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Divine Wisdom

Question: " What happens to a man after he dies?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "When a man dies after attaining Knowledge, he doesn't have to go to another plane of existence; he isn't born again. But as long as he has not attained Knowledge, as long as he has not realized God, he must come back to the life of this earth; he can never escape it. For such a person there is a hereafter. A man is liberated after attaining Knowledge, after realizing God. For him there is no further coming back to earth. If a boiled paddy-grain is sown, it doesn't sprout. Just so, if a man is boiled by the fire of Knowledge, he cannot take part any more in the play of creation; he cannot lead a worldly life, for he is not bound by lust and greed. What will you gain by sowing boiled paddy?"

Question: "How can one develop divine love?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Through restlessness - the restlessness a child feels for his mother. The child feels bewildered when he is separated from his mother, and weeps longingly for her.

If a man can weep like that for God he can even see Him. At the approach of dawn the eastern horizon becomes red. Then one knows it will soon be sunrise. Likewise, if you see a person restless for God, you can be pretty certain that he hasn't long to wait for His vision.

"A disciple asked his teacher, 'Sir, please tell me how I can see God.' 'Come with me,' said the Guru, 'and I shall show you.' He took the disciple to a lake, and both of them got into the water. Suddenly the teacher pressed the disciple's head under the water. After a few moments he released him and the disciple raised his head and stood up. The Guru asked him, 'How did you feel?' The disciple said, 'Oh! I thought I should die; I was panting for breath.' The teacher said, 'When you feel like that for God, then you will know you haven't long to wait for His vision.'"

Question: "What is the meaning of Jnana Yoga?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is the path by which a man can realize the true nature of his own Self; it is the awareness that Brahman alone is his true nature. Prahlada sometimes was aware of his identity with Brahman. And sometimes he would see that God was one and he another; at such times he would remain in the mood of Bhakti.

"Hanuman said, 'O Rama, sometimes I find that You are the whole and I a part, sometimes that You are the Master and I Your servant; but, O Rama, when I have the Knowledge of Reality; I see that You are I and I am You."

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, December 6 1884

Absence of Pride

Editorial

Natimanita is humility. Sri Krishna considers humility as one of the great spiritual qualities without which one cannot advance in spiritual life.

Atimanita is pride, vanity, conceit, overestimating oneself. *Natimanita* is the exact opposite of this. It really means humility. Let us discuss pride.

Pride (or hubris or vanity) is considered as the most serious of the seven deadly sins. It is the ultimate source from which all other sins arise. Pride generates egotism and obscures truth. Regarding ourselves as exalted, superior or worthy of adoration and cherishing intense craving for fame, honour, prestige and respect and feeling happy on getting these (even if we do not not hanker after them) - this is called pride. This is overestimating ourselves. It breeds excessive love of self and makes one look down upon all others.

Pride, said Dante, is “love of self perverted to hatred and contempt for one’s neighbour.”

The natural tendency of most of us is to appear important in the eyes of others. This desire expresses itself as pride and vanity. A true enquiry into the Self compels man to relinquish pride as a disease of the mind.

Pride makes us feel that we are the centre of the world. We have high self-esteem, which is often a mask behind which our own self-esteem is hidden. Pride makes us feel we are all powerful, all knowing, and faultless. Pride makes us impatient and distrusting; it breeds contempt for those who do not subscribe to our philosophy, beliefs and way of life. If others do not agree with our views we become sarcastic and biting. Pride makes us look down our noses at people who react negatively to our beliefs and views. Pride makes us deny the warning signs that there is something seriously wrong with us and thus we become easy prey for a downfall when a serious crisis or disaster strikes our lives - pride comes before a fall.

Pride, vanity etc., are qualities derived from *tamas* . “A characteristic of *tamas* is pride. Pride and delusion come from *tamas* . Pride of learning, pride of money, and pride of social position. One cannot attain divine knowledge till one gets rid of pride. Water does not stay on the top of a mound; but into low land it flows in torrents from all sides.” (Sri Ramakrishna)

There are many forms of pride - pride of beauty, pride of strength, pride of wealth, pride of ancestry, pride of power and position, pride of talent, pride of name and fame, etc. Many, especially parents, feel proud when their children attain wealth, fame, power etc. Many become vain even when there is nothing to be proud about. These unspiritual qualities like pride, secretiveness, and the like are so many bonds which keep man in ignorance. Man is free only when he is liberated from all these.

Of all forms of pride the worst and most harmful is spiritual pride.

“And, above all, if the pride of spirituality enters into you, woe unto you. It is the most awful bondage that ever existed. Neither can wealth nor any other bondage of the human heart bind the soul so much as this. “I am purer than others,” is the most awful idea that can enter into the human heart. In what sense are you pure? The God in you is the God in all. If you have not known this, you have known nothing. How can there be difference? It is all one. Every being is the temple of the Most High; if you can see that, good; if not, spirituality has yet to come to you.” (Swami Vivekananda)

But we need not think all pride is inimical and dangerous. There is a form of pride which is positive and highly helpful in spiritual life. This spiritual pride is the result of the grace of God.

Regarding this Sri Ramakrishna says: “The ‘ego of a devotee’ begets no pride; it does not create ignorance. On the contrary it helps one realize God. Haven’t you heard Ramprasad’s song? He used to say, ‘Whom do I fear in the world, whose sovereign is the Divine Mother!’ Keep such a pride always awake in the mind. If you must have pride, then feel like Vibhishana, who said, ‘I have touched the feet of Rama with my head; I will not bow this head before anyone else.’ There are two signs of knowledge: first, absence of pride, and second, a peaceful nature. You have both. Therefore you must have received the grace of God.”

This kind of spiritual pride also helps us overcome frustration and depression. Swami

Vivekananda says to a disciple who was feeling low: “Then think like this: ‘Whose child am I? I associate with him and shall I have such weak-mindedness and lowness of spirits?’ Stamping down such weakness of mind and heart, stand up, saying, ‘I am possessed of heroism, I am possessed of a steady intellect, I am a knower of Brahman, a man of illumination.’ Be fully conscious of your dignity by remembering, ‘I am the disciple of such and such who is the companion-in-life of Sri Ramakrishna, the conqueror of lust and wealth.’ This will produce a good effect. He who has not this pride has no awakening of Brahman within him.”

Do we suffer from pride and vanity? Many of us are blissfully unaware of our pride, egotism and vanity. A little self-enquiry is sure to confirm that we suffer excessively from pride, etc. If we are highly sensitive, if even an innocent remark or slight criticism puts us off and we take offence, if we are not open to truth; then, surely we are suffering from this disease!

As mentioned earlier, pride is a deadly poison. No one likes a proud and vain person. Pride makes others unhappy and resentful towards us; it also makes us miserable, hampers our happiness and creativity, and bars our progress in spiritual life. Until we recognize and take steps to eradicate this demon of pride there is no hope of progress in any field of life. So how do we get rid of pride and vanity?

The best antidote to pride and vanity is the practice of humility. The practice of humility opens all doors to peace, prosperity, and truth in this as well as the other world.

Humility and its practice will be discussed in our next editorial.

Swami Dayatmananda

An embodied being does not have the right to choose at the last moment which path he is to take. This is decided by the Lord, who has the sole prerogative in his regard. But the Lord is not whimsical. He decides through the law of karma. The cumulative effect of the karmas of the individual's entire life will be the guiding factor in forming the Lord's decision to shape the destiny of the soul for its sojourn through the path of light or the path of darkness. But the karma yogi who has worked with the attitude of seeing 'inaction in action' will attain knowledge that will cut all his bonds and make him free. By the grace of the Lord he will know that his soul will not go to any place but will enter into the realm of bliss when the flame of life is extinguished.

Swami Saradananda

Pathways of Realization (continued)

Clement James Knott

Realizing the Feeling Body

Early cultures which did not have the facility of writing as a means of communication were obliged to rely more on their perceptions and memories than we are accustomed to doing now. Their senses and feelings were more highly developed, especially on a survival level. Western type civilization has depended on a vast expansion of mental activity in the cognitive aspects of the mind and one effect of this has been to reduce the amount of attention left available for appropriate development and enhancement of the senses and the feeling body, for many individuals.

The common habit of not allowing ourselves sufficient attention and space for the recognition and expression of our feelings is self-perpetuating. But why do we allow it to continue dictating our thoughts and actions?

The mind that is self-aware cannot become a receptacle for unwanted feelings. It has the capability of influencing the movements of our feelings as well as of the mind and of the will. The aware self is capable of clearing away the redundant and unwanted accretions of the mind. If the imposed modes and the occlusions of *maya* were permanent, we could not have survived for long as *homo sapiens*. We would not be here now.

Any person who has been chronically blocked during childhood from observing and expressing his feelings will not only be lacking in feelings for others, he will also be lacking in feelings for himself. He will have difficulty in expressing his feelings on a normal social level. He may even wonder at times whether he has any emotions at all. His spiritual sensitivity will also be in abeyance.

The worst thing that can happen to any young person in his or her formative years is to be prevented from flowing out the true spirit of the self, which is the true essence of his being, by being blocked, coerced or just misguided. This insidious blocking out of feelings and of the expressing of emotions reduces personal creativity and sensitivity to others and it makes meaningful communication difficult. This unfortunate person is then alienated from fulfilling his or her life goals and from the enjoyment of living, from the friendship and love of other souls and from spiritual growth. This has various effects on the individual and on the groups of which he is a part. These persistent effects on the development of his or her personality may include some of the following consequences:

- 1) Uncertainty and lack of purpose. A feeling of something fundamentally lacking in life. A sense of something wrong with his mode of thinking and feeling.
- 2) Diminished ability of perception, especially seeing and hearing, and of the quality of consciousness.

- 3) Insufficient co-ordination and integration of the physical, mental and emotional capabilities.
- 4) Lack of concentration and patience. Inability to put his whole attention on the object of his perception. Difficulty in relaxing, both mentally and physically.
- 5) Difficulty in perceiving things clearly, just as they are.
- 6) Lack of persistence in a chosen course. Habitual lethargy.
- 7) Reluctance to recognize one's own actual character and personality.
- 8) Inability to assign realities, appropriately and consequently, their priorities.
- 9) Limited capacity for perceiving and discerning inner sensations and feelings, and the reactions of others.
- 10) Denial of the gifts of the spirit. Instead, devotion to godless materialism.
- 11) Wishing to enhance his limited level of consciousness and spirituality but not knowing where to start. Unawareness of the ideal of achieving individual realization.

Any unfortunate person who is alienated from normal modes of communication through the feeling body is limited to expressing himself through the mental aspect of the mind or through the spiritualized aspect of it by seeking intuitive knowledge. It could be either one or the other. If the feeling body is dormant there would be a lack of integration of the vital fields of consciousness. Thus the person whose feelings are chronically blocked from beneficial expression will be unaware of the instrument of inner perception that is his centre of co-ordination of perceptions and sensations. His mode of consciousness will consequently become fluid, variable and unpredictable. He will have difficulty in finding a stable datum on which to focus himself for the purpose of attaining the ideal of the realization of his beingness through Yoga. The effects noted above may be self-perpetuating if they manifest on the communal level as well as on the individual.

The Reintegration of Divisive Cultures

The mechanistic philosophies of the 18th century separated art, religion, science and government into separate cultural areas, each with its own boundaries and zones of influence. Consequently, this philosophy of reductionism has reduced the unity of culture that had previously existed and thrived in various European countries. Since then, these partial, incomplete cultures have progressed separately, often regardless of one another and sometimes as if the others did not exist at all. Each has its own code of what is acceptable or not within its own ambit. Few rules of ethics or morality could cross these boundaries so as to be acceptable to all.

This fragmentation of cultures has permeated all levels of society and, amongst other effects, it results in a fragmentation of personality at the individual level. Each of these partial aspects of national cultures is a manifestation of one of the vital elements of human consciousness; the spiritual, the mental, the emotional and the physical bodies. Many of us

have committed ourselves to one or another of these divisive modes of thought and culture and have neglected the integration of the others, unaware of ultimate consequences.

Thus the individual seeking personal fulfilment may find himself caught in an unfriendly environment with a lack of fellow-travellers with whom he could share his beliefs and ideals on a continuing basis. The earnest seeker will find himself thrown more on his own resources to ensure the beneficial continuation of his spiritual and personal development. This also necessitates the restoration of the balance of the individual's mental and feeling bodies in order to generate progress towards the achievement of the ideals of his community and himself. To re-establish this balance it is necessary to enhance the individual's mental and feeling faculties at the same time.

Realizing the Mind: Types of Knowledge

Any aspirant seeking to attain realization of the mind needs to be aware that there are various types of knowledge, each of them relevant to a field of reality or of assumed reality, and each with the capability of manifesting an aspect of the will.

The primary types of knowledge are:

Knowledge of the divine Life beyond our senses and faculties, with the ultimate transformation into mystic union.

Superconscious knowledge beyond our normal human awareness: the capability of reflecting on the flow of consciousness and on realities.

Intuitive knowledge that is received from sources that we may not be able to identify.

Knowledge of the subtle body, the *chakras* and the senses which can be observed and influenced through the individual will.

Knowledge of the nature of the one true Spirit; the essence and the energies of the divine Supreme, the one without a second that pervades all forms of life.

Knowledge of the nature of the Self (being of the same nature as the divine Supreme) and of the realization of the mind.

Experiential knowledge that has been derived from one's own life experience, whether it has been good, bad or indifferent.

Sensual knowledge that has been acquired through the physical senses.

Scientific knowledge that can be observed, measured and tested on a repeatable basis.

Instinctual knowledge that has been derived from one's human instincts for the purpose of self-survival.

Historical knowledge that is connected with past events in one's own life or in the experiences of others.

Mental knowledge that has been acquired and retained through one's own mental faculties.

These fields of knowledge are separate, each having a memory of its own or a chain of recollection. They are not exclusive, except at the highest levels, and they 'overlap' in the mind. This necessitates sensitive discernment to determine which fields of knowledge one has access to and to perceive in which fields the mind is moving at the present time. A lack of differentiation in thought can cause a lack of integration of the faculties of thought and action. The mind that is lacking in self-direction is prone to drifting from one kind of thinking to another without being aware of it.

The quest for the divine Life may begin at the level of personal experience motivated by the 'need to know' mode of the mind. Knowledge that has been derived from one's own life experience and with self-awareness is irrefutable. It cannot be denied. Imposed dogmas and doctrines seek to establish exclusivity by restricting access to true knowledge and experience and by restricting the use of it to one self-perpetuating hierarchy or another.

Faced with this multiplicity of knowledge, the enquiring mind can easily feel overwhelmed, not knowing where to begin on the lifelong quest to attain a higher level of beingness for oneself and for others.

(to be continued)

Japa means uttering His name. You should do japa irrespective of the state of your mind. Consider yourself as one detached from the mind. Whether the mind registers a feeling of joy or sorrow should not be a matter of concern to you. Go on doing your own work.

Swami Vijnanananda

St. Alexander Yakobson - the Solovetski Doctor

John Phillips

Memorial day in the Assembly of the New Martyrs.

Confessing one's faith is heroism in faith, and usually appears in the form of unshakable faith, human fortitude and power of awe in the face of whatever offends the beloved of God. The effect of this burning quality of the spirit brings forth inspiration and the fire of zeal for God is lit, which gives strength and energy, and when from being a weak man, irrespective of whether there are shortcomings and even sins, he becomes a hero of the spirit, powerful, so to speak, as if obtaining fire from heaven.

Confessing Christ changed the human type and founded Christian civilisation. The spiritual power of such confessors of faith is great. Russia has always given birth to such people, and now it needs them even more. So let us be inspired by their feats and we shall help Russia, which is still suffering today. The author of this article, I . M. Andreyev, himself a confessor of faith, was the inspirer of a whole generation of contemporary warriors of Christ.

S.L.O.N.

In 1929 at the end of winter in the terrible Solovetski concentration camp the incidence of scurvy sharply increased, and by the spring, out of 18 thousand prisoners in the 4th department of SLON (Solovetski Special Regime Camp), which was located on the island of Solovetski itself, the number of the sick reached five thousand. I, as a prison doctor, was assigned to the task, besides my normal work, to take on the management of one of the new scorbutic barracks with 300 prisoners. When I arrived in these barracks, I was met by a young Jewish doctor with a very handsome inspired face.

He was a fourth-year medical student. Having such a qualified assistant was a great rarity and an immense relief. Alexander Yakovlevich Yakobson (this was the medical assistant's name) went round the whole barracks with me and showed me all the patients. He described to me in detail the medical history of each of them and the nature of the appearance of the disease in each one. The patients were all in a very serious condition. Bleeding and rotting gums, ulcerous scorbutic gingivitis, immense swelling of the joints, scorbutic bleeding in the form of blue patches on the extremities - all this jumped to my attention in a brief examination. On detailed examination many appeared to have serious complications in the internal organs: haemorrhagic nephritis, pleuritis and pericarditis, serious eye diseases ("fish eye" - i.e. an eye with a red border around the cornea). From the explanation by the medical assistant I understood that he could cope very well with the symptomatology of diseases and correctly made diagnoses and prognoses. When I learned that Alexander Yakovlevich was continuously working twenty-four hours a day, I sent him away to take a rest and began to go round alone and examine the patients.

In the records of the disease were noted all the basic details, i.e. forename, surname, date and place of birth and so on, the medical history was collected and subjective complaints noted. In view of the huge number of patients I was forced to examine them very hastily or make quite short notes. Nevertheless my examination, which began at 8 o'clock in the morning, ended only at 3 o'clock at night, with two half-hour breaks for dinner and supper. On the following day I again came to the barracks at 8 o'clock in the morning and found Alexander Yakovlevich, who had already gone round all the patients, carrying out all my

instructions and collecting information about the most seriously ill patients (it appears that he worked from 12 o'clock noon until 8 o'clock in the morning, i.e. 20 hours, again without a break). Alexander Yakovlevich's face was more swollen and bore the clear signs of hard beatings. In answer to my questions he told me the following. At 7 o'clock in the morning the supervisor of the I.S.Ch. (Information Investigation Section, i.e. the GPU department in the concentration camp) visited the barrack. The supervisor was in a drunken condition. Going round the patients, he asked them whether they were happy with the work of the doctor and the medical assistant. Some of the sick prisoners said that the doctor "looked into" the barracks only late at night and quickly examined "some" patients, "not giving any help to the seriously ill," and the medical assistant came to work the day before only at 12 o'clock noon.

Not investigating to see whether these complaints were true, and not asking for any explanation from the medical assistant, the I.S.Ch. supervisor struck him on the face several times and ordered me "the doctor, supervising the department" to appear at 12 noon before him "for explanations."

"Alexander Yakovlevich," I said, turning to the medical assistant, "as you know, I must without fail go for interrogation. You yourself see how many seriously ill patients there are. Can you, in spite of the fact that your work again continues for a whole period of twenty-four hours, work a further two or three hours, until I return, I hope, from the interrogation?" "Of course, doctor!" the medical assistant humbly replied, "I shall stay and examine all the seriously ill patients."

"Please. As you cope very well even with complicated cases and I can thank you warmly for your help. I in turn will try to explain to the I. S. Ch. Supervisor that he acted unjustly towards you".

"Oh, do not worry about me," the medical assistant exclaimed, "and do not defend me. I have had occasion to undergo rather more serious torments without any fault of mine and for these I only thank God! Remember, St John Chrysostom said: "thank God for everything!"

"Are you then a Christian?" I asked him in wonderment.

"Yes, I am an Orthodox Christian Jew!" replied Alexander Yakovlevich, smiling joyfully.

I quietly shook his hand and said: "Well, goodbye, tomorrow we shall talk, pray for me!"

"Keep calm!" the medical assistant trustingly remarked. "Pray without fail to your Guardian Angel all the time you are under interrogation. May God preserve you, doctor!"

The Guardian Angel

I went away. On the way I prayed to the Lord, to the Most Holy Mother of God, to St Nicholas the wonderworker and, in particular, to my Guardian Angel, fulfilling the good advice of Alexander Yakovlevich.

Entering the office of the I.S.Ch. supervisor, I mentally addressed a last prayer to my Guardian Angel: "Protect me! Make them understand! ..."

The supervisor greeted me in silence and pointed to a chair. I sat down.

“Tell me, when you yesterday went the rounds of the patients and why did your assistant, that Jewish medical assistant, go to work only in towards the evening?”

Mentally, without words, I called on the help of my Guardian Angel and tried to keep calm. Then in a soft even voice, I unhurriedly told him everything. I told him that, on instructions from the Health Section, I arrived to take over the barracks at 8 o'clock in the morning. When I learned that the medical assistant had, expanding into a new hospital, taken 300 patients and prepared everything necessary for their arrival, thus working a whole day and night without a break, I sent him for a few hours to rest and myself undertook to go round the patients. My going the rounds lasted from 8 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock at night, and I saw the last group of patients, who were in the attic, in fact only between 2 and 3 o'clock at night. The medical assistant, after working without a break for 24 hours, went to sleep for about 3 or 4 hours and then again came to work yesterday at 12 o'clock noon and has again been working for 24 hours without a break - until that moment!

“What are these swine complaining about!” the supervisor interrupted me. “Point out these bastards! I shall put them into solitary confinement!”

“They are not to blame,” I replied, “they did not know about the working conditions. They told you the truth, that the medical assistant came to them in the attic at 12 o'clock noon and the doctor went the rounds to them at 2 o'clock at night.”

“So, that is it,” said the supervisor, scratching the back of his head and yawning. “All right, now go!”

Coming away from the interrogation, I at once went to the hospital barracks. There I found the Head of the Health Section, a doctor, who after serving a sentence for a criminal offence (for abortion, ending in death) remained to serve as a “voluntary employee.”

The Head of the Health Section was shouting at the medical assistant about some kind of shortcoming.

“What a disgraceful thing to come to work so late!” he shouted at me.

I explained. The Head of the Health Section went away.

“Why was he angry with you?” I asked Alexander Yakovlevich.

“Because there is a strong stench here ... I explained to him that 90% of the patients have rotting saws. Then he shouted: ‘Shut up!’ and then you came.”

“Go and get some sleep,” I said, “and come back at 6 o'clock in the evening.”

I already wanted to get to know Alexander Yakovlevich better and have a heart-to-heart talk with him, but due to our being extremely busy and exhausted, I did not succeed in doing this for a long time.

A Friend of St. Tryphon

Once, on the feast day of the Most Holy Mother of God, I was able to arrange an assignment for myself and Alexander Yakovlevich in the form of an inspection of a remote medical post. Early in the morning we left the Solovetski fortress along the Savvatiev road and, after travelling several kilometres, turned off that road into a pine forest. It was a wonderful, clear and warm autumn day, which rarely happens on the Solovetski islands. The birch trees shone with a bright golden glow in the sun's rays, scattered in huge patches in the pine forest. The Levitanovski landscape added a quiet melancholy to the spiritual joy of the feast of the Mother of God. Going into the depths of the forest, I sat down on a tree stump with Alexander Yakovlevich and asked him to talk about himself. And this is what he told me.

Born the son of a St Petersburg merchant at the Alexandrov market, he early lost his parents and began to make his way in life independently. When he was a second-year student in the Faculty of Medicine he met and formed a friendship with a certain geologist, a Jewish Tolstoyan, who attracted him with his stories about L. N. Tolstoy and the teachings of the Tolstoyans. It was not Tolstoy's theological works that exercised a strong influence on Alexander Yakovlevich, but his tales and stories: "Where love is, there is God," "By what people live," and others. A year later, being now a third-year student, he got to know an elderly doctor, who had personally known L. N. Tolstoy. This man, a convinced Orthodox Christian, explained to Alexander the essence of the Tolstoy sect and revealed to him "the boundless treasure of the Orthodox Church." A year later Alexander Yakovlevich was baptised and became an Orthodox Christian.

"After baptism," Alexander Yakovlevich continued, "I could not look upon religious Jews indifferently. The atheist Jews, who are now in the majority, were of little interest to me. But Jews who believed in God began to appear to me as just unfortunate lost people, whom I was morally obliged to bring to Christ. I asked: "Why are they not Christians? Why do they not love Christ?"

The arguments and sermons of the newly converted Jew became known and Alexander Yakovlevich was arrested.

"On one of the assignments in the concentration camp," Alexander Yakovlevich told me, "where I worked on very heavy general labour in the preparation of timber, there was an unusually savage supervisor. In the morning and in the evening, before and after work, he lined the prisoners up and ordered them to sing morning and evening "prayers:" in the morning the *International* , and in the evening some Soviet song, in which there were the words: 'We, as one, will die for the Soviet power!' Everyone sang. But I could not do so. I remained silent. Going along the line of prisoners, the supervisor noticed that I was silent and began to strike me across the face. Then I sang, loudly, unexpectedly for myself, looking up to heaven: 'Our Father, who art in heaven!' The savage supervisor became like a devil and knocking me down on the ground, beat me with his fists until I lost consciousness. On release from the concentration camp, I received 'voluntary exile' to Vyatka ..."

"Well, how did you manage in Vyatka?" I asked Alexander Yakovlevich.

"When I arrived in Vyatka, a town completely unknown to me, I first of all asked where the church was (at that time not all the churches were closed), and coming to the church I asked whether there were any icons of St. Tryphon of Vyatka there and when his feast was celebrated. They showed me an icon and said that the saint's feast was on the following day,

8 October. My heart was transported with delight that St. Tryphon had brought me to his city for the very day of his feast. Falling on my knees before the saint's icon, I told him that I had no friends in Vyatka except him, that I had no one else to ask for help. I asked him to arrange my life and work in Vyatka. After the prayer my heart became calm, light and silently joyful - a true sign that my prayer had been heard. Coming out of the church after vespers, I slowly walked along the main street, carrying under my arm a small bundle of my things.

"What is it, darling, have you just come out of hospital?" I suddenly heard the inviting voice of a woman asking. In front of me stood a well-built elderly woman wearing a clean white headscarf, modestly, cleanly and neatly dressed, looking at me with clear kind eyes.

"No, mother," I replied, 'not from hospital, but from prison, I have just been released from the concentration camp and they have sent me to Vyatka.'

"What crime were you punished for? For robbery, theft or murder?"

"No, because I believe in God and, while being a Jew, I embraced Christianity," I replied.

A conversation started. She invited me to go to her flat. In her room it was clean and tidy, and the whole corner above the bed was hung with icons, in front of which burned three different coloured lamps.

"Tomorrow is the feast in honour of St Tryphon of Vyatka, the protector and patron saint of this city," said the woman and pointed out the saint's icon. I knelt down before it and wept in joyful gratitude. And so I arranged to live in this devout widow's flat. And after two days I also found work for myself as a stevedore. In this way I lived, thank God, quietly for six months, but in the spring I was again arrested, and this time I received a sentence of ten years and came to this holy island of Solovetski. Here by their prayers St. Zosima and St. Savvati help me."

We silently proceeded further with Alexander Yakovlevich into the depths of the forest and suddenly quite unexpectedly came across an ancient half-ruined little stone chapel with windows and door boarded up with wooden boards. The boards were old and decrepit and easily came away with a little effort. We entered the chapel and saw on the wall the large old icon of the Smolensk Mother of God. The paint on the icon had run and crumbled, and only the Mother of God's face was clearly and faithfully preserved, even just her beneficent eyes.

Alexander Yakovlevich at once fell on his knees before this icon, raising his two arms aloft and with a loud full voice sang "It is meet and proper" He sang the prayer to the end. My throat just closed up and I could not sing a note, but my whole soul sang and rejoiced, looking at the two pairs of eyes: the compassionate eyes of the Mother of God and the contrite eyes of Alexander Yakovlevich.

A month after that walk Alexander Yakovlevich was arrested and sent to an unknown place. (The arrest of a prisoner usually ended in execution).

Almost forty years have passed since this occurrence, but the unforgettably wonderful picture of the prayer of the Jewish Orthodox Christian before the eyes of the icon of the Mother of God has often vividly passed through my mind, and I have heard his joyful voice, expressing unconquerable faith and a deep fiery urge to glorify her, who is "more honourable than the

Cherubim!”

The Saint in Action

Professor Grotov has written to us from Rome that when he was a prisoner on the Solovetski islands under the same legal provision as Ivan Mikhailovich, almost at the same time, he met Alexander Yakovlevich and was also impressed by his sincere Christian behaviour. He knew that they would soon arrest him. In that same year they executed him for this same spirit of sincere Christian humility, as unnecessary and even dangerous for the existing atheist soulless society. But Communism has fallen to the depths of hell, fallen apart like something useless and even dangerous, like a contagion poisoning the healthy organism of the Russian people. And now such a man is extremely necessary, but he is not there, heroes of humility have died out! And Russia appeals to their spirit of its past, as to living persons, for with God all are living: “We magnify you, holy Martyrs, and honour your noble suffering, which you bore for Christ! Help us!!!”

And with regard to the honouring of the loving Alexander Yakovlevich as a saint, I can say the following. A young Jewish woman came to us and asked for baptism. Father Seraphim prepared her well for this and inspired her with the New Martyrs, who at that time had not long been canonised, and she wanted to have one of them as a patron saint. She humbly asked me to name her any saint among the heavenly protectors and I gave her the little known holy woman Agafia Gomelskaya, who died of hunger in 1939. And then this St. Agafia began to do her work. In the soul of the zealous new Orthodox Christian arose the thought of helping people, the handicapped, those crippled for life. And she inspired her to adopt a boy who was born blind and whose parents flatly rejected him. In our degenerate times hardly anyone can undertake such an act. She had a spiritual mother, Elena Yu. Kontsevich, who did not approve of a rich spoilt young divorced woman, who already had a son, undertaking such a spiritual feat. Her new husband drank, but did not stand in the way. What was to be done? She prayed to the Most Holy Mother of God and the latter directed her thought once again to the New Martyrs.

It was a blessing that at that time a book called *Catacomb Saints of Russia* was being prepared for publication. And in this book Agafia learned about St. Alexander, the Medical Assistant, and began to pray to him to give her the poor boy and for him to take on his care, because she could hardly manage it. And he heard her prayer, and took the new blind Orthodox Christian into his care and has protected him as holy as it befits him, for already more than twenty years. So that the boy might learn to honour icons and his heavenly protector, an icon of the saint was engraved for him, so that he could “see” it with his hands and venerate the saint as is appropriate for an Orthodox Christian.

[Look, Learn and Be Free](#)

C.S . Ramakrishnan

WISDOM consists in valuation, runs the adage. We function wisely when we are able to assess the true worth of things, and it is wisdom that effaces sorrow and leads to bliss.

Our lives are crowded with events. So many things happen to us, we meet such a variety of people, we face all manner of situations, we confront a multiplicity of problems, we go through variegated experiences - all for what? Only to gain enlightenment, to be able to apprehend the Truth that shall set us free.

We must observe, listen, think, meditate, realize and be free. There is no other road that leads to ultimate freedom. Hence it is that the Lord exhorts us in the thirteenth chapter of the *Gita* to gain a deep insight into the pain and evil associated with birth, death, old age and disease. He places before us four basic facts inseparable from life, and asks us to understand their implications fully and act upon that understanding. Siddhartha Gautama was born in the lap of luxury and was carefully sequestered from all ugly and painful aspects of existence, but Destiny chuckled and presented before his intelligent vision four sights: an ailing man, an old man, a dead body and a shaven monk. The Prince became intensely aware of the pervasiveness of sorrow and set out to find a remedy therefore. He meditated deeply and became the Buddha, the Illumined One, who blazed a trail for all humanity to attain ineffable bliss.

As the Buddha points out, each of us has to be a light unto himself, a light that tells apart the eternal from the transitory. Appearances should not delude us. The siren voice of sense pleasures calls to us, but no pleasure comes without a

crown of thorns. Pleasure and pain are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. When you accept the one, you have to accept the other too. Birth, for instance, implies death. Every one of us is born under a sentence of death. We are all ticket-of-leave prisoners of Yama, the king of death, who permitted us varying periods of parole. On the appointed day, which is mercifully kept a secret from us, he will claim us back quite unceremoniously. Whatever clever steps we may take to avoid death, there is finally no armour against it. Prince and pauper alike must await the inevitable hour. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

So in the unknown time allotted to us we must strive our utmost to reach the Supreme. It is true that the Lord in His infinite mercy never shuts the door to salvation with a bang. If we die, we are sure to be born again to take up the thread of evolution from where we left it. Again and again we have to die and be reborn, till all our *Karma* has been completely worked out. It is a long, long rope that He gives us to find our way to fulfilment. In this scheme of the path to freedom there is no blind alley, no end of the tether. All shall willy-nilly be saved. But there is a snag. There is no guarantee that in the very next life we shall be born as human beings once more. The next birth is determined by a complex calculus of our accumulated *Samskaras* . We may have to pass through births among other species, before we are human again. Even if, because of our good deeds, we are born not as lower creatures but as higher beings like *Devas* , there is pretty little comfort in it for the earnest aspirant for two reasons. First the status of celestial is also time bound. When the accumulated merits are exhausted even the star has to fall down. There is no permanent tenancy in heaven. That apart, being a celestial does not help a spiritual pilgrim in the least. Heaven is a *bhoga bhumi*

, a field of pleasure; but enjoyment despite their glamour, do not lead us anywhere. They are self-stultifying. It is only on this earth as human beings that we can practise the disciplines that can take us to *Mukti*, liberation. This is a crucial fact that few of us recognise in our myopic life. And that is why Sri Sankara begins his *Vivekachudamani*, the *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, with the observation that three things are difficult to obtain: human birth, yearning for freedom and the company of the holy. Having obtained the human body it is imperative that we should strive for freedom here and now, remembering that death can always be round the corner.

To death itself, however, we need not be allergic. It is only an episode in the saga of the soul which, in reality, is neither born nor dies, but abides eternally. What we call birth and death are only the embodiment and disembodiment of the soul in the manifest world. We are like actors in a drama, a long, long play composed and directed by Him. Each of us is allotted a small part in it. Ours is not to question why, we cannot protest against the way He has ordered. Ours is only to act the prescribed part well. We have to appear on the world stage when called and withdraw when our lines are over. If we carefully remember this, life gets a new fragrance altogether.

As inescapable as birth and death are old age and sickness. As time rolls on, we get old, our body deteriorates, the sense organs weaken. All our faculties are impaired. Hearing becomes difficult, vision becomes dim, smells turn faint, taste run to insipidity and the tactile sense loses its sensitiveness. Walking and moving become arduous challenges. Life, in short, proves a trial and a tribulation. But the curious thing about getting old is that desire does not always diminish. The craving for sense pleasures mostly continues. To be a little irreverent, we may say that even Sri Sankara did not know everything. He asks rhetorically. "When old age sets in, where is the hankering for the delights of the flesh?" He queries in all innocence. Sankara died quite young and so could not experience real old age. But we ourselves are by no means unfamiliar with cases of men, advanced in age and reputed to be clever, chasing titillations that even younger men would scorn. Sooner or later all of us are finally taught that sense pleasures are evanescent, bringing only sorrow in their wake. Desire cannot be assuaged through enjoyment any more than fire can be extinguished with ghee. Old age comes to remind us that it is time we cease the endless chase of the mirage of desire and turn our gaze inward. The *Upanishad* says that the Lord made the senses outgoing, but the man of wisdom is he who, desiring immortality" turns his gaze inward.

It is expected of us that with maturity we become inward-looking. If inward-looking does not come normally, nature gives us a shock which reverses the direction of our gaze. What fools we mortals be when such a rich inexhaustible treasure lies within us and we totally ignore it in our pursuit of external trumpery trifles.

Disease, too is inescapable by the mortal frame and we have to do our best to alleviate the suffering. Modern science indeed has done marvels in wiping away many diseases and controlling many others, but a disease-free human life is still a pipe dream. The most expert physician also falls ill and dies. So it is up to each of us to use disease itself as a stepping stone to happiness. Look at Narayana Bhattatiri, the composer of the immortal *Narayaneeyam*. He was the victim of crippling arthritis, but in his agony he turned all his poetic gifts and imaginative powers to hymn the glories of the Lord of Guruvayur. The result was that he had a vision of the Lord in all His sweetness and grandeur and his disease was cured, and what is more, we have been vouchsafed one of the most thrilling devotional epic poems in Sanskrit. The moral is that we too likewise should exploit our handicaps to yield us

joy. We should be like the pearl-oyster. When a grain of sand gets inside the shell of the pearl-oyster, the creature responds to the irritation by throwing out a sort of enamel which covers the grain, over and over again, till finally a lovely pearl is formed.

In fact there is pain and evil, in birth, death, old age and disease only when we approach them negatively. Positively approached, they all prove themselves catalysts spurring us on to life's fulfilment. If you should think of birth, why not think of the birth of that eternal child, Sri Krishna? He was born in the utter darkness of Kamsa's prison, but how dazzling became the cell when He appeared decked in all his divine paraphernalia! The Krishna Birth must take place in our heart every morning when we open our eyes on the darkness of *Samsara*. If we wake up every day to Krishna-consciousness life becomes a mart of joy and we can face any situation with a song and a dance.

So also, if we should think of death, visualise the death of King Parikshit. Here was a great emperor condemned to die in seven days. Instead of moaning his fate he listened to Sri Suka and absorbed the nectar of immortality called the *Bhagavata*. We are tempted to exclaim with the Apostle, "O Death, where is thy sting, O Grave, where is thy victory!" Or contemplate the passing away of the patriarch Bhishma. What a heroic finale to a mighty life! From his bed of arrows he has given us some of the sublimest texts of wisdom like the *Santiparva* and the glorious litany the *Vishnu Santiparva*. That is creative dying, milking the nectar of Immortality out of death itself.

Old age, likewise, should be a consummation to be wished for. The evening of life should see the radiance of a fulfilled existence. Society should profit by their mature wisdom. A senior citizen should be a beacon light to the community.

How ailment can be a blessing is best illustrated by the terminal illness of Sri Ramakrishna. His physical cancer cured the mental ailment of many. We read with a thrill how on New Year's Day in 1886 he showered his grace on a variety of people and dowered them with a taste of the Infinite. It was also that illness which brought together the band of young lads who later became the pillars of the Ramakrishna Movement. It was during this illness that Narendranath was made aware of his spiritual potential and commissioned to do the great job he did later as Swami Vivekananda. Again it was because, even in the throes of physical suffering, Sri Ramakrishna could distinctly declare that "He who was Rama and He who was Krishna has now taken embodiment in this human frame." that Naren was convinced of Sri Ramakrishna's real nature and was inspired to dedicate his whole life to spreading his gospel. Indeed Sri Ramakrishna radiated so much spiritual joy during his illness that one of the boys, Latu, was tempted to remark that the Great Master was only play-acting, and was not really ill. Sri Ramakrishna responded with the smiling remark. "The rogue has found me out."

As a matter of fact it is not the physical ailment that harasses us so much as the mental misery. The real cure for all our troubles should happen in the mind. If the mind is kept clean and pure the afflictions that plague the body become just flea bites.

The body-mind is, no doubt, a complex entity; what affects the body affects the mind, and vice versa; but in the complex, the mind can be made the senior partner and the body taught to obey its behests. When the mind dominates the system, it can derive useful lessons from everything around it. The *Bhagavata* tells us of the Avadhuta who had twenty-four gurus, a couple of dozen things and creatures that taught him valuable spiritual verities. Sri Ramakrishna also used to say "As long as I live, so long do I learn." There is no end to the

insights we can gain from what are considered common sights beneath our notice. Even misfortunes are great teachers. Kunti prays to the Lord "May misfortunes assail us constantly," When in trouble, we are forced to think of the Lord. Troubles are finally removed not through our cleverness but through His grace. Therefore anything that helps us think of Him should be welcomed. Shakespeare catches a faint glimmer of this truth when he makes the Duke in *As You Like It* discourse on the uses of adversity. He points out that the alert mind can find "tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything."

Horace Walpole said that the world is a tragedy for those who feel and a comedy for those who think. If we watch our own life and the life around us without self-centredness and self-pity, considering ourselves as willing companions of the Lord in His play, the world loses its gloom and life becomes a joy and a benediction.

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[Bondage and Freedom](#)

[Swami Bhajanananda](#)

The archetypal image of freedom

One evening in late autumn a stout greenish yellow caterpillar with decorative eyespots and a horn-like spur at each end came crawling out of the Mayavati forest into this editorial office. After nosing around a bit it made straight for one corner of the room and ensconced itself comfortably there for the night. Next morning in the same corner there was instead of the worm a fluffy ball of golden silk which it had obviously woven around itself during the night. And there it remained all through the winter, unnoticed, unaffected by the snow-falls, hailstorms and rain that were changing the outside world. One fine morning in early spring the ball of silk was found to be empty with a big hole in it, and there was a large beautiful yellow tusser moth sunning against the window-pane. When the window was opened, the angelic creature gently flapped its iridescent wings and glided away into the golden rays of the sun which were filtering in through the mist. Under our very eyes, but mostly concealed from our vision, one of the marvellous acts of life had been performed.

When understood properly, every event in nature has a symbolic significance. For every event in the universe is in some way an approximation to the archetypal process of being, becoming and liberation. This is what, at the gross physical level, the Second Law of Thermodynamics represents: energy builds up, does work and is then lost for ever in the vastness of space. Life too, when viewed as a whole, is no exception to this law. Universal life consists of countless millions of individual life-cycles, like that of the tusser moth for instance. The tusser moth begins its life as a leaf-eating larva, then spins a cocoon for itself within which it undergoes a radical transformation, and finally emerges as the free-flying imago. But the freedom of the tusser moth is limited and short-lived. The essence of its being is drawn back into the life stream and the whole life-cycle is repeated all over again, endlessly. Therefore the tusser moth does not fulfil completely the ultimate purpose of creation; and this is true of all living beings. Except man. Man is born as a child, grows and works, and impelled by his inner impulses spins the threads of bondage by which he binds himself. But then, he reflects, meditates, transforms his consciousness, breaks his bonds, and his radiant soul wings its way to the Supreme Self - never to be pulled back into the life stream again. This is of course true of only the ideal man; the rest of mankind go on struggling in bondage and repeating the cycle. But every man carries deep in his unconscious the archetypal image of the free soul.

It is this archetypal image of freedom that gives man an acute sense of bondage. If an animal is free to roam wherever it pleases, it will not feel bondage. But man, in spite of having all the freedom he needs to move about and enjoy life, still has a constant sense of bondage. It is upon the nature of his understanding of this bondage and the way he struggles to attain freedom that a person's character and destiny depend.

The wheel of bondage

In Shakespeare's *King Lear* the king tells his virtuous youngest daughter:

"Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound

Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears

Do scald like molten lead."

Here the 'wheel of fire' refers to the wheel of Ixion. Greek mythology narrates how Ixion, king of the Lapithae, committed a serious offence, and when nobody would purify him of this sin, Zeus carried him up to heaven. But Ixion tried to deceive Zeus himself and, as a punishment, was tied to a perpetually revolving wheel of fire in the infernal regions. Crime, guilt, sin and punishment - these constitute the wheel of Ixion which obviously represents the state of moral bondage in which quite a big section of humanity lives. In ancient Greece the followers of the Orphic cult conceived human existence as a series of rebirths constituting 'the sorrowful weary wheel.'

The *Upanishads* speak of the whole universe as a huge wheel, the wheel of Brahma, with the individual self symbolized as a swan tied to this ever-revolving wheel. According to this view, life itself is a state of bondage; not only the present life but also the after-life. All the three worlds - earth, world of the manes and heaven or the world of *karma-devas* - are included in the wheel of Brahma.

Vyasa in his commentary on *Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms*, speaks of the 'six-spoked wheel of transmigratory existence.' The six spokes are: virtue and vice, happiness and sorrow, and attachment and repulsion. Good actions lead to happiness and bad actions lead to suffering; happiness leads to attachment and suffering leads to repulsion, which in turn produce good and bad actions, respectively - the whole series thus constituting a cycle, the wheel of transmigratory existence. The hub of this wheel is ignorance of the real nature of the Self.

The struggle for freedom

What adds poignancy to life is not man's state of bondage, which in itself is not such a difficult problem, but his ignorance of the true nature of bondage and freedom. Very often a state of bondage is mistaken for true freedom and, by striving for wrong types of freedom, people only strengthen their bondage. The *Gita* says that in order to understand the true nature of bondage and freedom one must have a *sattvic buddhi*. Sri Ramakrishna has spoken of four classes of people - the ever-free, liberated souls, seekers of liberation and bound souls - and has given the following illustration:

Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, "Look! there goes a big one!" But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, "We need not fear any more; we are quite safe here." But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.

It is the struggle for ultimate freedom that distinguishes spiritual life from worldly life, known respectively as *nivritti* and *pravritti*. Struggle for freedom is seen in both the spiritual man and the worldly man but whereas the spiritual man seeks ultimate liberation, the worldly man seeks freedom to enjoy life. However, all those who turn to spiritual life are not necessarily seekers after liberation. As a matter of fact, in most spiritual aspirants true longing for ultimate liberation comes only at a somewhat advanced stage of spiritual progress and, until this longing arises, spiritual life may not be so vastly different from worldly life as it appears to be.

It is the longing for liberation that makes even love for God meaningful. God is commonly described as the embodiment of perfection, beauty, love and happiness. But then, why is it so difficult to realize Him, to seek Him and even to have faith in Him? Lack of freedom is the only difficulty.

Liberation as the ultimate goal of life is one of the most fundamental characteristics of the Indian religious tradition which distinguish it from the Hebraic tradition. To understand the uniqueness of this doctrine it is necessary to know the conception of salvation in different religions.

Meaning of salvation

One of the important ideas shared by all religions is the view that man is in a dire situation and needs to be saved from that. The human predicament is, however, conceived in different ways in different religions. In Hinduism it is regarded as a state of bondage of the soul. The real self of man is the self-luminous, blissful, immortal spirit known as the *Atman*. Owing to primordial ignorance the soul, in some mysterious way, gets involved in matter, subtle and gross. The identification of the spirit with matter is the cause of suffering. The gross covering of the self is destroyed by death but the subtle body survives and is reborn in a new gross body resulting in a chain of births and deaths.

Buddhism rejects the notion of *Atman* as immortal spirit. According to the doctrine of dependent origination what appears as the self or ego is nothing but a combination of various elements which are a part of the universal 'chain of causation' and flux. This combination is born again and again in accordance with the Law of Karma. Buddha considered this state of human existence suffering.

Christianity conceives human existence as a state of damnation by which is meant sin and exile from paradise. The 'original sin' of disobedience to God committed by Adam and Eve is shared by all humanity, and hence the natural tendency of every man is to do evil. Thus on the one hand man has to bear the burden of a guilty conscience and, on the other, he is separated from God. Christianity does not believe in rebirth.

In Judaism and Islam man's present condition is regarded neither as bondage nor as damnation; it is simply the normal state of affairs in the inscrutable plan of God.

Whatever be their conception of man's present state of existence, all the world religions are unanimous in holding that man can be saved from it. This process of 'saving' man is known as salvation. The Latin word *salvatio* is derived from *salus* which means health and the Greek word *soteria* is derived from *sos* which means 'safe.' Thus salvation refers to a state of existence in which the soul remains whole, immortal and in supreme peace. This state of blessedness has been described in different ways.

Since Hinduism believes in bondage, it conceives salvation as freedom, *mukti*. According to some schools of Hindu thought, freedom can be obtained through man's own effort, whereas according to the devotional schools God alone can liberate man. In this state of freedom the *Atman* shines in its own glory and blissfulness.

The Buddhist term for salvation is *Nirvana*. Though it is often translated as 'deliverance,' what it really means is the cessation or extinction of suffering.

In Christianity salvation is known as redemption. Through his death on the cross Christ atoned for humanity, brought about a 'reconciliation' between the Father and human beings (some Christian theologians, including St. Augustine, regard Christ's death as ransom paid to the Devil) and has thus redeemed man from the 'original sin.' The redeemed soul returns to heaven and experiences the Beatific Vision of God for ever. Since Christian theologians regard the body and soul as inseparable, they speak of the 'resurrection' of the body with the soul (after death or after the Last Judgement) rather than of soul's immortality.

Judaism and Islam also believe in resurrection but reject the need for an Incarnation as the redeemer of souls, individual atonement being regarded as sufficient means for the remission

of sins.

What kind of experience does salvation represent? According to all religions, it is a state of supreme peace. However, Hinduism regards it as a state of pure 'being' in which the Self remains in its true original nature, whereas Buddhism regards it as a state of absolute 'non-being', and the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions regard it as 'participation' in the ceaseless act of divine Love. Being, non-being, participation; these are the three descriptions of salvational experience given by world religions. They all negate the endless struggle of 'becoming' which characterizes worldly life.

(to be continued)

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Thayumanava

Swami Ritajananda

He strongly felt that the *Vedas*, the *Agamas* and the other scriptures did not preach divergent creeds, but pointed only various roads leading to the same goal and the Lord indeed comes to us in the form we like to have Him.

The Vedas, Agamas and Puranas great,

So legends and other diverse lores,

Set forth at length, the vast Advaita's creed

And Dvaita too, for Dvaita's truth well grasped

Do lead us towards Advaita's light.

Here reason, facts and sacred texts agree,

And Dvaita and Advaita are at one,

Enough, no more of discipline I want,

Whate'er I think I that become indeed.

So by the constant thought that Thou art I

I can well tread Advaita's path (indeed)

Whate'er I think of Thee, in that same form

Thou dost descend O Sir! What need I more

O Soul of souls on earth and other worlds!

O The All-pervading Essence True!

This 'All-Pervading Essence' without any particular form, possesses the noble attribute of grace, which plays an important part in bringing the devotee to the Lord. Readers of theistic literature will always find what an important part divine grace plays in the lives of the saints, and Thayumanava belongs to that group, when he describes how the saving mercy of the Lord was always with him. Like the cow seeking its calf, the Lord came to Him in the form of his Guru to help him. Every minute of his life he felt the touch of the Lord's benevolence.

What time the Teacher of the silence

Gave me His grace and made it grow.

How wonderous that all worldly kinships

Should seem to me a passing show.

I counted not my gains or losses

When first I gave myself to Thee,

For raining bliss, O Cloud, Grace-laden

Thou mother-wise art e'er with me.

Thy grace is all I know, O Gracious one,

The ship that taketh me ashore

The Hand that into it leadeth,

Thy hand I hold, for ever more.

In spite of the fact that Thayumanava felt the grace of the Lord, he could not get peace of mind and enter the state of bliss easily. His struggles were many and he had to overcome a number of obstacles on his way. These made him often feel extremely depressed for not getting the beatific vision in spite of his prayers. Many psalms are devoted to showing his hardships and struggles, which are as a matter of fact the struggles of all mystics.

Sublimation or the instincts without any effort is the lot or only a few highly evolved souls while many have to achieve it by an austere and self-disciplined life. The attachments to the body and the pleasures of the senses, which are naturally strong have to be overcome by discrimination and a vigilant life. The unreality of the world compared to the Absolute is explained elaborately by Thayumanava. The only noble state to be aimed at is indeed the state of *Mouna* when the wandering mind is brought rest on the Ultimate Reality.

Howe'er much I learn, whate'er discourse I hear

My mind is not subdued, and not a whit

The sense of 'I' has waned and in my heart

A myriad longings hide!

Is there on earth

E'er seen or heard, such crooked mind as mine!

O Bliss, supreme, that fills embracing all

The globes near us and systems far away."

“How strange that we identify the Thing which cannot be expressed by words as ourselves and think like that day and night” says he. The restless mind jumping from one object to another stands as a stumbling block on the way to realization and he prays for a state where there is no mind.

No limit is here for desires.

Great emperors of vast territories will like to bridge the ocean.

Men with the wealth of Kubera desire to learn alchemy.

People, who have lived to a hoary age worry themselves seeking

Rejuvenating medicines to prolong their life.

When I think o'er all these things, I find the needs after all

To me are food and a place of rest, which I get.

O my Lord, the Bliss-complete!

Stop my mind From jumping from desire to desire.

Bless me with The wind-less pure state, O Lord, the All-Pervading Bliss.

At last the saint succeeded in his quest and now it is worth considering the state which became the goal of his life. When we study the saint's life, we see that it falls into line with the lives of many mystics and that his final realization also is not much different from theirs. It is said that when they are well established in one pointed devotion to their ideal, they experience a state of bliss, incomparable with any earthly joy and which can never be expressed in words. In that state the subject feels a union with something greater than himself which may be called "the Soul of the world, God or the Absolute according to choice." Its overwhelming presence makes the seeker feel helpless to do anything. St. Theresa, when she experienced this state felt sick and was unable even to pray. She says, "I was wrapt in spirit with such violence, that I could make no resistance, whatsoever." In another place she describes its action. "With the swiftness of a bullet from a gun an upward flight takes place in the interior of the soul. I know no other word to describe it than a flight. Although noiseless, it is too manifest a movement to be an illusion, and the soul is quite outside itself. At least that is the impression made upon it. Great mysteries are revealed to us in the meanwhile."

Sri Ramakrishna, when trying to describe his first vision said, "The buildings, with their different parts, the temples and all vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever and in their stead I saw a limitless, infinite, effulgent ocean of consciousness. As far as the eyes could see, the shining billows were madly rushing at me from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! I was panting for breath. I was caught in the rush and collapsed unconscious. What was happening in the outside in the world I did not know. But within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss, altogether new. I felt the presence, of the Divine Mother." Similar descriptions are given by many other mystics.

While trying to explain this state, it is often found that they draw comparisons with human love in its intensity, in order to make the bliss understandable. So we sometimes come across erotic symbologies in many compositions of the mystics, when they describe their rapturous experience. Such a presentation is found in *The Ananda Kalippu* or *The Revel of Bliss*, the masterpiece of Thayumanava. This poem brings out his whole spiritual life, the beginning, the struggles and the final realization. The poem takes the form of a narration in which a young girl describes to her friend, how she met her lover, the words he spoke and the happiness he gave her.

He, who is the first and the eternal; He, who shines as bliss and knowledge came to me as the silent one, my friend, and said things unsayable.

How can I express his words?

By guile, He took me alone and without any preparation suddenly took possession of me.

'Cut off all thy bonds and cling to me.' Said He and when I

did so, how shall I tell you the thrill I got and

what shall I say of His words!

These are the lines describing how the saint met his Master and the initiation. Then he takes up how grace worked.

Long have I wandered prattling like one possessed, till deliverance came when my Lord driving away the ghost of desires took me and kept me at His feet.

Controlling my passions, I nurtured my love for Him more and more, and He took complete possession of me and I could not even utter a word.

I have lost my caste and position in society, my friend, and how can I live if I tell it out? Sister, He is no earthly lover, but my guardian and God.”

Now let us see how he describes his bliss.

He did a wonderful trick, and what a joy I felt!

While the body felt the thrill, tears began to stream from the eyes like ocean waters flooding the shores.

He showed me my real nature asking me to understand that I am none of the five elements.

How clever was He to make me His own:

When I began to see how I got this life and

death, I saw that all were due to the pranks of my mind.

My Lord came to me and asked me to see with

the sight of grace, but I foolishly tried to see

with my eyes of dull intelligence and I only saw

darkness and not even myself.

He asked me not to look myself different from Him by two words, and what a wonder! How shall I describe the bliss I got.

I reached the vast land of bliss stretching far beyond. All the darkness in me disappeared and I saw nothing but His beauty.

This experience with its superb joy will make us see how insipid are the worldly pleasures and how ridiculous it is to run after the transitory life, which is as light as sleep.

Short lived is the body and why do you take it as real, my friend?

And what reply will you give when he Lord of Death knocks at your door?

Are there greater fools than we, the strange pilgrims in this land of flesh, madly running after the flames of lust to be singed and burnt losing our pure states.

Rightly has the Lord of love (Kama) lost his body, knowing that beautiful bodies only feed hell-fire.

And these are the truths taught by the scriptures.

Say, neither yes nor no to the things of life,

but keep yourself silent and watch.

The Lord Himself will teach you all!

All the compositions of Thayumanava which are more than a thousand stanzas, are of great attraction. They represent the struggles of all real aspirants to spiritual life. He belongs to the class of saints who are beyond all sects and for whom the mystic union with the Lord is the goal of life. He clearly brings out his Master's instruction. "Be quiet," when he asks us to completely surrender ourselves and patiently wait for the divine grace. He has presented his hardships and the realization of all mystics in a most attractive form and thereby made a noble contribution the Tamil devotional literature.

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Why should you throw away your perfect nature and take an imperfect nature? Why do you give up your infinite life for this perishable life of a few years? You have degraded yourself. The omnipotent, omniscient, immortal eternal being is imagining that he dies; that he is limited ignorant, weak and helpless. You are pure, you are spotless. Do not give way to false imagination. This false imagining will make you what you are imagining yourself to be. You are like a man who hears the false news that his entire fortune has been lost and begins to lament and ask, 'What shall I do? How shall I live?' while all the time his lands and money are there as before. So you are imagining that you are miserable and helpless; but you have not lost you infinite glory. You are absolutely perfect, all-blissful, immortal.

Leaves of an Ashrama 27:

Expression of Personal Maturity - a Rare Trait

Swami Vidyatmananda

Every year during the Christmas season, with all the routine exchanging of sentiments and gifts, I ask myself: But what can anyone really do for others? Give them presents? But presents don't make people happy, at least not for very long. Serve others? Well, one may try, but isn't there the danger here of only being exhibitionist? Minister to their religious needs? That's the least sensible proposition of all. Only God or a guru can do that.

Then the thought occurred to me: Yes, there is something I truly can do for others; I can stop being an annoyance to them! Colloquially expressed, I can stop being a pain in the neck, a botheration to my neighbor by my complaints, through the gloom I spread on days when the *tamas* guna is in the ascendent, through my stratagems to claim his sympathy or admiration, through asking my neighbor to pay, through a dozen clever ruses, for the anguish my own "I" secretes.

How cleverly Arnold Toynbee puts it in his *Surviving the Future*: "A living creature is a bit of the universe that has set itself up as a kind of separate counter-universe. It tries to make the rest of the universe serve the creature's purposes and center on the creature. That is what egocentricity means."

Aldous Huxley remarked in *The Perennial Philosophy* that simply to be cheerful is one of the most humanitarian actions anyone can take. In *Maturity in the Religious Life*, which reports the seminars two Catholic priests (Fathers Evoy and Christoph) held with communities of nuns, the conclusion arrived at is that immaturity consists in thinking myself extraordinary or special, in demanding attention, and in trying to force others to show me the consideration which my supposed pre-eminence ought to command. Maturity consists in considering myself as nothing at all extraordinary.

How comfortable they are to be with, the unextraordinary!

One recalls that the Chinese sages stressed the virtue of near-invisibility. Chuang-Tze: "No one seems to know how useful it is to be useless." Confucius: "What the Higher Man seeks is in himself; what the lower man seeks is in others." Lao Tsu: "The world is ruled by letting things take their course; it cannot be ruled by interfering."

Let me resolve, thus, to be modest and undemanding. I need not wait for an act of divine grace to start a change in my behavior.

Simple charity tells me that maturity, as here defined, is the right quality to cultivate. I can do it through the exercise of reason and self-control. To be considerate to them is certainly one useful thing which I can do for others. For maturity on the part of his neighbor is everyone's most wanted gift, at Christmas time and all around the year.

Cry! Cry! Can He be realized through spiritual practice? How much power has man? What can he do in order to be worthy of the grace of God? Nothing. Be at peace by surrendering yourself to Him. Take refuge in Him. He will certainly accept you at His feet. It is impossible to realize Him without His grace.

Swami Shivananda

Book Review

John Phillips

How to Live with God

In the Company of Ramakrishna

by Swami Chetanananda

Published by the Vedanta Society of St. Louis

Price: \$ 29.95

What a wonderful surprise! A new book about Sri Ramakrishna, recounting many episodes in his life, which are sometimes drawn from sources not readily available to Western readers.

The author, Swami Chetanananda, examines the life of Ramakrishna from different viewpoints. The various forms in which Ramakrishna appeared to his followers, for instance, his name, his desires and his relationship with the people of Calcutta. In considering the name of Ramakrishna, Swami Chetanananda also explains the practice of japa and meditation. A whole section of the book is devoted to the ways various people, from Girish Chandra Gosh to Swami Saradananda, regarded Ramakrishna.

In the chapter entitled "Various Forms of Ramakrishna" Swami Chetanananda describes numerous incidents in which people saw Ramakrishna as Hindu gods and goddesses, avatars and other manifestations of divinity, such as light or the wish-fulfilling tree. He then goes on

to describe instances in which Ramakrishna later on appeared to various people, this often being on their deathbed. Swami Chetanananda describes Ramakrishna as the embodiment of all gods and goddesses.

In a more practical vein he then goes on to give instructions on how to meditate on the form of Ramakrishna, how to practise japa and meditation.

In this book there are many stories from the life of Ramakrishna, some of which are quite amusing. One day, for instance, Ramakrishna was having some fun with Hazra. The Master later described their conversation. "I asked Hazra: 'Tell me what you think of the people that come here. How much *sattva* does each one possess?' He said, 'Narendra has one hundred percent and I have one hundred and ten percent.' 'What about me?' I asked. And he said: 'You still have a trace of pink *rajas* . You have only seventy-five percent, I should say.'"

The author goes on to recount the developments that have taken place since Ramakrishna left his mortal form, how his message has spread over the whole world. I was particularly touched by the story about Swami Bhavyananda's visit to Pope Paul VI and how he presented His Holiness with a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Pope Paul mentioned that he already knew about Ramakrishna. So the message had even penetrated into the Vatica

Finally Swami Chetanananda explores what Sri Ramakrishna might say if he were alive today, whether he will come back to this world again and, if so, when and where.

Altogether this is a very inspiring book, well written and beautifully produced on glossy paper with copious illustrations. It will, I hope, be a source of joy for devotees old and new.

John Phillips