean Ingelow, English poet and novelist, made an interesting comment in this connection: "I have lived to thank God that all my prayers have not been answered."

We should always bear in mind the promises made by the Incarnations of God. Sri Krishna says: "Persons who constantly pray to me solely, to them thus ever zealously engaged, I fulfil what they need and preserve what they already have." So also Jesus tell us: "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

Whatever prayer one utters, it is a form of communion with God; the mind turns towards Him in some way as the prayer is expressed. Thus, in the search for ultimate union with God one should pray for purity of heart and devotion to Him. The rest will come because every sincere prayer has, undoubtedly, its fulfilment through the grace of God. When someone asked Sri Ramakrishna how to pray, out of compassion to his devotee he related his own personal experiences in the following words: "I used to pray to the Divine Mother (God) in this way: 'O Mother, who art the embodiment of bliss, Thou must reveal Thyself to me.' And sometimes I would pray: 'O Lord of the meek, O Lord of the humble, am I outside the universe? I have neither Knowledge, nor devotion, nor the merit of austerities. I know nothing. O Lord, in Thy infinite mercy Thou must vouchsafe me vision of Thyself. O Mother Divine, I want no honour from men; I want no pleasure of the flesh; only let my soul flow unto Thee, as the rivers flow into the sea'."

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Leaves of an Ashrama: 23

Grinning and Bearing It

Swami Vidyatmananda

It is well known that renunciation is the main requirement for spiritual attainment. Many mystics have said so; books of spiritual direction emphasize the point.

I do not doubt that this is true, but how does one do it? Efforts to divest myself of worldly desires and habits have convinced me that I cannot renounce at all. Like slops thrown out into a high wind, what I would rid myself of, blows back upon me. Burrs plucked from my sleeve transfer themselves to my glove.

Oh, if by renunciation one means giving away one's possessions, quitting one's job, or turning over to someone else one's proper responsibilities - yes, anybody can do that, but these are not necessarily the things that have to go; they just have to stop being important in our lives.

It is that vigorous entity called the ego that I must divest myself of - the monster inside me which makes me believe that I am singular. Getting rid of the idea of being separate and special is the one thing needful; but all efforts to expel the ego seem vain. It refuses to be evicted.

Then how does this renunciation of the ego take place? It seems to me that it occurs only as we open ourselves up to - and consciously sustain - discipline. Pain will burn out what we cannot throw out. This is why we must have a guru and the association of other devotees. Both will discipline us greatly!

A sad story concerns a young man who went to a certain teacher with the idea of becoming his disciple. The teacher accepted the applicant provisionally. In due course

he asked the would-be student to perform some menial task. "But," objected the young man, "I am a college graduate." The teacher withdrew the request courteously, but that was the end of this boy's novitiate; he never became a disciple.

As for association with other devotees, this same kind of test occurs; and our response must be positive. New people come to Vedanta, enthusiastically expecting to share experiences pleasantly with others on the same path. After a while, interpersonal strains develop. Trying episodes occur, and some of the newcomers fall away. Devotees would embrace a religion which emphasizes renunciation of the ego; but some of them, as soon as a little disciplining comes, retreat.

This will not do. The mother is slapping the child; and the child is clinging to the mother's knees, crying, "Mother, Mother". That is how it must be. The one thing needful is: "Don't give up; don't quit. Cling and be disciplined." This is the meaning of the emphasis placed by Ramakrishna's disciples on patience and perseverance.

If we will but cling to our teacher and other devotees, howling perhaps from the blows that they give us, but not letting go, that which we cannot do for ourselves will be done for us. The ego which we would expel but cannot, will be ground away.

The Power of Words

Clement James Knott

The birth of our present era of Western civilization can be said to date from the invention of writing as a system of communication. This epochal innovation has long been accredited to the Sumerians, a hegemony of city states in lower Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium before Christ.

The Sumerian system is known as Cuneiform (from the Latin *cuneus*, meaning a wedge) and was formed with a wedge-ended stylus making marks on a moist clay tablet. It is believed to have been derived from earlier and more primitive systems which were pictographic, using pictorial symbols. Cuneiform was used for many languages throughout the Near East and it flourished for more than 3,000 years, lasting rather longer than any of the systems that have superseded it.

Writing originated as an instrument of trade which required records of transactions, taxes and movements of produce and animals. It was later taken up for the purposes of public administration and religion. As the skill of writing developed and spread through Mesopotamia, it facilitated the growth of agriculture, trade, religion and the building of cities and it made possible a rate of territorial expansion which ultimately could only be sustained by conflict between neighbouring territories and kingdoms.

Around 2,350 B.C., King Urukugina of the Sumerian city of Lagash decreed that his people were to be freed from the repressions of corrupt government officials and tax collectors. On the clay tablet that gives the account of these reforms, the word "freedom" appears for the first time in recorded history. This was a powerful word in a time when it was lawful for a man to sell his wife and his children into slavery, or even himself, to pay off his debts and his taxes. So at one stroke the king relieved his people from subjugation to corrupt officials and from the alternative of submitting to bondage in slavery.

In the 4,000 and more years since then, anti-slavery movements and revolts have re-appeared from time to time and it has taken that long to reach a stage where now the great majority of countries have taken action to outlaw the servile bondage that had maintained their cultures and hierarchies for so long. Nowadays, most of us can enjoy the right to justice, liberty and equality, but political constitutions tend to play down the importance of religious freedom. Physical slavery has been nominally abolished but financial thralldom is still at the very foundation of our western societies and forms of government. The one aspect of modern life in which the individual can find true lasting freedom is in the choice and practice of his own religious quest, free of duress from any dogma or doctrine. This release from bondage is at the very heart of the perennial philosophies of Asia, as exemplified in the Veda and other scriptures, for which we are all indebted to the countless men and women who, often anonymously, have devoted their lives to this cause for us.

Cuneiform developed alongside other systems of writing which were mainly pictographic, consisting of simple drawings or diagrams representing the object or action. The Egyptian system of hieroglyphic writing was originally based on pictographs. The Egyptians called their writing "The words of the Gods", because they believed that Thoth, the god of learning, had invented writing for them.

Languages based on pictographic writing systems are considered by some authorities to be more effective for the spiritual type of writing. This is not because of the nature of the pictures, but because of their magical quality, generating subtle vibrations which convey the feeling with sensitivity. The pictograms represent the whole of the qualities of that person or thing itself. The symbols for a name emanated the power of that God or person wherever the name was placed. Because of this, when a new pharaoh took over the throne, he would order the erasing of all traces of the name of his predecessor in order to destroy any vestige of the late ruler's power and he would replace it with his own name and power instead.

When pictographic languages declined in use, being superseded by syllabic or alphabetic systems, so the power of words in regular use declined. The written language became less magical. As it became less easy to invoke the essence of a person by naming his name, it became necessary to use other means. The widespread use of alphabetic systems which substituted signs for images brought about a need for created images. This opened the way for special uses of language such as poetry, allegory and even humour. Many modern therapies are now using created imagery techniques to redress this imbalance. As the literary uses of language expanded, it became more necessary when reading to receive the imagery with feeling and emotion. This necessitated sensitivity and discernment of what feeling the writer intended to convey. Hence the vocabulary of feelings became more subtle and more broadly communicative.

In Biblical times, when reading to oneself the written word of spiritual writings, it was considered necessary and normal to mouth the words silently. This meant that the power of the words was reflected into the aware self. Anyone who read the words with eye movement only was liable to be suspected of using magic.

The power of the name of God is manifest throughout the Old Testament of the Bible. The name that God gave for himself is "I AM THAT I AM" (Exodus 3: vs 13-14). This brings together the individual self and the Universal Self. It signifies the totality of all beingness that God has chosen to manifest through us all as human beings. Each individual self is being subsumed into the Universal Self and is of the same nature. God replied to Moses' question in the words EHYEH ASHER EHYEH which is Hebrew for I AM THAT I AM. Subsequently, this was given a shift of emphasis to YAHWEH ASHER YAHWEH which is Hebrew for HE IS AS HE IS and this form was used until the ASHER was dropped and abbreviated to YAHWEH (HE IS). This was eventually translated into German and then into English as JEHOVAH.

This shift of focus from the original words reported by Moses was fundamental. The name that was given as an absolute statement of the divine principle by God has been replaced by a human concept of a dualistic nature. Instead of God being and pervading the continuing creation, this human concept of God separated the creator from his creation. Those religions which have their roots in the Near East have thus inherited a dualistic based system of philosophy combined with a belief structure that is monotheistic founded on belief in the one God who is supreme but outside of his creation. This interface between the philosophy and the belief has generated many different views as to whether God is immanent (present throughout the world of sense-perception) or transcendent (beyond our world of sense perception). This tension between the faith and the philosophy is perhaps necessary to both, but the postulated split between the extra-cosmic Jehovah and his creation remains. Some later schools of thought in Europe have reverted to the principle from the perennial philosophies that God is the one Absolute and is both immanent and transcendent.

The power of the name of those chosen of God is described in various instances in the Old Testament. In Isaiah it is related that God tells his prophet that "I have written your name in the palm of my hand". These words have a literal meaning. They express a living tradition whereby a holy man wishing to bless one of his followers would go through the motion of writing that person's name in his hand, using his fingers. This would commit him to the guidance and protection of that chosen person. Modern Bible translators who have inserted in this account "carved" or "branded" instead of the word "written" have missed the point by changing this literal statement into a non-literal one. In those days, only prisoners, criminals or runaway slaves were liable to be branded. The idea of God carving or branding himself is hard to imagine.

In the commentary to the Jerusalem Bible we are told that it is debatable as to which usage came first for ehweh and yahweh; as parts of the verb "to be" or as the name for God. It is evident that in earlier cultures, more than 5,000 years ago, the ideas of "being" and "God" were inseparable. This was a time when, in the words of D.H. Lawrence, mankind was living "breast to breast with the cosmos". In the early days of the awakening of human consciousness it was not possible for a man to consider himself as being separate from the source of creation. To our early ancestors, when a man said "I am", he meant "I am being in God". As communities increased in size, and tribal and religious hierarchies established themselves, so the individual became separated from his direct experience of the creation. Subsequently, common usage through several millennia differentiated the two meanings; the human and the Supreme: the individual "I am" from the great "I AM". Thus the idea of individual being became separate from the state of being only in God. This imposed spiritual vacuum, between Homo Sapiens and his Creator, was filled by the growth of innumerable primitive religious sects, which over the millennia coalesced or were absorbed into larger religions. This process continues to this day.

All theistic religions have a special reverence for the name of God or symbols representing his name. The power of the sacred word as a form of prayer is the same power in all religions. The gift of language is a divine gift to each individual from the Creator. Each religion has its own way of praying the name of the founder and the Supreme. In Vedanta and other branches of traditional Hinduism the sacred name or Mantra can be repeated continuously to oneself or in a group. This way of prayer is japa or smavana. The repetition of the sacred name in total concentration generates divine vibrations with associated feelings for the devotee, accumulating them in his mind and his body and in places of meditation through regular practice.

The sacred symbol OM is usually rendered as three sounds: A-U-M, (as in the Mandukya Upanishad). These sounds represent the whole range of words that can be uttered by the human voice, hence all thoughts and images in our mind. In the repetition of the mystic

word we can feel the divine vibrations entering and subsuming our being. The word AUM has been given symbolic or mythical significance in different Hindu and Buddhist sects. The letter A represents the continuing creation by the Universal Self. The letter U represents Vishnu, the God who is the preserver. The letter M represents Mahesha, the great Lord Shiva, in stillness and serenity, the male principle of the cosmos. Shiva's consort or Shakti is Uma, the female principle on the cosmos. Uma can also be meditated upon as the sacred name in japa by repetition of the sounds U-M-A, to invoke the creative movement and energy of the female principle. The two meditations can be combined in japa by repeating without pausing the sounds A-UM-A-UM-A-UM-A-UM-A in order to invoke the combined energies of the male and female principles which ultimately become a perfect formless unity as Brahman, the divine Supreme, the one without a second.

The aspirant who is accustomed to praying the sacred name in japa as a way of attaining serenity, may also pray his own name by repeating it in japa as a means of affirming his own beingness to himself, as an early stage in his preparation for being subsumed into the pure consciousness of the divine Supreme.

Passion Transformed Swami Chetanananda

Energy in man is like a swift-flowing river. If anyone erects a big barrage to reserve the water of a turbulent river, for the time being he may succeed, but in the long run, either the water will overflow - if the river cannot burst the barrage - or will take a side-course for its exuberant flow. When the energy in man moves towards the satisfaction of carnal desires, it is called lust; on the other hand, when it is checked and allowed to flow towards God, the same energy becomes divine love. The same force is acting; the difference is in its direction, and everything depends on the man who directs it.

Indian lore is full of beautiful episodes from the lives of saints where one can find illustrations. They are the living lessons which help us overcome the turmoil of Maya and transform worldly attachment into transcendent love. In the lives of Vilvamangala and Tulasidasa, we witness such transformation. They are shining examples which speak for themselves. The events are so touching and colourful that they leave an indelible mark on our minds. Here, such an episode in the life of Tulasidasa, the medieval saint of India, will be retold.

Tulasidasa lost his parents when he was very young. There was none to tend the orphan boy. The tradition goes that a maidservant came forward to nurse the boy and that she was Mother Durga herself. Anyway, Tulasi grew up and went to a Ramayat saint, named Naraharidasa, at Citrakuta, for education. Having completed his education, he came to visit his parental home. The good neighbours cordially received the learned young man. They were reluctant to let Tulasi go and advised him to marry and settle down there. Bridal offers came from all quarters; so at last Tulasi, though unwillingly, gave his consent and got married.

The bride's father was charmed to see Tulasi's scholar-ship and devotion. The bride, Ratnavali, was as beautiful as she was good, and Tulasi was completely captivated by her sweetness and charm. He also proved himself a devoted husband. He loved Ratna so much that if she were a single moment out of his sight, he would become restless with an agony in his heart. Gradually he became completely infatuated.

But everything has a limit in this world. Violent delights have violent ends. Fire and powder, when they meet each, consume themselves completely.

One day when Tulasidasa had gone to a neighbouring village for work, Ratnavali's brother came to visit her, and she left with him for her parental home without her husband's permission. Formerly, when Ratnavali had been invited by her parents, Tulasi had refused her permission out of extreme attachment. At that time in India, girls were married at a very young age, and naturally they were rather fond of their parents. They would feel more free at their parental homes than at their fathers'-in-law where they had some restrictions. So young Ratna did not miss the chance to see her kith and kin after a long time.

On his return home, finding his beloved absent, Tulasi was very much upset. The pangs of separation were unbearable. After making inquiries of the maidservant and obtaining the necessary information, he crossed the river at night and reached his destination. He called loudly and knocked hard at the door of his father-in-law. In the dead of night, Ratnavali awoke and, recognizing her husband's voice, opened the door for him.

The mind of man works in mysterious ways. Nobody knows what happens on account of what. Sometimes harsh, biting words cannot disturb the mind; at other times, a mild, sweet reproof can create a terrible upset. Anyhow, Ratnavali was a bit disturbed and ashamed to see the unbecoming manner of her husband. She mildly reproached him:

Don't you feel ashamed

That you have followed me here?

Fie on your love, my dear!

If this your devotion to my frame

Of skin and bone were given to Rama,

The fear of the world, you would surely overcome.

These words of Ratna pierced Tulasi's heart like an arrow. What force was in them!

Instantly Tulasi's lust was transformed and his dormant spirituality aroused. Binding attraction turned into burning dispassion. Then and there, at the gate of his father-in-law's house, he turned on his heel. Ratnavali's brother tried to pacify him but to no avail.

In anguish, Tulasi suddenly remembered the words of Naraharidasa, his guru:

If you have your spiritual welfare at heart

And wish to realize God,

Keep away from woman and gold,

Says Narahari.

After leaving the house of his father-in-law, Tulasidasa came to Prayag, had a bath for purification at the holy confluence of the Ganga and the Jamuna, and took the vows of Sannyasa. Tulasi, with all his energy, started to turn the wheel of his life in another direction. People were startled to see his severe austerity. In time he had the vision of Ramacandra.

The biographers of Tulasidasa have depicted very beautifully the circumstances of his God-vision. According to the instruction of the great devotee Hanuman, Tulasi was waiting for Sri Rama with sandal-paste at the busy bathing ghat at Citrakuta. Suddenly Sri Rama, disguised as a handsome young boy, came before Tulasi and said: "Baba, give me some sandal-paste."

Tulasi was overwhelmed with joy and drank in, with unwinking eyes, the enchanting beauty of Ramacandra. The Lord again asked for the sandal-paste, but Tulasi was in an

ecstatic mood: he could neither speak nor move. The Lord then bent down, took a little paste with His own finger, applied some to His own forehead as well as Tulasi's, and disappeared. Thus Tulasi was blessed by God Himself.

Ratnavali, the sweet wife of Tulasidasa, could not forget her beloved husband. She kept track of him. Once she wrote a letter:

Of slender waist

And golden skin

Am I.

With women comrades

I live secure.

My heart may burst,

I don't fear.

But I do care

That you may be caught

By other damsels fair.

Tulasidasa replied in the following words:

Devotion's sweetness

I have tasted,

Through the teachings

Of my wife.

With matted hair

I live, secure

In Rama's love alone, my life.

This correspondence was in dohas, small Hindi couplets, Their poetic beauty is beyond description.

Ratna's doubts about her husband were dispelled. She was fully satisfied and praised the devotion and renunciation of her husband. Amongst the wise, some said that Ratnavali was Sarasvati, the Goddess of wisdom; while others said that God had spoken through her to destroy the delusion of His favourite devotee. The fascinating story of Tulasi and Ratna does not end here. The story continues.

Many years had elapsed and a curtain of forgetfulness had fallen between the two souls. Tulasi had aged. His old memories had been completely erased by the repeated remembrance and overwhelming visions of Rama. Though a pilgrim of God like Tulasidasa is himself a mobile holy place, yet he had a desire to see his Chosen Ideal, Sri Rama, in the places of pilgrimage. He started his journey. On the way, by chance and unknowingly, he became a guest at his father-in-law's house. Ratna, who was no more young, came to receive the holy guest. Neither Tulasi nor Ratna could recognize each other. She arranged his food, but Tulasi refused to partake of it as he was strict in his rules. He himself started to cook his own food. After a short time, Ratna recognized her beloved husband, but she did not disclose the fact. On the contrary, she carefully concealed her emotion.

Again the sweet game started. Ratna mischievously asked: "Sir, shall I bring a chilli for you?" Tulasi replied: "Thank you, madam; I don't need it. There is one in my bag." She asked him to have this and that, but Tulasi's reply was negative. Ratna wanted to wash his feet but Tulasi did not allow her. Night came. Ratna passed a sleepless night. She was thinking deeply of her saintly husband. Her mind was turning over this thought: How was it that her husband had renounced the vital things of life, but still could not give up trivial things?

Next morning Ratna asked: "Sir, do you recognize me?" Tulasi: "No." Ratna again asked: "Do you know where you are?" Tulasi gave a negative reply. Then Ratna disclosed her identity and sought to remain in his company. Tulasi flatly refused her request.

Ratna saw that Tulasi was carrying in his bag gopi-candana (sacred yellow earth of

Vrindaban) and camphor for his daily worship. This suggested a way to tease him. If he could carry these accessories with him, then, she asked, why not a humble woman? She insisted that either he carry her along with him in his bag or depend on discrimination and renunciation alone.

This was the last blow for Tulasidasa. He admitted that his wife was wiser than himself. Immediately he got rid of the few articles he possessed, giving the bag to a Brahmana. It is said that Tulasi did not forget his debt to Ratnavali. In an indirect and subtle manner, he tried to convey his gratitude to her through the women characters of Ramacaritamanasa, his magnum opus, the famous Hindi version of the Ramayana. Lust brings bondage, love brings freedom. Lust springs from body-consciousness and love from God-consciousness. Deluded people cannot discriminate between lust and love. Discrimination is the beacon of spiritual life. Ratnavali (literally, a garland of gems) is for ever blessed that she was the cause whereby divine nectar, through the Ramacaritamanasa, was sprinkled over the people of India.

Sources: Viswakosa (in Bengali), Vol. VIII. Compiled by Sri Nagendranath Basu. Tulasidasa by C.K. Handoo. (Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, April, 1971)

Seeds (continued) Swami Yatiswarananda

Spiritual Life Demands Strength

Every one of us must have a central seat of consciousness, a central name to dwell on and a holy form to visualise; success in spiritual life depends on the firmness and steadiness with which we hold on to the Ideal.

In the midst of the confusion and darkness of the relative plane, we must find out a definite course of action, of thinking and of willing, without which no spiritual life is possible. The person who has no such ground to stand on, no such central point of consciousness, can never have any real faith in himself, never any real strength. Always believe, "I am a being that can achieve something in the world of spirit." Strength is our first requirement. We are meant for something greater, something nobler and higher, and what is needed is not negative humility but positive humility born of real inner strength.

The body must be kept strong and healthy, for a certain amount of physical strength is necessary; there must be some regular physical exercise, for the body is the temple of the Divine.

"May all my limbs, may all my senses, be strong and controlled." (Upanishad)

"This Atman cannot be realized by the weak." (Upanishad)

Fearlessness

If we have strength, then only can we be rid of fear. Let us, then, devote every heart-beat to this course and live ideal and irreproachable lives as examples to others.

Walking with steady steps, having firm faith in ourselves, let us never lose ground on the vital issues. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "So long as you have this false shame and

hatred and fear of society, you cannot make any spiritual progress."

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad there is a passage which says, "Now, Janaka, you have attained to fearlessness." There is also another passage saying. "In enjoyment there is fear, in wealth there is the risk of losing it, in honour that of being dishonoured, in true renunciation alone there is fearlessness."

This fearlessness, which is a characteristic of the true spiritual aspirant, can come only when we realize the Divine and the more we approach It the more fearless we become. Really, without true renunciation and true dispassion for all things worldly, no spiritual life is possible.

The Eternal Centre

"One who has not desisted from evil, one who has not calmed his mind, one who is not concentrated, can never know the Truth, even if he gets knowledge." This is the general rule of the Upanishads.

We should be pure because He is pure. We should be clean because He is clean, and if you really were impure by nature this would never be possible. We should be pure because purity is the very nature of our soul. This purity is not anything that is adventitious or superimposed on our nature. Unless we become pure it is not possible for us to see God; it must find its physical and mental expression in and through our whole life. Morals without God have to stop halfway; they can never really reach the goal. We want to make that the centre of our consciousness which is the eternal centre of all. Herein lies the explanation of purity and of being able to lead a spotless life. That is why, along with morals, we have to have the foundation of morals, which is wholly lacking in just utilitarian reasons.

That Thou Art

"There was neither existence nor non-existence then." We cannot describe in words the state before creation, or, as we say, before projection; it is beyond all thought and all mind and is never to be grasped by the intellect.

Tat Tvam Asi, That Thou Art, really means That, which is at the back of the outside world, and That, which is at the back of myself, is one and the same, the One Indivisible, Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute. We see the something in the outside world but we always see it coloured by the mind.

The bubble losing its bubble-form and the ocean losing its ocean-form, are both one and the same water-substance and this water-substance is the only reality we possess. Neither the bubble nor the ocean is so. Everything else is ephemeral and floating. Even our mind is maya and nothing but maya. There comes a time for all aspirants when this mind ceases to be and there remains only the thing-in-itself. But what It is, none has ever been able to express in words. The whole forest is always something more than the number of trees taken together. Evolution is only one part and never does the Whole become entirely transmuted.

Truth is One

The world can never be divided into East and West as far as the essentials of life are concerned and the idea that the East begins here and the West there is erroneous and misleading. There is no Eastern truth and no Western truth, but only Truth as such, which is neither Eastern nor Western. All problems of the human mind are the same problems. There are certain differences in custom and in the non-essentials of life, but the human mind and its problems are those of the human mind, neither Eastern nor Western.

Spiritual Practice

In the course of one's spiritual striving and practice there are certain points which can be observed. It is efficacious, if possible, to have a short break after the mid-day meal; a short break of consciousness from the hectic and feverish activities of one's mind and to fill it with the holy name and the harmonising vibrations of the holy sound.

We should also make it a point of not reading anything worldly, such as novels, before going to sleep, but to have some holy thought or sound to dwell on; to think with great intensity that we are going to sleep in the lap of God or some such Divine idea to fill our whole mind. In the evening we should be careful as to what we allow our mind to busy itself with, for what we permit ourselves to take in during evening hours goes on working in our subconscious mind during the hours of sleep and can have bad effects. There should be concentrated and peaceful dwelling on the Divine, either the Divine Form, or the Divine Name, or the Divine Sound, or on all three combined.

If we awake at night, at once begin doing Japam in a quiet, peaceful way without unnecessary strain. But it is bad for Japam and sleep to become connected.

Habits

With the formation and strengthening of habits, spiritual life becomes easier and loses much of its earlier strain. There should be perfect regularity in the hours of spiritual practice, as only thus does the mind become accustomed to them and meditation become possible, even when the mind is restless. A certain minimum must be kept up in one's daily practices and the time slowly and steadily increased in the case of the beginner. Later, in the more advanced state, one can make use of the undercurrent in one's mind. This enables one to keep part of the mind busy with the practices at all times, whatever one happens to be doing outwardly.

Holy Company

Fellow-travellers can help each other and that is why holy company is of such great importance. Mutual help and sympathy do much to sustain our energy and striving. We should never try to be teachers, but only students among fellow-students, giving others a helping hand if we can; then we do not become dangerous to ourselves and others. "Thou art the mechanic and I am the machine" - this is the attitude we should adopt, and never that of superiority. Before we lead others we must learn to serve with dedication and self-surrender.

(to be continued)

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