

Vedanta

372 JULY- AUGUST 2013

Faith, Reason And Realisation

Swami Adiswarananda

The Divine Presence

Swami Shraddhananda



An unpublished letter of Swami Vivekananda

63 St. George's Road
London, SW
July 17th

Dear friend – Many, many thanks for your very instructive book. I have been going through a few pages already and have already learned a few great and beautiful lessons. One specially where you insist that the life of Lord Jesus is the only commentary to His teachings and wherever the teachings as recorded contradict the life we are sure that the record was wrong. That is wonderful insight and keen reason. I am sure to read the book several times over and learn many a lesson. May the Lord speak through you long – for the world needs and never more than now inspired souls like yourself.

**Ever yours in the Lord
Vivekananda**

(The above letter refers to the book 'The Dead Pulpit' by Reverend Hugh Haweis, who was a delegate of Anglican Church to the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. The book was published in 1896. A copy of it was probably sent as a gift to Swamiji whom Reverend Haweis must have met at the Parliament.

Details of Swamiji's correspondence with Reverend Haweis are given in Marie Louise Burke's book Swami Vivekananda in West – New Discoveries Vol. 4, p.p. 193-4.

The original letter of Swamiji was found with the papers of Reverend Haweis's daughter, Hugolin Haweis.)

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Editorial

Fault-finding is the way forward

"Man finds faults in others after bringing down his own mind to that level. Does anything ever happen to another if you enumerate his faults? It only injures you. Hence I cannot see anybody's faults. To see the faults of others! One should never do it. Forgiveness is *Tapasya*. Everyone has to be accommodating. The Master used to say '*sha, sha, sa*'. Forbear everything. He is there to judge."

"To make mistakes is man's very nature, but few of those who criticise know how to correct them." (Holy Mother)

Few are free from the dreadful disease of criticising and being criticised; we all do it most of the time overtly or covertly. Even if we do not speak, just to look down upon anyone or any thing is also to indulge in criticism, for Vedanta teaches us that God has become everything. We are acutely aware of others finding fault with us, but hardly aware of what we do to others.

It is a fact of life that no one is free from being criticised. The higher-up one is, the more is one criticised. (God is the most criticised being in the whole universe!) Rama, Krishna, and Buddha were criticised. Christ was not only criticised but crucified. Sri Ramakrishna was criticised, Holy Mother was criticised. Swami Vivekananda had more than his share of criticism and suffered much, both in India and abroad. Some even went to the extent of trying to do away with him. Worst of all, he was heartlessly betrayed by some of his own disciples, whom he loved much and trusted. He was pure, innocent and naïve. How much heart-ache he had to go through!!

There are people who criticise and find faults— whatever one may be or do out of habit. There are others who are vicious; their goal in life seems to be to want to harm as many people as possible

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and as much as possible. Thank God, there are also many noble people who find fault deliberately and out of compassion; their only desire is to help others grow in every way. In fact, one of the main functions of a *Guru* is to whittle down the 'ego' of the disciples.

All of us have to accept criticism as a way of life and find a way—a spiritual way—to deal with it in order to foster our spiritual growth. We cannot avoid being criticised but we must avoid criticising and finding faults with others, otherwise progress in spiritual life is not possible. It is not easy but can be done as part of our spiritual practice.

The anatomy of fault-finding

Why do we indulge in criticising and finding fault with others? What are the causes?

Too much spare time; no clear-cut goals in life; no motivation for worthy causes; strong past habits; lack of self-awareness, jealousy, and deep frustration within; sheer malice and inflated ego are only some causes. By criticising others we definitely derive satisfaction in feeling that we are better than others. By indulging in fault-finding we also seem able to cover up and forget our own defects.

It is a fact that one cannot find a fault unless one has the same fault within oneself.

Swami Vivekananda says:

“How can you see evil until there is evil in you? How can you see the thief unless he is there, sitting in the heart of your heart? How can you see the murderer until you are yourself the murderer? Be good, and evil will vanish for you. The world will change if we change; if we are pure, the world will become pure. The question is why should I see evil in others. I cannot see evil unless I be evil. The subject changed, so the object was bound to change; so says the *Vedanta*.”

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Why should we avoid slandering, fault-finding, etc?

Firstly, it is a waste of time, and time is very precious. Certainly, it is not going to make those whom we are criticising or finding-fault with, any better.

According to the law of Karma, we are sure to get back all that we have given, with compound interest. There is a saying: 'To err is human.' If we look around, can we find even a single human being who is free from faults?

Secondly, it is a waste of energy. Every activity is an expenditure of energy. We need all the energy we can muster if we want to advance in spiritual life.

Thirdly, those who dwell on the faults of others will develop those very faults, for we become what we think of intensely and constantly.

Swami Vivekananda says: "**Never talk about the faults of others, no matter how bad they may be. Nothing is ever gained by that. You never help one by talking about his fault; you do him an injury, and injure yourself as well.**"

Fourthly, this habit of fault-finding prevents us from looking into our own hearts and finding our own defects and weaknesses.

Lastly, it is not only fault-finding but even gossip and meaningless chatter that should be avoided assiduously by those who wish to progress in spiritual life, for small-talk disturbs the mind, makes it restless, brews undesirable thoughts, and gradually turns the mind away from God. If we do not take care in the beginning, it will turn into an evil habit and may be hard to eradicate later.

How to put up with criticism

Not only should we avoid criticism but we should also welcome it heartily. Swami Vivekananda says (I think in his *Inspired Talks*): "if you wish to progress in spiritual life, go and

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live amidst those who find faults with you and who criticise you all the time”.

The Sufi saint Rabia al-Adawiyya’s love for God knew no bounds. When asked if she despised the devil, her famous reply was, **“I am so consumed in my love for God that no place remains for loving or hating any one save God.”**

Moreover, there is a nice way of taking in others’ criticism. *Vidyaranya* said that one obtains three great benefits by the simple act of being criticised by others. This helps us turn such criticism into our spiritual benefit.

A) Their criticism may be true. If the criticism is true, then the critic is doing us a great favour.

B) If there is no truth in others’ criticism, then it will help us to develop patience and forbearance. It shows that we are progressing spiritually.

C) People everywhere, as a rule, are selfish. Those who criticise others must be deriving some joy from it. So you are giving them much happiness without spending time, money, or energy, merely by being a target of their criticism. So welcome criticism from others always. In every way it helps us.

Fault-finding is the way forward

On the positive side, if we desire to progress in spiritual life fault-finding is the way forward, only instead of finding faults and criticising others, let us criticise and find faults with ourselves. Let us put our honed pernicious habit to our own benefit.

Here Holy Mother’s advice can help us immensely:

“If you want peace of mind, my child, do not find fault with others. Rather, find your own faults. No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own. Make it your own.”

There is a profound meaning behind this simple teaching. It is, in fact, a most expressive way of rephrasing the great

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Upanishadic dictum but in simple and practical terms. The first verse of the *Isavasya Upanishad* states:

All this—whatever exists in this changing universe—should be looked upon as God. Enjoy your life by this knowledge. Do not covet others' wealth.

We may rephrase Holy Mother's teaching in the light of this verse.

'No one is a stranger, the whole world is your own. (All is God, everyone is your own Self.) **'Make it your own'.** (Look upon everyone as God, as your own Self.) **'If you want peace of mind, my child, do not find fault with others'.** (If you wish to progress in spiritual life, to realize God, then stop looking upon others as different from you.) **'Rather, find your own faults.'** (Purify your own mind.)

If we wish to turn fault-finding to our benefit, we must fulfil these conditions:

- We must have a strong motive for self-improvement.
- We must develop the art of self-awareness, self-observation.
- We must be very objective so that we do not justify or try to ignore our defects and weaknesses. We should have the courage to face the dark side of our nature—our worst fears, phobias, passions, hatreds and desires—whatever they be.
- We must have a strong will to accept ourselves as we are.

Above all, we must have faith in our ability to overcome any obstacles we may encounter on our way to God-realization.

Swami Dayatmananda

The very idea of a sect being formed around him was abhorrent to Sri Ramakrishna. And, after all, how is it possible to hedge about a God-man, a knower of the Atman, one who was the very embodiment of divine love and had probed the very depths of every religion? (Swami Premananda)

Faith, Reason And Realisation

Swami Adiswarananda

The growth of science and technology has given rise to new thoughts and concepts which challenge the very foundation of all religious beliefs. Adherence to theological precepts is slowly giving way to the acceptance of the laws of physical science, the appeal of myths and legends to the reality of facts and data, and the concern for 'hereafter' to that of 'here and now'. The concepts of an extra-cosmic God, vicarious atonement, and eternal life in heaven after death, are often considered as consolatory imaginations rather than proven facts.

While religious theologies condemn doubt as moral obliquity and call for unquestioning belief, the spirit of science asks for a rational justification for any belief and considers blind belief as an intellectual sin. That which is true is rational and universal and the validity of such a truth rests not on faith but on experimentation, verification, and demonstration. Therefore, anything that is claimed as special or exclusive, private or arbitrary, is suspect, because such a claim goes against the very grain of rational justification. The religious traditions that lean heavily on the infallibility of their dogmas and creeds denounce this new spirit as an exotic and supercilious adventure which feeds itself on pessimism and doubt and seeks to undermine the very foundation of moral and spiritual aspirations. Thus the new thought-current has stirred up a controversy that divides the religious-minded into two camps: the upholders of faith and the believers in reason.

IN SUPPORT OF FAITH

The traditionalists look upon faith as the final authority in deciding the validity of any spiritual truth and put forward the following arguments in support of their view:

Faith is proof of existence

The validity of a spiritual teaching rests solely on faith and never on reason. The reality of God is self-revealing and self-evident and is not dependent upon any denial or acceptance of the human mind.

The proof of the existence of anything is the faith that it exists. As is one's faith, so are one's perceptions and cognitions.

Believers in 'matter' call the ultimate Reality 'matter', while believers in time call it 'time', and believers in void call it 'void'.

Faith comes before reason

In any walk of life reason follows faith. We perceive a thing and then reason about it. This is also the process in the realm of religion. That which is envisioned by faith is systematised by reason as philosophy for the understanding of the average mind. The prophets and God-men of different religions speak from faith. They are never guided by reason. They perceive reality directly and speak about It with childlike simplicity. Philosophical thoughts develop later to systematise what the prophets and God-men realized through faith. Myths and rituals are attempts to concretise what has been mystically experienced and philosophically systematised. One reasons and argues about a thing as long as one has not developed faith in the existence of that thing, or one is doubtful about its existence. Faith is, therefore, the mature form of reason.

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Conviction is born of faith

Reason is guided by the appearance of things and not by their content. It is dialectic in its approach and discursive in its temper. It gives only diagrams of Reality but not a comprehensive picture of It. It reduces all things—even living beings—to ideas in order to understand them better. Faith, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with the content of a thing and not merely with its appearance. It is an appeal to the heart and not to the head. The essence of every religion is love of God, or love of that which is ultimately Real, and love is a function of faith and not of reason. Loving is being and not knowing. In order to love a person, one does not need to know the physiology and biochemistry of that person. In order to attain love of God one does not need to reason about His existence.

The ultimate proof of the existence of God, or of that which is absolutely Real, depends on faith and not on reason. Faith makes everything living. The concept of God becomes a living Reality when it is inspired by faith. The power of a saint or a prophet or a God-man is not his philosophy but his conviction about the presence of God, born of his unwavering faith. The difference between a saint and an ordinary person is the difference in the degree of this conviction.

Reason begins with doubt and also ends in doubt, and such doubt springs from another kind of faith—faith in perverted reasoning. The cure for doubt is, therefore, not reason but faith. One who continuously doubts and reasons gradually develops a taste for such doubting and reasoning and, in course of time, such a habit becomes the means of sophisticated intellectual pleasures.

Reason is never conclusive

In the words of Plotinus, reason is a lame man's crutch. It is never able to establish beyond doubt the validity of any spiritual

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truth. The movement of reason is from 'general' to 'particular'. It seeks to make finite representations of the Infinite, an attempt which is frustrating to reason itself. Reason, as it refutes a hypothesis, implicitly suggests a new one, which in turn can be refuted by another reason. Thus it is like a game of solitaire which is never finished, for where speculation is both the goal and the means to attain the goal, there is no end of it. A person who waits for decisive proof about the efficacy of a spiritual path in order to commit himself to it can never do so because each doubt resolved reveals a new one requiring another solution.

Reason can never inspire faith

Reason can never be a perfect instrument of knowledge because the tools of reason are inference, analogy, assumption, and so forth, none of which can give any direct glimpse of Truth. Furthermore, a perverted mind can resort to perverted arguments. There is no use reasoning about the validity of a perception when the perception itself is vitiated by the penumbra of the perceiver's mind.

The goal of religion is not to form an opinion about Truth but to achieve a vision of It. A seeker of God does not seek knowledge of God but God Himself. Such an attainment is possible only through faith and not through reason, for in order to reason about a thing, one has to create a distance, and the more one reasons, the more distance one creates. On the other hand, faith creates a nearness to the object of faith.

Faith is the very life-breath of religion

Faith is a kind of superior reason that teaches us that man, the individual, is organically related to God, the totality. Any reasoning that takes away the individual from the totality is a form of self-love, the root-cause of all the sufferings of life.

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Self-love is motivated by the motto of 'having and possessing', while love of God is guided by 'being and self-surrender'. Self-love springs from an egotism that lives with a sense of puerile self-sufficiency. Faith is that reason which focuses our attention on the smallness of the ego and the folly of self-love and urges us to love God, the centre of our inmost being. Faith is the very essence of one's commitment to a spiritual goal. An aspirant who is devoid of faith is only meandering aimlessly.

The universe of reason is made of dead concepts and dry categories. One who depends upon reason for the vision of Truth is like one who is searching for the living among the dead. The message of reason is always fragile and vacillating. It can never inspire faith in God or in matters spiritual. Belief of a person in the infallibility of reason is a form of weakness. It is weakness not because he believes in reason but because he believes only in reason. Such reason can give consistency but never truth.

The process of reasoning follows the triple method of experimentation, verification, and demonstration. That which is true and authentic is universally true irrespective of time and place. Such truth is experimental, verifiable, and demonstrable. Verification of a truth depends on experimentation and experimentation requires involvement. But spiritual truth cannot be verified unless it is experimented upon by living it in one's own life, and to live it, one must have faith in it.

The spiritual quest therefore, begins with faith, it is sustained by faith, and also, it attains its culmination through faith. Faith matures into conviction and conviction reaches its fullness in realisation.

The theology of reason is based on doubt

The doubting mind is a victim of cynicism that scoffs at things and phenomena that it does not understand. Such a mind doubts

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the validity of the scriptures but believes in the infallibility of a newspaper report. It is sceptical about the holiness of a saint but is prone to accept the meanness of the evil-minded. The person who is guided solely by reason is forced by his own intellectual rigidity to live in a universe filled with concepts and categories that constantly challenge his basic philosophy of life and make him feel most insecure and unhappy. His intellectual obviousness is really a form of fanaticism that intends to evaluate everything in the light of its own creed. Because of his compulsion to reason he cannot accept that which is easily acceptable and is haunted by a passion for doubting. When such a person finally arrives at a conclusion he has no time to appreciate what he knows.

One who lives only by reason is guided by the philosophy of necessity and utility. He must have a reason for everything he does or says or thinks. His doubting intellect dominates everything. All his feelings and actions, perceptions and volitions, are dictated by reason. He is like a machine, automatic and meticulous in every respect, but devoid of the sense of value. As a result he becomes possessed by a sense of determinism that makes even the trivialities of his life appear unduly significant. Such determinism cripples every movement of life because he is looking for an explanation and justification for everything, whether or not these are necessary. He must find a cause for everything. The man of reason lives in the future because his present is made up of uncertainties and probabilities. His doubts and determinism follow from his inner devaluation, and his devalued personality is always pessimistic, projecting its pessimism on everything.

In the realm of religion when reason becomes the sole pathfinder, everything becomes dark and dry because the intellect becomes the victim of its own reasoning. It creates problems which it cannot solve, and raises questions which it cannot

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answer. That which is Infinite cannot be grasped by the finite mind. All our finite perceptions of Truth and Reality are not exhaustive but suggestive.

Spiritual truth can only be felt and never defined and measured. Feeling is seeing and not seeking. Seeing is subjective experience, not descriptive fact. Seeking separates the subject from the object, while seeing brings them together and finally merges them into one. Seeing requires total commitment of the whole personality to the object of faith. It is a form of revelation.

The philosophy of life based on reason reduces everything to nothingness. Such a philosophy looks upon the processes of Nature as meaningless and trusts only in the dignity of man, but fails to explain how an unintelligent, absurd Nature can produce a man of dignity. Therefore, reason is too fragile an instrument to be depended upon in the realm of the spiritual because, by nature, reason is vacillating and self-doubting. It is said that even Darwin had doubts about the judgement of the human mind since, according to him, it is after all the evolved form of the animal mind. The reasoning that refuses to see anything but absurdity in the processes of Nature or in the functioning of faith is itself absurd and leads only to absurd postulations.

IN SUPPORT OF REASON

The advocates of reason repudiate the authority of faith and argue that it is not faith but reason that can decisively validate any truth. The following are the arguments they give in support of reason :

The so-called faith is unfounded belief

What the religious traditions emphasize as faith is, really speaking, an unquestioning belief in the authority of the scriptures or the doctrines of theology. Such belief has no

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foundation of its own. It is believing in the beliefs of others. Belief is an assumption which turns into conviction only through conscious reasoning about what one believes in. One cannot really believe in something for which one does not find a logical rationale.

Reason separates the real from the imaginary

Belief is a form of imagination—the making of images and concepts, dogmas and creeds, which are substitutions for Truth. These are thoughts about Truth and not Truth Itself. One may believe something to be true even though such belief has little or no relation to the truth of that thing. Truth is known only when we have risen above all beliefs and imaginings, and this is possible only through reason. That which distinguishes the real from the imaginary is reason and not belief.

Divorced from reason, religious traditions and beliefs lapse into various forms of perversion, such as futurism, pseudo-mysticism, psychism, super-naturalism, and occultism. To disbelieve in the efficacy of reason is to make the validity of spiritual truth contingent upon so-called mystical experiences, which are always personal and private, and can be the results of auto-suggestion, hallucination, or mental degeneration. The sceptical mind looks upon such experiences as symptoms of nervous weakness and inner depression. An individual may see visions and hear voices which can very well be the echoes of his own mind, such experiences often being occasioned by bereavement, worldly disappointment, or disease. Or these may be different forms of animism and excitement and, as such, are always temporary or momentary. When the validity of a spiritual truth becomes dependent solely on the private and personal realisations of an individual there is no end of uncertainty and self-deception. Furthermore, a spiritual experience may be borrowed or stumbled into, or may be a form of sentimentalism,

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and can never be accepted as the authentic testimony of a spiritual truth.

Truth becomes suspect when it is not amenable to reason. A spiritual seeker who does not cultivate reason always depends on chance for his right choice when he confronts rival creeds and dogmas. That which is true for one person under certain conditions must prove itself true for all persons under similar conditions, and that which is spiritually true is also universally true, irrespective of time, place and historical conditions. Reason, therefore, liberates spiritual truth from the bounds of dogmatic supernaturalism and false mysticism, self-hypnotism and occultism. To the seeker of Truth reason is the most infallible guide in the realm of religion, which so often remains clouded by make-believe prophecies, creedal puzzles, and conflicting traditions. True spiritual adventure is possible only when the seeker is guided by reason and not by so-called faith or any hearsay. The alternative to reason is blind faith, which robs a spiritual individual of his manliness and dignity of independent thinking and reduces him to a mere nonentity.

Dependence on faith makes one dogmatic

Blind belief in things which are unproved by reason can be unfortunate and, when combined with the frenzy of emotion, eventually leads to fanaticism. A dogmatic person is always a fanatic because of the unsteady foundation of his belief. He is not yet convinced about what he believes and is rigid in his views because he refuses to see the truth. Allowing no scope for self-doubt or for tolerance of others who do not share his beliefs, yet not being satisfied with his own views, he exhibits excessive tension and anxiety. He often claims that his religion is best and his method is the most superior. His claim of superiority over

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others is a form of defence, and the more he raises walls of defence and exclusiveness, the more fanatical he becomes in his views.

The dogmatist is devoid of spiritual identity and individuality and therefore shuns self-criticism and self-effort. Incapable of taking upon himself the responsibility of his own spiritual quest, he looks instead for a means of passively satisfying his desire for certainty. His is a search not for real Truth, which requires honest efforts, but for a vicarious truth which can be given to him.

Psychologically speaking, a dogmatist is an immature person. The sign of maturity is growth. A mature person never thinks that he is infallible or a finished product. He is always anxious to enrich his fund of knowledge by learning from others. A dogmatist, on the other hand, believes he is infallible and has nothing to learn from others. Oliver Cromwell is once said to have told a dogmatist, 'I beseech you, by the bowels of Christ, to admit that even once in your lifetime you may be wrong.'

A mature spiritual seeker has a definite spiritual identity, a distinct and individual spiritual inner disposition, a decisive commitment toward the goal, and an implicit conviction of his spiritual potentiality. He has reason for what he believes, and conviction for what he follows. He exhibits tension and honest doubt. In contrast the immature person in the realm of religion is guided by a basic mistrust for teachings other than his own, suffers from a sense of insecurity, believes in isolation and rigidity, and substitutes moralism and convention for inner conviction of spiritual truth. Often he fails to distinguish that which is authentic from that which is imitation, or that which is essential from that which is incidental or accidental. He is guided by sacramentalism and emotionalism. He does not use the faculties of reasoning and thinking and therefore is governed by collective thinking and remains drowned in the opinions of a group or community.

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Historically speaking, whenever reason becomes divorced from faith there arise oppressive religious traditions and heartless rites. The rewards of religion become the privilege of the selected few. Myths and legends, which are meant to provide concrete representations of abstract Truth, often prove to be impenetrable encrustations around It. The mystery of God's grace gives way to fatalism and supernaturalism, and blind conformity to convention and ritual comes to be regarded as the mark of spiritual living. The history of Europe and Asia is replete with instances where the sublime teachings of the holy scriptures have been invoked by religious fanatics to justify their bitter religious intolerance and hatred towards those who differed from them. Devout religious people have often become most cruel and inhuman, justifying their cruel and inhuman behaviour in the name of religion. Having been divorced from reason, religious traditions have promoted the cause of narrow nationalism and sectarianism. They have provided the inspiration for religious war, inquisition, and religious persecution. The religious wars in sixteenth-century France and seventeenth-century Germany and the persecution of hundreds and thousands of people during the period of the Inquisition are examples in illustration. The brutal barbarism in the name of religion during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries has few parallels in history.

Thus the faith of the so-called 'faithful' is nothing but blind belief that evokes only temporary sentiments but fails to transform the life. Such transformation is possible only through a perception of the inner Truth based on the conviction of reason, which calls for the cultivation of manliness and individual spiritual responsibility. Manliness alone can ensure the attainment of Godliness.

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The arguments in support of faith and those in support of reason do not establish the superiority of one over the other, and therefore do not resolve the controversy.

What, then, should be the way? Can spiritual quest and scientific outlook go together? Must one discard reason altogether in order to have faith? Would the faith that suppresses honest doubt be considered sincere? Or should one cultivate scepticism in order to be spiritual?

(To be concluded)

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, March 1981)

Devotees should converse about the Lord with one another. Our lives become vain if we have no love for devotees of the Lord. Devotees are our own—there should be no consideration of caste or race, for they have none. To love the devotees of the Lord brings no attachment, it creates no bondage. Whichever church or temple you visit see the presence of your chosen ideal; everywhere is the one Lord, your own beloved. That is what is meant by steadfast devotion to your Chosen Ideal.

Meditate on the Lord and chant his name as much and as often as you can. Also converse about him with like-minded people. That helps everyone.

Pray to Sri Ramakrishna for whatever you feel you need. He dwells in the hearts of all and he listens to the prayers of all.

(Swami Premananda)

The Four fold significance of Sri Ramakrishna

Prof. S. S. Raghavachar

To those who had the rare good fortune of coming into contact with him and of becoming his close associates, Sri Ramakrishna was of such immense significance that they rarely attempted a full formulation of what he meant to them. They simply surrendered themselves to him and achieved for themselves immortality in the spiritual world. The great Swami Vivekananda is the leading example in this band of disciples. He rarely spoke directly about his Master, but lived the life that the latter marked out for him. Those of the present time who have become devotees of Sri Ramakrishna are literally soaked in his manifold and all-absorbing inspiration, and may not command the clarity that comes from considering this from a distance, to articulate their appreciation of his distinctive message. Hence I should imagine that we, comparatively distant from him in life and not altogether immersed, can manage to put in words his exact and unique significance. What we have lost in fullness of absorption, we can perhaps make up by the advantages of perspective. It is this doubtful merit that we have that emboldens me somewhat. I propose to attempt a characterisation of the great significance of Sri Ramakrishna. To me it appears that this significance is fourfold.

Firstly, the primordial point of Sri Ramakrishna's significance is that by his life and teaching he awakens the consciousness of the modern man to the supreme concern of life.

The quest for the Infinite or the Divine is for Sri Ramakrishna the primary concern of life. But we, modern men, are apt to ignore it in our semi-enlightened agnosticism or simply bypass it and lose ourselves in lesser concerns. We notice the insistence on the supreme concern in the life of Ramakrishna almost from his infancy. He literally abandoned himself to the search of God. It was the abiding and sole occupation of his life. To those that came

to him, almost the first instruction he gave was the enunciation of the utmost priority to realise the Divine Ultimate. Like the sages of the *Upanishads* he saw in the Godless life a colossal self-annihilation. He would say with the sage of the *Taittiriya* that man to whom the Absolute is a pressing presence is a man who truly lives.

This presence of God in our conscious concerns of life is the criterion of life as compared against unawareness, which is death. It is a foolish game to search for peace in finite trivialities. There is neither life nor fulfilment in the pursuit of what is less than the highest. One may almost say that this admission of God into life as the fundamental concern is the basic proposition in Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy.

Now to the second great element in the teaching - religion was a reality to Ramakrishna in a special sense. He was dissatisfied with secondhand spirituality. To him the fundamental object of religious consciousness was not a matter of hypothesis or scriptural testimony or a simple article of dogmatic faith. He struggled for its immediate experience, direct vision, or in the language of Swami Vivekananda, realisation. He proclaimed the universal possibility of such direct realisation. The highest truth must be such that it can be comprehended by the most intimate mode of experience. Religion, in essence, must be more immediate and integral than sense-experience and less uncertain, conjectural and speculative than logical demonstration. This factuality of religion is a cardinal point with Sri Ramakrishna. This has great concordance with the *Upanishadic* emphasis of *darsana* (direct experience), with the declaration from the *Gita* that the Ultimate Reality will satisfy the scientific temperament of our time, which demands factual verification. Faith may be valuable, dogmas may serve provisional purposes, scriptures may lead the way, but the ultimate deliverance of religion must be experiential.

The Four fold significance of Sri Ramakrishna

To Sri Ramakrishna the religious truth was an unshakable, stubborn and irreducible datum. It was providential that Swami Vivekananda put the right question to him and drew forth from him the declaration of its experiential and factual character. The Supreme Reality of religion must be 'direct realisation'. This is a kind of radicalism in spiritual matters, and if Sri Ramakrishna stands for anything unique in modern times, it is for this principle of the factuality of religion. There is no true or first-rate spirituality unless there is this realisational certainty. In fact the direct evidence is so overwhelming for Sri Ramakrishna that the facts of mundane experience climb down to the level of shadows. Here we have the 'truth of truths'.

Thirdly, there is something special in Sri Ramakrishna's teaching concerning the pathway to the realisation of the immediacy of the Godhead. He denounces none of the conventional programmes. He does accept the *Vedantic* discipline of discrimination, but that is not enough by itself for him. The conventional life of *karma* and rites is good, but it does not go the whole way. He accepts Tantra, but does not stop with it. The formal worship inculcated in the *Bhakti* cults is fine, but something more is required to bring about the consummation. The *yogic* technique is fruitful, but is not without its dangers and is not quite indispensable. It is necessary to discern clearly Sri Ramakrishna's prescription here.

He exemplified in his life and promulgated in his precepts what was almost the core of his *Sadhana*. He set forth what may be called the *Vyakula* Yoga. It is intense yearning, ceaseless and passionate quest, for God, in all one's life, through all the faculties and resources of personality. This *Vyakula* Yoga is simple and at the same time all-absorbing. It was the deliberate and repeated teaching of Sri Ramakrishna, that love carried to the point of self-effacing intensity, almost agony of desire, brings to the

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aspirant the fruition of his search. All other ways are to contribute to this and this is the supreme method of endeavour for God. He frequently quotes the lines of *Ramaprasad*:

" Cry to your Mother *Syama* with a real cry, O mind !
And how can she hold herself from you?
How can *Syama* stay away ?..."

It is significant that he preferred to look upon the Divine as the Mother and thought of himself as the child given to this real and insistent cry for the Mother. One has not got to wait for long to reach the goal if one has reached this point of longing. This is in fact the dawn of realisation. Sri Ramakrishna reaffirms the assurance of the Gita, '*Hereafter you will live in Me*'.

Finally, Sri Ramakrishna is most helpful to us when he characterises this experience. The Godless life is one of illusion, it is due to our lack of desire for God. It is an illusion of absence, a 'negative hallucination,' generated by our wish that there be no God. That truly is a case of wish-fulfilment.

The experience or realisation is the Supreme Truth. The unflinching mark of truth is integrative power and that power is the central character of this experience. In the realisation, not merely is the individual assimilated to the object of his devotion, the whole universe is transmuted into a glorious manifestation of the Absolute. Sri Ramakrishna calls the experience not merely *jnana*, the discernment of the transcendent, but also *vijnana*, a higher phase, for it holds the transcendent as the form of the manifold universe. The vision overflows into the daily life of man and substitutes all-embracing *Daya* (compassion) for *Maya* (Illusion). It is in this direction of *Daya* that the Master trained his beloved disciple Narendra, into Vivekananda.

The Four fold significance of Sri Ramakrishna

It is in this integrative process that Sri Ramakrishna witnesses, as it were, the fundamental unification of all religions. He is the first to proclaim in unmistakable terms the equal authenticity of all faiths in terms of the experience of God. This pertains not merely to Indian religions, not merely to the cults of God with attributes and God without attributes, the *Dvaita* and *Advaita* of popular Hinduism, but also to all the religions of the world, past, present and future. For him this unification of faiths was not a matter of social adjustment, but a vital spiritual necessity.

This working out of the integrative function of religious experience to its logical culmination, is one of the characteristic gifts of Sri Ramakrishna. The unification of man and God, the unification of the transcendent and the immanent, the unification of the vision of God with devoted service to mankind, and the unification of religions are the striking features of the integrative experience as witnessed in Sri Ramakrishna.

In conclusion we may sum up the great significance of Sri Ramakrishna. He awakened our consciousness to the supreme concern of life. He emphasised the experiential or realisational quality of religion. He distinguished the ardent and all-consuming craving for God as the central factor in *Sadhana*. He worked out the integrative consequences of spiritual life to the farthest bounds.

Let us, in all humility and devotion, pray for his benediction, and seek his guidance in our onward march.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, April 1972)

The Divine Presence

Swami Shraddhananda

The goal of spiritual life is to experience God and to have the divine vision in all that we encounter. The experience must come to us some day in which we feel the presence of God in the heavens, in the air, in the oceans, in the mountains, in the rivers, in the flowers, in all living beings, including ourselves. We must be able to feel the presence of God in our bodies, in our minds, in our egos and in all phenomena.

The Vedantic scriptures tell us that this is possible. When man lives in ignorance, there is a wall which hides God from him.

This wall has to be broken, bit by bit, but we should keep our aim pure. When we have come to spiritual life, we need not calculate how far we have progressed. We should go on practising the means by which the ultimate goal can be reached and then, if we are earnest and if we do not lose patience, surely by God's grace we shall be able to feel the Divine Presence in all situations. Then into our lives will come the truth, the peace, the knowledge and the joy that we are seeking.

To experience the Divine Presence, through and through, is a difficult task entailing many years, perhaps many lives, but we must not give up hope. If we believe in the theory of reincarnation, we know we have lived many past lives in ignorance. Therefore, what does it matter if a few more lives are required? It is said that if we are sincere we need not have long to wait. God-realisation can come by divine grace in *this* life. So, with hope, courage and determination we should increase our spiritual efforts.

Great seers tell us that all we see and experience is God, the immortal Reality, the light of pure Consciousness, the infinite Bliss. Most of us, however, cannot see God in this way. This material universe, this ever-changing world, full of contradictions

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and sufferings, is to us so different from God. But spiritual experience is a question of the growth of the mind. When the mind is freed from desires and passions, we can understand what Divine Presence is. We begin to see that all is God — God who is looking through all eyes, manipulating all egos, listening through all ears, thinking through all minds and residing in all hearts. This is the experience of the Divine Presence. It does not evolve in one day, but we must not lose faith in the possibility of this vision. We have to begin from the place where we are standing.

In the beginning God to us is ultra-cosmic. We think that He is the Creator and Ruler, abiding in some distant heaven, and by remote control He is managing everything. That position in philosophy is called dualism. Pursuing such a philosophy we do not care to inquire so much into the nature of God. We take for granted that God is eternal, all powerful, all compassionate, omniscient. In this dualistic thinking the devotee feels, 'God is different from me; I am bound, small, limited, mortal, and the world is ever changing, but God is immortal, omniscient, free. He exists and I am praying to Him to fulfil my life, to grant me His vision.' In this way, with a dualistic attitude, we can carry on our prayers and meditations. If we persist, God will gradually begin to reveal His higher nature. He will draw closer and closer and no longer seem a distant ultra-cosmic God. He will become an immanent God.

Various views of the immanent God are described in Vedantic scriptures. The *Chandogya Upanisad* says : That which is the subtle Essence-in It all that exists has its Self. That is the truth. That is the Supreme Self. (*Chandogya Upanishad* 6.8)

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says : He created all this—whatever there is. Having created all this, He entered into everything. (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.6.1)

The immanent God is thus present in every part of creation. God is not merely in one's own body but in all human bodies, in

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plants, in animals and also in inanimate objects. Nature is not separate from Him. Such a position in Indian philosophy is called qualified monism. The one is qualified by the many; everything exists in God and is filled with God. This contemplation brings God nearer to us and our awareness of the Divine Presence is intensified.

Normally we look upon a mountain as a material mass of stone; this is the usual, ignorant outlook. Now we must bring a spiritual element into our contemplation : True, the outer appearance is a material mountain, but in the core of the mountain there is God. God in the language of the *Upanishads* is *sat*, Infinite Reality. When the mountain is felt to be something actually existing, that existence is God. In all that exists, the principle of existence is God. If we break the mountain into a million parts, each part will still exist; if we break the mountain into atoms, each atom will still have to exist. Not a single fragment can escape the presence of God as *sat*, existence. The meditator can include in this contemplation not only the mountain but any other object in nature. Any material object is 'material' on the surface, but metaphysically it is permeated through and through by God as *sat*. Thus, thinking of the mountain in the context of God as existence can throw the mind into deep meditation. The mind will grow calm and the inner reality of the mountain will become apparent, not only as existence (*sat*) but also as consciousness, or knowledge, (*chit*) which is involved in all existence. All that we experience comes to us as something existing and shining as knowledge.

Then a third element has to be added, which may not be clear to us in the beginning. This is *Ananda*, joy. In everything there is the basic joy of God. Because we are ignorant, our experience of joy is selective. We find joy and blessedness only in certain persons or things, not in everything.

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But we must enlarge our vision. We have to know that joy or blessedness, like existence and knowledge, is inherent in every thing and in every experience. The mountain is a real object but the source of that reality is God. The mountain is a piece of knowledge and that knowledge is coming from God. The mountain also is a mass of joy and that joy is coming from God. In this perspective we must look at nature. We will have to alter our mode of thinking. Normally the mind does not see God; it sees only the material form of the universe.

But in meditation the spiritual seeker has to touch the core of reality. This is not a poetical fancy. These are the actual experiences of sages who have beheld God and who have felt the Divine Presence everywhere. Following their experience, as we contemplate the mountain, the ocean, the forest, the river, the sun, the moon, all that we see around us, we must try to see that God is existing there and radiating bliss, for He has entered into all these objects.

In the *Upanishads* one finds many exercises for meditation on external things: 'meditate on the sun as *Brahman*'. Without the sun, all life would have stopped. What power, what potentialities exist in the sun! The spiritual aspirant contemplates the fact that all the brilliance, the heat, all the life-giving powers in the sun are emanating from *Brahman*. In the core of the sun is that spiritual reality which is God. Using the sun as a symbol, the aspirant meditates on God. Similarly, he can meditate on the moon: everyone sees the moon's sweetness, its beauty, its calmness, its gentleness, but the spiritual seeker must also associate the moon with God. The devotee should try to feel that all objects in nature are emanations of *Brahman*; their very existence comes from God. In this way the mind prepares itself for higher and higher contemplations, and it becomes more and more ready to feel the Divine Presence.

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Another meditation is on *Usha* (the morning). No matter how tired a person may be in the evening, when he awakes refreshed, he often thinks, 'Oh, what a wonderful morning!' All of us think in this fashion, but a spiritual seeker must realise that it is God who is manifested in the morning and meditate on this. He can also meditate on *Sandhya* (the evening): evening is the scene of quietness; all the turmoil of the day is gone. At that time the mind is naturally in a calm mood. The meditator should think that the evening's power of tranquillity is coming from God. In the *Rig-Veda* there are superb hymns dedicated to the goddess of morning and to the goddess of evening but all gods and goddesses are nothing more than manifestations of the one universal God, *Sat-cit-ananda*.

In another meditation the meditator looks inside himself. He sees within him a miniature universe; there also are mountains, rivers, deserts, for all nature has its counterpart in the human body. In these preparatory meditations the devotee may concentrate on the presence of God in his eyes or ears or heart or any other organ. Next he tries to feel the presence of God in the various modifications of his mind. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (7.4.1) directs us to meditate on *samkalpa* as *Brahman*.

Samkalpa is that function of the mind which is continuously creating resolutions some of which are effective, some futile. With the help of this contemplation, the mind will gain a quality of serenity and will not be disturbed by trivial resolutions. Another exercise is prescribed: meditate on the mind as a whole as *Brahman*. *Brahman* has entered into the mind and that is why all the functions of the mind are possible.

If the devotee can meditate on the mind (*manas*) as *Brahman*, after a time he will see that this brings a remarkable transformation in his mind. The mind will realize that it is being watched, and will comprehend that it is connected with God. As

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it is watched, the mind will be ashamed to play tricks; all thoughts and emotions that come will be controlled, calm and rational.

In a similar way the meditator can try to associate *Brahman*, the Divine Presence, with other elements of his personality. Take the case of ego. Normally we take our egos for granted but our egos can deceive us. At one moment the ego becomes angry; the next moment it becomes sad; in another moment it is kind, and then violent. Soon it becomes a saint and a minute later is a devil. That is because we have not objectively observed our egos.

We think the ego is an independent power, but this is not so. The 'I am' consciousness is really grounded in that universal Reality, God. In the Old Testament of the Bible we read that Moses asked God, 'Who are you?' He did not actually see God, but he heard God's voice. Then the voice of God answered, 'The I am that I am', which means, 'I am the Fundamental Reality; no one can describe Me.' God's 'I am' does not change, but our 'I am' is false. If someone asks, 'Who are you?' today, one of us may say, 'I am a scholar,' but tomorrow he may say, 'I am a fool.' In the morning he may say, 'I am happy,' but by evening he may declare, 'I am miserable.' Actually we are nonentities. God alone can truly say, 'I am,' because He remains eternally the same. If a spiritual seeker remembers that his own small ego is based in the infinite reality of God, his ego will be less changeable; it will be steady and serene. He will be able to feel the Divine Presence in his own ego.

We must try to feel God's presence in as many ways as possible. This does not come to us in one day but through practice of contemplation these ideas will become increasingly real. More and more we will be able to feel the presence of God inside and outside. Even when we are working, our minds should be tinged with the Divine Presence. The spiritual seeker should know that

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God is the real Doer. Our bodies and minds are His instruments. The *Bhagavad Gita* says :

'From whom originate all the activities of beings, by whom all this is pervaded, worshipping Him with his own duty, a man attains perfection'.

All actions are actually proceeding from God. In breathing, sleeping, eating and in everything, the power for each action comes from God. If the devotee remembers this as he works in the house, the office or the shop, his ego becomes quiet and he feels the presence of God.

Emotions also emanate from God. If an emotion of love for someone comes, the aspirant should feel that it is from God. The universal love of God is manifested in all our little loves for persons and things. Normally our love is tinged with selfishness, but if we can feel the Divine Presence even in our human love, it will be a means for our liberation. A mother loves her child, but if she remembers that the sweetness, the beauty and the charm of the child are coming from God, feeding and caressing the child become spiritual practices. We have many opportunities to feel the presence of God in this world, but sometimes we forget that. Often we think, 'This is my child, my child,' but if the child suddenly dies, we cry, 'Where is my child? O God, why did You take away my child?' With the practice of Divine Presence we shall not suffer. Even if the child dies, we will say, It is God's will. God brought me this child and made me love the child. It is all the play of God in order that I may find God.'

If we are really earnest, we must find time to realize that it is God who is operating the universe that wherever there is power, wherever there is beauty, wherever there is bliss, it is God. 'It is He. It is He.' We must touch this reality in our contemplations, and the memory of this will prevail in all the activities of our lives. Spiritual life is a total life - a life that exists not only during the

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meditation but at all times. In whatever we do, God-consciousness must be there. Trying to feel the presence of God throughout the universe, knowing that God has penetrated every atom of this cosmos, brings us great strength, courage and peace.

In Vedanta the final philosophic position for experiencing the Divine Presence is monism, the practice of unity. At this stage we have to know that there is nothing else but God as Supreme Consciousness. In the dream state, even though there seems to be a solid or tangible universe, yet on waking we know that the seemingly real universe was mental entirely created by the mind. Similarly, the waking world is a projection of consciousness. In the monistic vision the material world is nothing but consciousness. Space, time, matter, energy, life, mind, and all that we encounter and experience are forms of consciousness. It is all one consciousness.

At this stage the meditator will try to concentrate on the ultimate Reality as consciousness and he does not need to wander here and there to discover that consciousness. He discovers it within himself. He sees the light of his own consciousness and knows that this light of consciousness is one with the Universal Consciousness (God). They are the same. Then the meditator tries to concentrate on the Universal Consciousness as his own true Self.

Every experience that comes to him he at once merges into the Universal Consciousness. If a thought of the body comes, he at once merges it into the source of all thoughts—his higher Self. From the outside the body appears to be made up of many components—bones, flesh, nerves and so on—but it is all projections of his true Self. Slowly he realises that the entire universe, including time and space, is within himself. In this way the experience of the Divine Presence comes to its culmination—in which man's true Self includes all things: the universe, the past,

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the present, the future, animate and inanimate objects, life, death. All these are one indefinable, indescribable unity—the unity of the universal Self.

Thus, the Divine Presence has varying degrees or levels of comprehension. We must start from where we stand and practise the Presence as much as possible, knowing, in the language of the *Chandogya Upanishad*: 'All this is certainly God.' All this is the true Self of man.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, September 1981)

[To one who is repentant] God dwells in every being, and he knows the innermost thoughts of all. Pray to him with your whole heart, weep before him. He is the one who can direct your mind toward the path of good, he is the one to give you the strength to follow the path. If you vow to yourself that you will follow the path of righteousness, you will be able to do so by the grace of the Lord.

But pray to him day and night, weep before him; you will gain strength and you will attain devotion. He is the ocean of mercy, he is full of compassion and he is the embodiment of forgiveness.

(Swami Premananda)

God Is Also Mother The Taoist Feeling Of Being Alive

Hans Torwesten

[Continued from last issue]

Philosophical considerations such as this only have meaning when they are embedded in a living religious stance. One should not denounce thinking, but one should also protect oneself from mental acrobatics, which only juggle with “interesting” problems. If we are speaking here of the subject of “God is also Mother”, it is a question of a new feeling of being alive, a new living belief, which also sees the female-motherly in God – in which connection belief in this case does not mean that one is “considering as true” any particular dogma, but a certain basic attitude to life, a fundamental *trust*. Anyone who sees in God the Mother as well, feels himself borne up by a powerful and yet gentle energy, to which we can abandon ourselves. This self-abandonment has nothing to do with regression or laziness – rather it is the art of “Wu wei”, which literarily means “Not doing”, but fundamentally means a spontaneous, relaxed activity, an alert, active passivity, letting things happen, a natural effect without a “why”.

It is not by chance that Taoist terms are used here, because Taoism is – in contrast perhaps to the more patriarchal and “ordered” Confucianism – a mystical and “motherly” religion. With almost extreme severity, Lao Tse expressed this feeling in Chapter 20 of the Tao-te-king:

He who ceases all learning has no troubles.
The hesitant “yes” and the willing “yes”,
Is there a difference?
What others esteem, that too I should honour.
What nonsense!

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Oh, what confusion in this world,
And without end!

People are so joyous
As when celebrating great festivals,
As when climbing the terraces in spring.

I alone remain silent and unmoved
Like a new-born child who has yet to laugh;
Unattached, independent.

The masses have their opulence,
Only I alone seem to possess nothing.
My heart is that of a fool's;
Shrouded, inscrutable.

People are all so bright and clear,
Only I am turbid and dark.
People are all so clever and astute,
Only I am foolish and simple-minded.

I drift along like the sea,
Without direction, like the restless wind.
People all have a purpose,
Only I am a useless fool.

I alone am different from others
But I revere the nourishing mother.

This sage seems not to have been born for a world of intelligence tests, pressure to do well and pushiness. He seems to want to deliberately transform himself back into being a baby,

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who knows nothing and wants nothing. Nowadays we would say that he wants to opt out from a society, in which only pushing and shoving is in vogue, in which it has to get a man somewhere, in which the capable and clever people engage in ingenious battles of words and amuse themselves at more or less boring parties.

We must of course consider that sages like Lao Tse never wanted to make this way of life absolute. They did not have in mind wanting to make a rigid ideology out of it. Taoism draws its wisdom from the knowledge of the relativity of all things. The apparently “regressive” characteristics of the approach, which is expressed in the verses quoted above, are a reaction, a healthy protest against the *overestimation* of so-called “manly” values – such as self-assertion, determination, usefulness, etc.

The sage must ensure that where only the energetic *Yang* counts, the *Yin* (the dark and weak) is reinforced. Everything in this case is put upside down, so-called healthy common-sense, which is mostly unfortunately unaware of its chronic illness, is challenged. The fact that these verses even after 2500 years are still relevant – indeed perhaps more relevant than before, hardly needs to be stressed. In this regard we need to look not only to material competition and at the pressure of rivalry in our society dominated by growth and performance. We also have to look closely at many a “spiritual” group, in which such a rare holy man as Lao-Tse would hardly be accepted, because even among them one must not vacillate or hesitate, one must continually radiate confidence, one must, with a perfectly fitting suit of clothes, be able to appear as a representative or foreign minister, one must be able to repeat one’s confession of faith without hesitation and not be uneasy and anxious. Such an obstinate rascal would soon be brought to reason – or one would at least try to do so. Perhaps he has much too radically attained that “poverty

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in spirit", which Jesus and also Meister Eckhart so energetically promoted, so that he is no use for anything; he would also not take on any ministerial post in the new "Age of Enlightenment". Like Ramakrishna, who also always regarded himself as a child and worshipped the "nourishing Mother", he belongs among the fools who are equally deprived of everything. But only in them does the essence of the naked Ground, which acts without reason, indeed does not seem to do anything, become visible to us tensely pushing people.

When we previously spoke of a basic trust, which is expressed in a religion, which feels itself borne by a motherly aspect, it was not a false and comfortable assurance that was intended. This basic trust goes hand in hand with unlimited openness, with exposure and vulnerability. Lao-Tse and Ramakrishna were not ashamed to show themselves as sometimes apprehensive and "restless like the sea". Even today, when every *Guru* always has to have the last laugh and the last word, where one must not show any weakness, the hymn in praise of weakness is so necessary. I do not mean a weakness that weakens us in our innermost being and allows us to become exaggeratedly aware of our sinful nature. I am speaking of an attitude which not only loves the perfect and the smooth, but also the irregular and the unsmoothed – an attitude, which creates an atmosphere of absolute freedom, in which one can also afford not to be fit as a fiddle and quick-witted, but helpless, insecure as it were. For only in such an insecurity, in which we hold fast on to no such an ideology, in which we have apparently lost our way, do we have a chance to really meet one another and our fellow men.

So it holds good for the Mother. We also only encounter her when we have no outside support, when we have let go of ourselves and everything. After we have bitten into the apple of knowledge and know good and evil, we must in a further step

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again let go of the pairs of opposites. "Is the good so far removed from the bad?" In order to be able to stand before the Father, God, one must appear in a white garment, the garment of the good. One must have something to show for oneself, otherwise one will be thrown out into the place where hell and the gnashing of teeth predominate. Even Protestantism makes no exception in this, even if it is suspicious of all good "works". In Calvinism there is an almost compulsory pressure to do well, as allegedly in one's own economic prosperity it should appear how merciful God is – a somewhat rather capitalist version of the Christian gospel of the poor, and where this mania for work is so great, faith is raised to the highest obligation – and faith can be a quite strenuous achievement.

Before the Mother one does not have such a good chance in the white garment of the chosen, for the simple reason that there are no 'chosen' for her. She is certainly glad when we do good and she is also glad when her children achieve a "manly" performance and is sometimes more proud of them than they themselves are. Even such well-tried monastic virtues as modesty and obedience are not at all smiled at by her. Most of all she is happy when we appear before her without any garment of virtue, when we appear naked before her, without any certificate of hard work in our hand. When Ramakrishna prayed to her, he always offered the pairs of opposite at her feet, which in the final analysis have their origin in her *Maya* Power: good and bad, knowledge and ignorance, beauty and ugliness, etc. and asked her only for pure love for her.

That sounds dangerous, of course, it sounds almost anarchical. Should then in the final analysis only pure Being count nakedness as such? Is the democratic-motherly principle not made too absolute and the wind taken out of the sails of all human striving from the start?

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How much fear man has that he could be robbed of his clothes, his role in society, his uniforms, his medals and earnings – in a society, in which one should not have any fear! But nothing should be taken away or extinguished, naked asceticism should not be elevated to a principle. We only want clothes, uniforms and earnings to be more transparent, so that they do not completely conceal the view of the Ground. A philosophy that only proclaims pure Being and condemns any endeavour would only lead us into another blind alley. Yet man must know the Ground from which he acts, he should himself have gone so far on the Ground, that all his action is fed from this source. Then he can perhaps achieve a greater perfection than anyone who is only concerned with achievement and perfection. The Mother also claps her hands in joy when a job is completed. But she is most joyful when the work has gone along by itself, with the highest concentration indeed, but without cramped muscles.

Translated by John Philips

You have to be strong and a hero, and at the same time calm and tender. If you have faith in Sri Ramakrishna, you will have no fear. You will remain undaunted in the midst of dangers and difficulties. You will experience and see for yourself the truth of this. You will have a new birth as you take the name of Sri Ramakrishna. Man becomes God in his name.

(Swami Premananda)

Memoirs of Swami Premananda

Swami Prabhavananda

(Swami Prabhavananda, late head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California; had the privilege of associating with Swami Premananda and of serving him on a number of occasions. In his memories which follow, he recalls one of his first lessons as a novice and gives an insight into Swami Premananda's relationship with his brother-disciples.)

There is a saying that only a jeweller can know the value of a jewel. Similarly, only illumined souls can really understand and appreciate another illumined soul. This was evident in the great love and affection the disciples of Ramakrishna had for each other.

When Swami Turiyananda and Swami Premananda met after not having seen each other for some years, they prostrated before each other. Swami Turiyananda was the first to get up. He said: "Brother, no one can surpass you in humility." One day I was present when Swami Premananda said to Swami Brahmananda, who was known as Maharaj: "Let us get rid of this ochre cloth. It advertises that we are monks." He was in such a mood of renunciation that even the traditional monastic dress seemed to him a barrier to complete self-effacement.

Maharaj had a great sense of fun. He used to tease Swami Premananda through me in an affectionate way. Once, while I was massaging him, he whispered to me: "Go to Brother Baburam in the next room and give him a massage."

Now Swami Premananda was not in the habit of accepting personal service from anyone and never let himself be massaged. But as long as Maharaj had given me this order I meant to carry it out. (I was then eighteen years old.) I went to Swami Premananda's room and opened the door.

The Swami was lying on his cot, covered with a sheet. I took one of his feet and began to massage. Swami Premananda got up

Swami Prabhavananda

and said: "Go away! I don't want a massage. Go to Maharaj!" But I did not listen to his protest. Again I pulled his leg towards me and began to massage, explaining: "Maharaj asked me to do it." This continued for some time. Every time the Swami objected. I told him that I had to carry out Maharaj's order.

Finally he relaxed, and I gave him a good massage. I was blessed to serve him.

I remember a board meeting of the Ramakrishna Order's trustees early in the year 1915. Swami Saradananda, the Secretary, arrived from the Udbodhan Office and asked: "Where is Brother Baburam?" "He is upstairs in the shrine room," I informed him. Swami Saradananda tiptoed upstairs. I followed him. In a corner of the room Swami Premananda was seated, absorbed in meditation. Swami Saradananda was a big, strong man. He lifted the slight, motionless figure of his brother-disciple and carried him downstairs, dropping him in the courtyard.

Swami Premananda landed on his feet and began to dance in ecstasy. Maharaj, Swamis Turiyananda, Saradananda, Shivananda, and Subodhananda all joined him. Maharaj danced in the centre and his brother-disciples circled around him. The whole place vibrated with their spiritual fervour. They danced and sang for about an hour. It seemed as if they were calling all mankind to come to be liberated and to share in the bliss of God.

During my last visit with Swami Premananda he was very ill. He was then living at the Udbodhan Office in Calcutta. He asked me to stay there with him and to assist Swami Saradananda in the secretarial work of the Order. Of course I was very happy at this suggestion. But within an hour I received a letter from Maharaj at Puri asking me to come to him immediately. I went to Swami Premananda and read the letter to him. He said: "Write to Maharaj that you can't come, that you are staying here." "How can I do that?" I asked him. Maharaj was my *Guru*.

Memoirs of Swami Premananda

Swami Premananda's temper was rising: "What, you won't obey me?" he asked.

"But sir, when it comes to obeying you or Maharaj, I must obey Maharaj" This answer irritated him all the more: "Get away from me!" he exclaimed. "I can't look at your face!" Somehow Swami Premananda's anger did not affect me. Deep in my heart I knew that he was just acting, and that his plans for me had been prompted by his love. But I left him, because he was sick and I did not want to excite him unduly. I went downtown to do some errands before my trip to Puri.

In the meantime Swami Premananda had sent for me. As soon as I returned to the Udbodhan Office I went to his room. He had ordered my favourite sweets and asked me to sit before him and eat. He would not let me go. Then he inquired: "Are you angry with me?" "Why should I be angry with you, sir?" "Because I scolded you." "But sir, your scolding was a blessing!" Then Swami Premananda said: "Well, this is the last time you will see me. We shall all be gone; you boys will have to take charge of the Mission work. I wanted you to learn these duties from Swami Saradananda, but it seems that Maharaj has other plans for you. So go!" His mood changed. Like a little boy he said: "But don't tell Maharaj that I scolded you!" Then he asked me to send him some holy water from the Jagannath temple in Puri.

As soon as I came to Maharaj he inquired about Swami Premananda's health. I told him that he was very sick. Maharaj talked for a while about how his brother-disciple had contracted his fatal illness in East Bengal in his desire to serve others. Suddenly he inquired: "Did he ask anything of you?" "Yes, Maharaj, he asked for some holy water." Maharaj became excited: "What, such a great soul asked such a small thing of you, and you kept quiet so long! Do you know how great he is? In whichever direction he looks, that whole direction becomes purified!" He immediately ordered Swami Shankarananda, his secretary, to send some holy water to his brother-disciple.

Self-Enquiry

Sri Ramana Maharshi

(The teachings given below have been compiled from Talks with Ramana Maharshi, Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi and other books published by Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, and are published here by permission.)

Question : How is one to think of the Self?

Maharshi : The Self is self-luminous without darkness and light, and is the reality which is self-manifest. Therefore, one should not think of it as this or that.

The very thought of thinking will end in bondage. The purport of meditation on the Self is to make the mind take the form of the Self. In the middle of the heart-cave the pure Brahman is directly manifest as the Self in the form I ... I ... I.

Q : What exactly is this Self of which you speak? If what you say is true, there must be another self in man.

M : Can a man be possessed of two identities, two selves? To understand this matter it is first necessary for a man to analyse himself. Because it has long been his habit to think as others think, he has never faced his 'I' in the true manner.

He has not a correct picture of himself, he has too long identified himself with the body and the brain. Therefore I tell you to pursue this enquiry 'Who am I?' You ask me to describe this true Self to you. What can be said? It is That out of which the sense of the personal 'I' arises and into which it will have to disappear.

Q : Disappear? How can one lose one's sense of personality?

M : The first and foremost of all thoughts, the primeval thought in the mind of every man, is the I thought. It is only after the birth of this thought that any other thought can rise at all. It is only after the first personal pronoun 'I' has arisen in the mind that the second personal pronoun 'you' can make its appearance. If you could mentally follow the 'I' thread until it led you back to its source, you would discover that just as it is the first thought to

Sri Ramana Maharshi

appear, so it is the last to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced.

Q : You mean that it is possible to conduct such a mental investigation into oneself?

M : Certainly. It is possible to go inwards until the last thought, 'I', gradually vanishes.

Q : What is then left? Will a man then become quite unconscious or will he become an idiot?

M : No. On the contrary, he will attain that consciousness which is immortal, and he will become truly wise when he has awakened to his true Self, which is the real nature of man.

Q : But sure the sense of 'I' must also pertain to that?

M : The sense of 'I' pertains to the person, the body and brain. When a man knows his true Self for the first time something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind ; it is infinite, eternal, divine.... When this happens, a man has not really lost himself; rather, he has found himself.

Unless and until a man embarks on this quest of the true Self, doubt and uncertainty will follow his footsteps through life. The greatest kings and statesmen try to rule others when in their heart of hearts they know that they cannot rule themselves....

What is the use of knowing about everything else when you do not yet know who you are? People avoid this enquiry into the true Self, but what else is there so worthy to be undertaken?

Q : Does the enquiry 'Who am I?' lead to any spot in the body?

M : Evidently, self-consciousness is in relation to the individual himself and therefore has to be experienced in his being, with a centre in the body as the centre of experience. It resembles the dynamo of a machine which gives rise to all sorts

Self-Enquiry

of electrical works. Not only it maintains the life of the body and the activities of all its parts and organs, conscious and unconscious but also the relation between the physical and the subtle planes, on which the individual functions. Also, like the dynamo, it vibrates and can be felt by the calm mind that pays attention to it. It is known to the yogis by the name *sphurana* which in *Samadhi* scintillates with consciousness.

Q : How to reach that centre where what you call the ultimate Consciousness -the I ... I ... I-arises? Is it by simply thinking 'Who am I?'

M : Yes, it will take you up. You must do it with a calm mind-mental calmness is essential.

Q : Is the 'I ... I ... I' consciousness Self-realization?

M : It is a prelude to it. That which arises in the physical body's 'I' is the mind. If one enquires whence this I-ness first arises, it will be found that it is the Heart or *hridayam*. Restraint of the outgoing mind and its absorption in the Heart is known as *antarmukha-drsti* or inwardness. When the mind becomes absorbed in the Heart, the 'I' or ego vanishes; and pure Consciousness or Self which subsists during all the states of the mind alone remains resplendent. This state where there is not the slightest trace of the I-thought is one's true *svarupa*.

Q : What is meant by saying that Atman is Light?

M : The Atman is not a light like the Petromax light. It is called light because everything else becomes known through it.

Q : Even though I have listened to the explanation of the characteristics of enquiry in such great detail, my mind has not gained even a little peace. What is the reason for this?

M : The reason is absence of strength or one-pointedness of mind.

Sri Ramana Maharshi

Q : What is the reason for the absence of mental strength?

M : The means that make one qualified for Self-enquiry are meditation, *yoga* etc.

Again One should gain proficiency in these through gradual practice, and thus secure a stream of mental modes that is natural and helpful.

Divine grace is essential for realization. It leads one to God-realization. But such grace is vouchsafed only to him who is a true devotee or *yogin* who has striven hard and ceaselessly on the path toward freedom.

Q : What is self-surrender?

M : It is the same as self-control. Control of mind is effected by the removal of *samskaras* which imply the functioning of the ego. The ego submits only when it recognizes the Higher Power. Such recognition, which is surrender, is self-control.

... A passenger in a train keeps his load on the head by his own folly. Let him put it down, he will find that the load reaches the destination all the same. Similarly let us not pose as the doers, but resign ourselves to the guiding Power.

... Surrender itself is a mighty prayer.

Q : Then you mean that the Self is God?

M : You see the difficulty. Self-enquiry ('who am I?') is a different technique from the meditation : 'I am Siva' or 'I am He'. I rather emphasise self-knowledge, for you are first concerned with yourself before you proceed to know the world or its Lord. The moment you get into the quest for the self and begin to go deeper, the real Self is waiting there to receive you and then whatever is to be done will be done by something else and you, as an individual, have no hand in it.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, April 1980)

Leaves from an Ashrama : 43
Advantages Of Differential Morality

Swami Vidyatmananda

The *Vedantist*, I find, is obliged to get along largely without the help of casuistry - that so-called churchly science of right and wrong conduct. This is not easy. You are left with all kinds of unsolved ethical dilemmas to struggle with. You ask the *guru* such questions as: "What should I do in the present circumstances?" or perhaps, "Is So-and-So behaving properly?" and the only answer you get is: "It is very difficult to say," or "It all depends".

This absence of absolute standards of right and wrong is really frustrating at first. How much easier it would be to have all deeds neatly categorised according to some system of canon law - to be aware at all times whether one's sins are original, deadly, moral, or venial, and what the specific penance is for each!

But according to Hindu thought, morality is largely differential. Few acts of themselves are ever right or wrong. The Vedantist allows not only double standards, but indeed multiple standards - actually one for every person and each circumstance. Temperament, impressions from previous lives, emotional conditions, karmic predispositions - all are said to have a bearing on anything we do and to determine its comparative worthiness. Thus Ramakrishna could chastise a too-mild disciple for not fighting under certain circumstances and in the next breath chide one of a naturally aggressive nature for not practising pacifism under the same conditions.

Sometimes I dislike such freedom. It leaves you so embarrassingly on your own. But I can see that the Vedanta scheme has many advantages.

For one thing, straining is avoided. I have seen rigid insistence upon unattainable levels result too often in discouragement, indifference, or neurosis. Aided by his theory of reincarnation,

Swami Vidyatmananda

the Indian is willing to inch forward in a more organic way. High performance, being relative, is possible for those even at the lower end of the evolutionary scale. Puritanism does not develop and mental health is preserved.

Furthermore moral egoism is prevented where the differential approach is followed. Where a blanket code prevails, a familiar error is that of believing yourself to be spiritually advanced simply because you do not break this code. This leads to judging others who appear to fall below the standard, and generally takes you further from, rather than nearer to, charity.

In the Vedanta notion of differential morality, emphasis is placed on what is significant. Action is not the important thing. The important thing is the attitude of the mind. Am I thinking of God? I know I cannot attain Him by any act. Any action - even of high moral significance - is detrimental if it emphasises my ego, *me*. Any action is worth while - even if, from the upper levels, it appears inadequate - if it makes a Godward impression on the mind. Remember Ramakrishna's parable of the *sadhu* and the prostitute.

How thankful I am that Vedanta respects individual differences and permits a variety of approaches to God. Such liberality is realistic, psychologically sound, and far more interesting than the route of exclusiveness and standardisation. We are in the world, and by our nature we must act. But action is valuable only in that it may bring us to the end of action, to contemplation, where the whole question of ethics drops away.

Programme for July - August 2013

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation,
at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

There will be no discourses during the months of
July and August

Sri Krishna's Puja

Sunday 25th August 2013

at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

When you give up everything, then alone will you win spirituality. See God, know the Atman, then will the book of infinite wisdom be opened to you. He who is infinite wisdom and infinite Being dwells within you. The experiences of the seers and prophets of old are recorded in the scriptures, but the mere study of the scriptures is not enough. In order to gain the true knowledge of God you have to have the experience yourself. Then alone will the door to all mysteries be opened.

It is written in the Gita: "That Brahman is beginningless, transcendent, eternal. He is said to be equally beyond what is, and what is not." The key to the knowledge of God is in His hands. Therefore, pray for His grace.

(Swami Premananda)

Dispassion can arise only in a heart that is pure. In his own life, Buddha exemplified dispassion. He asked for nothing for himself, not even liberation. All his struggles were for the good of mankind. Out of dispassion springs knowledge. Shankara was the embodiment of knowledge. Knowledge leads to love, and Sri Chaitanya came that mankind might bathe in this love. Yet man in his ignorance thought that these ideals differed one from another, and out of this ignorance divergent creeds and sects were formed. But with the coming of Sri Ramakrishna, these differing opinions were harmonized. The divergent streams met in him, the ocean of harmony.

(Swami Premananda)

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To him alone who has the seed of religion comes its gradual unfoldment. Just as a seed of a banyan is necessary to bring forth a mighty tree, so there must be the seed of spirituality in us first. Then we must rear the tree; in other words, mould our thinking by one thought only. No one can become spiritual by simply filling his head with stock phrases and now and then making a parade of them before others. Of course, one can pass for a great scholar. But he will never be spiritual. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that pundits are like vultures that soar high in the air, but whose eyes are fixed on the charnel pits below on lust and gold.

(Swami Premananda)



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