

Vedanta

417 JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2021

Vedanta: Its Theory and Practice
Swami Ananyananda

**Swami Vivekananda: The Apostle of
Universalism**
Swami Vishwananda



Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 14



MONEY IS ALSO A GREAT UPADHI -14

MONEY is also an Upadhi and that too of a very strong nature. As soon as a man becomes rich, he is thoroughly changed.

A brahmana who was very meek and humble used to come here every now and then. After some time he stopped coming and we knew nothing of what had happened to him. One day, we went over to Konnagore in a boat. As we were disembarking from the boat, we saw the brahmana sitting on the bank of the Ganges, where, in the fashion of big folks, he was enjoying the pure air of the river. On seeing me, he accosted me in a patronising tone with the words, "Hallo Thakur! How are you doing now?" At once I noticed a change in his tone and said to Hriday, who was with me, "I tell you, Hriday, this man must have come by some riches. Can't

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Mantra Japa or Repetition of the Holy Name – 3

As we saw earlier, the Mantra is said to be the sound-manifestation of the Divinity or the Supreme Truth or *Shabda-Brahman*. What do we mean by this? The creation of this universe is a cyclic process of matter and beings manifesting from their causal form to their gross form, and again retracting back to their causal form, to re-manifest again and again in cycles. The ultimate or irreducible reality is 'Spirit' in the sense of Pure Consciousness (*Chit*) out of which, as and by its Power (*Shakti*), Mind and Matter proceed. Spirit is one. There are no degrees or differences in it. The Spirit, which is in man, is the one Spirit that is in everything, and which, as the object of worship, is the Lord (*Ishvara*) or God.

According to Vedanta, Mind and Matter exhibit diversity and are of many degrees and qualities. Matter is the grosser aspect of mind or the mind is the subtler aspect of matter. It is a continuum known as Prakriti. Atman or Spirit is also termed as The Whole (*Purna*) and is without sections (*Akhanda*). Mind and Matter are parts in that whole. One has to notice here that 'whole' implies no-space and 'parts' implies space. Thus, Mind and Matter are not whole and are parts which are limited by time, space, and causation. Spirit is absolutely motionless (*Achala*) but Mind and Matter are subjected to constant changes. That which is absolutely motionless implies no time and motion implies and thus involves time. Spirit is beyond time and space and is infinite (*Aparicchinna*) and formless (*Arupa*). Mind and Matter are finite (*Paricchinna*) and with form (*Rupa*). Mind limits the Consciousness so as to enable man to have experience of the finite. There is no mind or, in fact, anything in this universe that is without Consciousness as its background or substratum. The Supreme Consciousness is not limited or graspable by the mind (*Amanah*). If there be no mind, there is no limitation either.

Pure or Supreme Consciousness remaining Itself in one aspect unchanged, changes in its other aspect as Its active Power (*Shakti*) which manifests as Mind and Body. Man can thus be understood as Pure Consciousness (*Chit*) apparently limited by its Power (*Shakti*) as Mind and Body. *Maya* is that part of the Power that severs the united Consciousness so that the object is seen as other than the Self and then as split up into multifarious objects of the universe. *Maya* is that which creates subject-object differentiation in that one indivisible whole which is Pure Infinite or Undivided Consciousness and is also termed as Brahman. The Seers of the Hindu or Vedic tradition, which includes Tantras and other scriptures as well, discovered that this Power or Great Energy or *Shakti* is the source of creation and *Nada*, *Prana*, *Shabda*, et cetera, are only synonyms for that Cosmic Energy. This is mentioned in the *Prapanchasara Tantra*, an important text of the Tantra tradition. This *Shabda* or *Nada* as the Cosmic Energy is the soul of the Universe, and, as illumination, is also conscious. The gross form of this *Nada* supports the things of the universe as their essence or soul, and its subtle form again is represented by *Para Shakti*, *Parameshwari* or *Chinmayi Kala*. So, in the mantra tradition the spiritual aspirant (*sadhaka*) attempts to realise the subtle forms through the gross, and to reach illumination by generating the corresponding vibration. The recitation or mental repetition of the mantra, prayers, et cetera, all aim at awakening illumination or having transcendental experience through vibrations.

The Tantras explain that *Chit* and *Shabda*, Illumination or Consciousness and vibration, represent two parallel aspects, the subtle and gross forms of the same thing. *Nada* or *Shabda* is thus the very first manifestation of *Chit* and is just adjacent to it. The external things and their shapes are just material forms of the vibrations, and in them the *Chit* aspect becomes more latent, potential, or hidden. In *Nada* or vibration, the *Chit* is not so materialised but retains much of its fluidity, and it is because of this fact that it is easier to awaken the *Chit* element in and through vibration (*Nada*) than through

external forms or things. *Nada* can be imagined as an intermediate between *Chit* and *Jada*, being neither so solid as external things nor so fine and absolutely immaterial as *Chit*. Therefore, the importance and efficacy of *Mantra* or *Nada sadhana* cannot be overestimated. It is a priceless gift to the world which the tradition of Tantra has discovered. The idea that *Nada* or vibrations and *Jnana* or illumination are two parallel manifestations of the same Cosmic Energy or *Shakti* and that, as such, the one can lead to and awaken the other without fail is the fundamental idea behind *Mantra Sadhana*. The *Yamala Tantra* says that the *Nada* or vibrations can be easily got hold of in the forms of breath (*prana*) and sound (*dhvani*), and the *Chit* or Consciousness can be realised through them, which, by itself, eludes the grasp of even the most discriminative and intelligent among sadhakas.

We saw above how Pure or Supreme Consciousness remaining Itself in one aspect unchanged, changes in its other aspect as Its active Power (*Shakti*) which manifests as Mind and Body. *Mantra sadhana* is thus a reversal for transcending the above duality to reach the Whole. The Pure Consciousness and Its Power, also known as *Chit* and *Chitsakti*, or *Parashiva* and *Parashakti*, are motionless (*Nihspanda*) and soundless (*Nihshabda*). In the process of Creation of the universe, *Nada* is the first produced throbbing, pulsation or movement in the Cosmic Consciousness leading up to the Sound-Brahman (*Shabda-Brahman*), whence all ideas, the language in which they are expressed (*Shabda*) and the objects (*Artha*) which they denote, are derived. This *Nada-Brahman* or *Shabda-Brahman* condenses itself into a point called *Bindu* to evolve into the objective world. In its technical *Mantra* sense, it denotes that state of active Consciousness (or Illumined Awareness or *Shakti*) in which 'I' or the illuminating aspect of Consciousness identifies itself with rest of the objective existence—"This". That is, it subjectifies the 'This', thereby becoming the *Bindu* (a point) of Consciousness, Itself being all inclusive.

When Consciousness apprehends any object as different from Itself, It perceives that object as extended in external space. When subjectified, it collapses into an unextended point or *Bindu*. In fact, this is the universe experience of the Lord-experiencer as *Bindu* (i.e., the Lord, *Ishvara*, pervades the whole of the universe and therefore sees the universe within Himself; thus, even in its expanded state, the Lord experiences it as if it is a 'Bindu' within Himself), where the man and Lord build up a collective identity. The universe is seen withdrawn into the *Shakti* which projected it. The universe collapses, as it were, into a mathematical point without any magnitude whatsoever. This is further withdrawn into the Great Cause (the *Mahakarana*), the cause of all causes, finally remaining as Pure Consciousness in its own Glory as Existence-Consciousness-Bliss-Absolute (*Sat-chit-ananda*).

The term '*Bindu*' means 'a drop' or 'a point'. Here the '*Bindu*' means something like an epicentre from where the sound is expanding; with this expansion time appears. Simultaneously the directions are created, space comes into existence. This *Bindu*, the epicentre, which is an actuated Consciousness, a centre of absolute Awareness which knows what is happening at every point being Itself pervading the expansion, is the Cosmic Ego—the *Ishvara*. It never loses the awareness and knowledge of Himself being the Absolute, and therefore remains unstained and unaltered. Therefore, the creation is nothing but a *Lila*, a Divine play. Before grossification into the subtle and gross world, there appear polarities, the male-female principle, the positive and negative charges (the basis for multiplication, segmentation, division and union). From it the electrons and protons and neutrons, the male-female, the forces of attraction and repulsion (*Raga-Dvesha*) appear.

According to the Hindu spiritual tradition, the first material-oriented manifestation during the process of creation of the universe is space/ether (*Akasha*). With it appears the sound principle (*Shabda*) and the corresponding sense organ of perception (the *Karnendriya*).

Shabda is a quality (*Guna*) of ether (*Akasha*) and is sensed by hearing. *Shabda* is twofold: viz., lettered (*Varnatmaka Shabda*); and the sound independent of letters, *Dhvani* (*Dhvanyatmaka Shabda*). *Dhvani* is sound caused by the vibrations produced by striking or blowing and does not convey any specific meaning if it is not a speech produced by vocal cords or its mechanical imitations. Lettered sound is speech (words, letters, sentences) which has *Dhvani*, sound/articulation, as its carrier.

Such sounds carry specific meanings. The *Dhvani* produced by vocal cords in certain definite forms backed by consciousness conveying definite meaning is speech. The sound segmented to the lowest fraction is a letter. A group of letters that indicate an object or a thing is a word. Word is the manifestation of an idea that appears in mind, which by the will has sought an outward expression in the form of audible sound. The perceived sound (*Dhvanyatmaka Shabda*) is transitory but the 'lettered-sound' (*Varnatmika Shabda*), as it is in itself, is said to be eternal. It was manifested by *Dhvani*, unlettered perishable sound. It existed before, as it continues to exist after. It is something like a pot in a dark place revealed for a while by lightening; it was not produced at the time of the lightening nor does it cease to exist after the lightening disappears. Just as a tree that has manifested in a definite/particular form existed in the seed, of course in an entirely different form, and continues in the subsequent seeds of the tree, so does the seed of ideation and its expression, speech, exist and manifest even to the gross level of articulation through the mouth. Trees from the seeds of the one and the same mother tree may not be identical but grow according to the environment they get, so does the language and speech differ from place to place and person to person, but the idea, feeling and sense they convey remain the same. Thus, the *Shabda* manifesting as speech is said to be eternal.

(To be continued in the next issue)

Vedanta: Its Theory and Practice

Swami Ananyananda

A well-known Sanskrit verse gives the gist of the Vedantic teaching thus: what is discussed in hundreds and thousands of scriptures regarding the ultimate truth, I will compress it in half a verse. It is this, that Brahman alone is real and the world is unreal; and that the jiva, the individual self, is verily Brahman and there is no difference between the two. This is the essential teaching of Vedanta—Vedanta as represented and expounded in Advaita. This verse briefly but clearly expresses the Vedanta theory in essence: and its practice also is suggested by implication. The principal teaching of Vedanta is that Brahman, the Absolute, is alone absolutely real; that all the phenomena, all the names and forms in manifestation, are not real from the ultimate standpoint; and that the soul of man—indeed the essence of everything—is nothing but Brahman. The Atman, the Self of man, is verily Brahman, declares the Upanishad. The Vedanta practice consists, to put it in one word, in the realization of this identity of the Atman and Brahman. When that realization takes place in the heart of man, all his doubts are dispelled, the knots of his heart are rent asunder, and his Karmas are destroyed: he becomes a liberated soul—these, again, are the words of the Upanishad. This is the central theme of Vedanta, the essence of its theory and practice.

The Vedanta philosophy is very ancient. It is the outcome of Vedic and Upanishadic thought, which is the background and the basis for all the orthodox systems of philosophy that have been thriving on the soil of India, providing spiritual nourishment to her people down these scores of centuries. The Vedanta literature is vast. The Upanishads, the Brahma-Sutra, and the Bhagavad-Gita—the Prasthanatraya— are looked upon as the source books

of the Vedanta philosophy. Even among the Upanishads, only ten or twelve are considered very important and authoritative. The Vedanta commentators, beginning from Shankaracharya, have interpreted these texts, writing elaborate and penetrating commentaries on them, and have established their respective schools of Vedanta based on those interpretations. There are several commentators, Acharyas as they are called, and so there are several schools which come under the name of Vedanta. Basically, all of them can be brought under three headings: Advaita, as represented by Shankaracharya, which may be translated as non-dualism or, simply, monism; Vishishtadvaita, as represented by Ramanujacharya, which may be translated as qualified non-dualism; and Dvaita, as represented by Madhvacharya, which may be translated as dualism. The other schools of Vedanta come under one or other of the above three—philosophically speaking—and have slight differences in their mode of interpreting the texts and in their religious beliefs and practices.

Here, we are chiefly concerned with Advaita, which, by the way, is popularly referred to as Vedanta. The greatest exponent of this philosophy was Acharya Shankara, who not only wrote thought-provoking commentaries on the original texts already mentioned, but also travelled the length and breadth of India—during his short life of only thirty-two years—and established the Advaita philosophy on firm foundations. In our own time, it was Swami Vivekananda who brought the Vedanta philosophy not only to the people of India, but also to the people of the West. He visualized that it would be Vedanta and Vedanta alone, understood and applied in its essential, pure form, that would bring salvation to the West, which needed a fresh impetus to its spiritual life, and to his own socially backward and poverty-stricken country, India. This was his deep conviction, which came of his personal

experience, and this he gave expression to in all his writings and speeches. Swami Vivekananda's boon to mankind is invaluable, and time alone will show the blessings of his precious gift—his message of Vedanta.

The teachings of Vedanta are impersonal, inasmuch as they do not owe their origin to any person or prophet. Vedanta is not built around any person. Its teachings voice the profound spiritual experiences of highly evolved souls who have touched the rock-bottom of reality. They are not hypothetical theories of speculative philosophy, but tested truths experienced in the hearts of men. They are spiritual realizations of the highest order, which hold good for all time and for all people. Hence, they are universal; their appeal is universal; and they are applicable universally.

Vedanta speaks of the divinity of the soul, its innate perfection, and its inborn freedom. It speaks of the fundamental spiritual verities of life—of man and nature. Its appeal to man is spiritual; to know his real nature and to be free from the thralldom of matter. Vedanta will always appeal to anyone who is awake to the spiritual nature of things, to one who is spiritually sensitive. Vedanta will not only be the solace of his life, but a solace in death also.

The opening verse of the Isha Upanishad, one of the oldest of the Upanishads and generally enumerated as the first of the major ten—first not in any logical or chronological sense—makes a significant statement which is the very essence of the Vedantic teaching. It says: "Whatsoever there is changeful in this world, all that is to be covered by the Lord." This declaration of the Upanishad forms, as it were, the basis on which the entire superstructure of Vedanta is built; this idea provides the philosophical as well as the religious background of later Vedanta literature. It states the truth clearly and emphatically and urges man to realize it. It speaks of the spiritual oneness of all existence, for everything

is enveloped by the Lord. God is covering everything; God is in everything; God is everything. Realize this truth and be free—that is the message of Vedanta. This single verse of the Isha Upanishad can be said to be the soul of Hinduism, for the entire history of Hinduism, in all its phases, is but an understanding and an expression of the truth of this statement—All is Divine. Mahatma Gandhi once said about this verse: "If all the Upanishads and all other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse of the Isha Upanishad were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever."

Vedanta teaches the divinity of man; it says that each soul is divine. In fact, everything in the universe, animate or inanimate, is basically and potentially divine. This divinity is one and universal, pure and perfect, infinite and eternal. It is spiritual and unconditioned by time and space. It is the basis of all manifestation, of all names and forms. The purpose of life is to know this truth and to be one with it. That is the goal of religion, of every kind of spiritual struggle. Swami Vivekananda has beautifully compressed the entire Vedantic teaching in the following few statements, which truly breathe the spirit of a universal religion. He says:

"Each soul is potentially divine.

The goal is to manifest this divine within, by controlling nature, external and internal.

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.

This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms are but secondary details."

This, in a nutshell, expresses the whole scope of Vedanta.

Vedanta says that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is like an infinite ocean of Sat-chit-ananda, of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, and that we—every kind and form of life in

manifestation—are like bubbles, ripples, and waves on that ocean. In essence, bubbles, ripples, and waves are not different from the sea in which they appear and subside.

It is all water only, but names and forms differ and endure for a while. They emerge from and enter into the same source. So with the universe of diverse names and forms. They are verily Brahman: they emerge from It, live in It, and return to It at the time of dissolution. Names and forms are temporal; they are not permanent. They appear and disappear in the ocean of Brahman, which alone endures. Brahman is Truth; it is Knowledge; it is Infinite; Know That, says the Upanishad.

Knowing that we are divine, we must realize it in our life—in this very life. That is the goal of Vedanta. Vedanta urges us to realize Truth in this very life, here and now. Otherwise, great will be the calamity, warns the Upanishad. To achieve this, Vedanta advises us to tread a path different from the one taken by the worldly-minded. This different path is the path of religion, of true spiritual life. Religion, says Swami Vivekananda, is the manifestation of the divinity already in man. That is the essence of religion—this unfoldment of the divinity that lies hidden in every soul. This definition, it hardly needs to be pointed out, has the widest application, because it admits of every religious pursuit which works towards the manifestation of the divinity that is latent in man. Every path that leads to this ultimate goal is good and welcome, no matter what form it takes. Every earnest endeavour that leads the soul towards God deserves to be encouraged and helped. Vedanta accepts all spiritual paths, all forms of worship, all religious pursuits, as true and beneficial. It is all-inclusive and gives a helping hand to everyone who is marching towards the goal supreme. It has no quarrel with this dogma or that doctrine,

this school or that system, for it knows that every one of them is helping the soul that is wending its way towards God.

In this sense, Vedanta is universal: and it exhibits a spirit of reverence towards diverse religious paths and methods. As a matter of fact, Vedanta welcomes diversity in religious methods, for it recognizes the needs of different people who are at different stages in their spiritual growth. This is what is known as Adhikaribheda in Vedanta. The spiritual competence of individuals does vary: all are not of the same attainments at the same time. They require to be helped differently, and hence the need of diversity in religious methods. Vedanta does not denounce this diversity. On the contrary, it encourages it, for it is necessary for the growth of diverse types of minds. Vedanta does not destroy any particular mode of worship or religious path: it helps one and all by encouraging them, leading them by the hand, and pointing to the final goal that has to be reached at the end of the journey. The goal, as Swami Vivekananda has stated, is to be free, to manifest the divinity that is within us. And this can be achieved "either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy", indeed, by any means that is suitable to one's temperament, inclination, or spiritual urge. The only condition that Vedanta lays down is that the aspirant should be earnest in his efforts and seek the goal with real spiritual fervour.

According to Vedanta, religion is a way of life. Understanding the truths of Vedanta, being convinced about them, and practising them daily, should bring about a transformation in our life, in our behaviour, in our dealings with others. Our conduct should correspond with our conviction. In other words, it should build in us an excellent character, moral and spiritual. Jesus said: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." Why should I love my neighbour? Vedanta provides the right answer. It says that your neighbour is yourself,

in another form and having a different name. The same divinity that is in you, giving you life and understanding, is in him as well, and in everybody else. Divinity is the basis of all existence. Without it, we cannot live for a moment. Perceive that divinity in all and serve them in all humility. The more we become conscious of our own divine essence, the better shall we be able to perceive divinity in others and act accordingly.

Vedanta provides the soundest basis for all morality and ethics. The practice of the perception of divinity in all leads to the feeling of the oneness of all. When a person feels that he is one with all, how can he injure others by his thought, word, or deed? Whom will he injure? Is there anyone else to be injured? Will one injure oneself? It is all he himself—the same God exists in everything and in everybody. He sees himself in all beings, and all beings in himself, says the Upanishad; and it adds: To such a one, where is grief or delusion? He is not afflicted by the world and its twofold forces of attraction and repulsion. He sees God in everything and serves everybody in that spirit. To him, service of others becomes a form of worship of God. All the activities in which he engages himself get transformed into acts of worship and bring him spiritual benefit by purifying his heart and mind. There is no selfishness in such a person, for his little self is no longer there demanding all his attention. His self has become identified with the Universal Self, which is the Self of all.

In the light of Vedanta, all philanthropic work, all humanitarian service, undergoes a thorough transformation, for it is no longer philanthropic, no longer humanitarian: but all work and all service is uplifted to the level of the worship of God. Service of man, then, is equal to worship of God. This attitude of Vedanta elevates not only the doer of service, because his act becomes spiritual in content, but also the receiver of service, because he is raised to the position

of God accepting worship. When we understand Vedanta in the proper light, there is nothing that can be called secular; everything is spiritual and sacred. Life itself becomes religion, and all modes of service to man become paths of realization. This is humanism at its best, based on the divinity of the human soul, which may be called "divine humanism".

It is no doubt true that significant pronouncements like "Man is the measure of all things", "Man is an end in himself", have initiated great humanistic, democratic, and socialistic movements and institutions. But they have not 'delivered the goods', mainly because they are confined to the physical, the socio-economic, dimension of man. This is a limited vision of human personality, which overlooks man's essential divine nature, his spiritual dimension. All our afflictions come because of this incomplete understanding of man and his nature. The day we dive deeper and understand ourselves fully, in all our dimensions, and readjust our physical, social, and economic life in tune with that new understanding, that very day will bring solace to our heart and clear away all sorrow and misery. We shall then know what man really is, how to approach him, and how to serve him. Humanism based merely on socialistic or materialistic principles has only landed us in the quagmire of politics, national and international: and humanity is crying in despair to be saved from its self-appointed saviours.

Vedanta reveals all the dimensions of man's personality in their true perspective. The endeavours of man to live a good and happy life are given a spiritual orientation. It is the spiritual content of human life and its aspirations that gives it its true meaning. Without it, life is only an aimless wandering, very similar to that of the animal.

In the eyes of Vedanta, all men are in essence equal. Vedanta recognizes no privileges in the spiritual realm. No one, from the spiritual point of view, is superior to another because of birth or position in life. Since the same divine power is behind all, it is open to everyone to work for and reach the highest. The differences that we do find between one man and another are the result of our own limited understanding. Since we ourselves created the situation in which we find ourselves, we can also undo it and get out of it. That is what Vedanta promises to everyone. What we are today is the result of all that we did in the past; no one else is responsible for it. And so, the future depends on us, on what we do in the present. The present will determine the future: hence the exhortation of scripture that this life should be shaped and conducted so as to lead us to the door of immortality, and enable us to realize our true nature and attain perfect peace.

This teaching of the spiritual equality of all is a great message to humanity on the social level as well. For it makes not only for the dignity of the individual, but also for the dignity of the work that he does. All types of work become of equal value since all types of work are necessary for the maintenance of society. In this respect, Vedanta has not only a spiritual message, but a social one also.

It is practice that leads to perfection. The Vedantic teachings have to be practised daily in our life if we are to benefit from them and experience their blessings. No amount of theoretical knowledge or intellectual understanding will do. One must live the life truly and earnestly. There is no other way. And the way Vedanta prescribes is the way of discrimination (viveka) and dispassion (vairagya). It asks us to discriminate between what is real and what is ephemeral, and to follow only that which is real. God alone is real: and the world, with all its good and bad things, is unreal. We have to turn away from the world and cultivate a

spirit of dispassion. We are not to run after the things of the world and get entangled in their meshes; on the other hand, we have to withdraw ourselves mentally from the world and its objects by gradual stages. This withdrawal from the world is indeed a very difficult task. But then, without it true religion never begins. Tremendous dispassion is the first condition of all religious life. Aptly, therefore, has the path of religion been compared to the edge of a razor. Religious life is like walking on the edge of a razor: one has to be wary and ever alert. At the end of the journey is the promise of immortality, of infinite bliss.

Christ said: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." For the sake of God, we shall have to give up the world, for man cannot serve both God and Mammon. It is said that where there is kama (desire for worldly things), there is no Rama (God): and where there is Rama, there is no kama. God and the world cannot go together. As the Upanishad puts it: "Not by work, not by progeny, not by wealth, but by renunciation, some have attained immortality." One who has attained the highest spiritual experience can remain and work in the world, for he sees only God in everything. The world will have neither attraction nor distraction for such a one, and work will no longer bind him down to this earth. He is a free soul untouched and unaffected by the mundane things of the world. So it is said, and rightly so, that real religious life begins with a spirit of dispassion. Discrimination and dispassion go together and strengthen the mind of the aspirant.

Dispassion leads to detachment. This is an important aspect of spiritual life, this spirit of detachment. Whatever work we are engaged in should be performed with this spirit of detachment. Work done in this spirit will have no binding effect on us. It will not taint us, the scriptures say. That is the prohibitive injunction regarding work: Do not get attached. But the positive injunction

is: Do all work in a spirit of dedication—dedication to God. Negatively, we do not want to get attached to work; we want no results from work for ourselves. Positively, we work for work's sake, and offer all work as an offering to God; we dedicate all work to Him. These four mental qualities—discrimination, dispassion, detachment, and dedication—are indispensable for every aspirant, and they provide a firm foundation for his spiritual life.

Vedanta asks us to turn our mind inward. As long as the mind runs after the world and its objects, it cannot collect itself and concentrate on the truth which is within us. The mind that runs after sense-objects gets dissipated; it cannot give itself a higher direction. The mind should be purged of its baser desires before it can turn towards the higher pursuit of self-knowledge; hence the importance laid on purity of mind for every spiritual aspirant. It is only in the pure mind that the Self is revealed—the mind that is sharpened and rendered pure by concentration and meditation, that has become calm and collected, and that is unruffled by sense-objects and sense-desires. "Blessed are the pure in heart", said Jesus, "for they shall see God." And the declaration of the Upanishad is that he who desires immortality should turn inward and perceive the inner Self; he should not run after the things of the world.

Withdrawing from the world does not mean running away from it. It means, as it has been beautifully said, "Be in the world, but not of it." Live in the world knowing its true nature, its apparent as well as real nature. Apparently, the world—its names and forms, its attractions and repulsions, its loves and hatreds, its joys and sorrows, its gains and losses, is unreal: it is ever changeful and never enduring. Significantly, the Sanskrit word for world is jagat, that which is always changing. But from the absolute standpoint, the world is nothing but God, for God alone is enveloping

everything, as the Upanishad says. The real nature of the world is divine. As long as we do not perceive that divinity, which is the core of everything, life in the world is always slippery. Knowing this fundamental truth about the world, try to live in it, says the Upanishad.

This is Vedanta in practice, or Practical Vedanta, as Swami Vivekananda has called it—to see God in everyone and serve them as such, as well as to perceive one's own divine nature and realize it here and now. Swami Vivekananda, who was a living embodiment of the teachings of Vedanta, combined these two ideals in one significant statement which he made the motto of the monastic organization he founded, the Ramakrishna Order. The motto runs: *Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*—"For Self-realization and for the good of the world". It means that every spiritual aspirant should take his stand on the teachings of Vedanta and work not only for his own Self-realization, but also for the good of the world, seeing God everywhere, in everything, and in every being.

And so, we come to the point from where we started, namely, the first verse of the Isha Upanishad, which, as noted already, gives the very essence of Vedanta, both in its theory and in its practice. It may be added that the first half of the verse embodies the theoretical aspect of Vedanta, enunciating its fundamental as well as ultimate teaching, namely, God is everything; and the second half of the verse embodies the practical aspect of Vedanta, showing man how to live in this world seeing God in everything. This verse gives the sum and substance of Vedanta. The entire Vedanta literature is only an elaboration of this theory and this practice.

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Swami Vivekananda: The Apostle of Universalism

Swami Vishwananda

Is it an accident of history that India and the United States were discovered in the same decade? Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492, and Vasco De Gama, the Portuguese navigator, after a perilous voyage via the Cape of Good Hope, discovered India in 1498.

In the remarkable book *The East India Company*, published by Stanford University Press, it is said that, because of strained political relations between the Dutch and the English, the price of cloves and nutmeg was raised on the London market. A group of merchants in London sent a petition to the Queen of England to start their own company, and it was on December 31st, 1600 that Queen Elizabeth chartered the East India Company. If this story is true, then we can only say, "Inscrutable are Thy ways, O Lord". This East India Company was instrumental in creating the Hindu renaissance.

Charles Wilkins, a servant of the East India Company, was the first to master Sanskrit and to translate the Bhagavad-Gita into English. Warren Hastings, first Governor-General of India, wrote a letter to Nathaniel Smith, Chairman of the Directors, from Benares, dated 4th October 1784, requesting him to recommend Wilkins' translation to the directors of the East India Company for publication. The following words in that letter are very significant: "Might I, an unlettered man, venture to prescribe bounds to the latitude of criticism. I should exclude, in estimating the merits of such a production, all rules drawn from the ancient or modern literature of Europe, all reference to such sentiments or manners as are become the standards of propriety for opinion and action in our own modes of life, and equally all appeals to our revealed tenets of religion ... of

an antiquity preceding even the first efforts of civilization in our own quarters of the globe."

Max Müller, who left his fatherland Germany and went to stay in England permanently, was the foremost of Western Sanskrit scholars. It was he who gave the Hindus their Rig-Veda as a printed book. The East India Company collected Sanskrit manuscripts from different parts of India and helped Max Müller financially in the publication of this sacred book of the Hindus.

Sir William Jones, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Calcutta, became an ardent admirer of Sanskrit literature. Since the renaissance, says MacDonell in his Introduction to *The History of Sanskrit Literature*, "There has been no event of such world-wide significance in the history of culture as the discovery of Sanskrit literature in the latter part of the eighteenth century." It was this noble Englishman, Sir William Jones, who wrote in his essay on the literature of the Hindus, "Wherever we turn our attention to Hindu literature the notion of infinity presents itself. The longest life would not be sufficient for the perusal of near 5000 stanzas in the Puranas." Sir William published a translation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* (Fatal Ring) in 1788. When Goethe read this book, he was in rapture.

From the day Queen Elizabeth I chartered the East India Company to the day when Queen Victoria took over the administration of India in 1858, it is a far cry. In 1858, three high courts and three universities were founded at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras respectively. Western jurisprudence was introduced in that ancient country of India. Hindu boys began to read the Holy Bible and Shakespeare, Darwin and Herbert Spencer. The Occident and the Orient clasped hands at Calcutta more than in any other city in Asia.

Unknown to the world, a young man, shut up in a temple garden only ten miles from Calcutta, was practising tremendous austerities and meditation. Like another Buddha, he buried himself in meditation under a banyan tree. His name was Ramakrishna. Christ

walking on the shores of Galilee and Ramakrishna walking on the bank of the Ganges speak the same language, "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul." While the scientists in England and on the continent were discovering the laws of science and giving more and more knowledge of the physical world, Ramakrishna was going deeper and deeper in the inner world. Like an expert diver, he was going to the bottom of the lake of his mind for pearls, diamonds, and sapphires. He went through various spiritual practices prescribed by different sects of Hinduism and the non-dualistic sadhana of Advaita. He was not contented with these realizations: he wanted to know how the adherents of Christianity and Islam had attained God vision. He was instructed in the Islamic sadhana by a Sufi devotee. Seeing the picture of the Madonna in the drawing room of a very liberal Hindu, he felt an irresistible impulse to practise the sadhana of the Christian way. He had a vision of Jesus Christ and realized that Christ was a messenger of Light. Ramakrishna possessed colossal power for God-realization. His crowning realization was that the supreme Being, the All-merciful God, can be realized by following all religions of the world. He said, "As many religions, as many paths." In the Rig-Veda, it is said: "The supreme Being is one: He is called by different names." Ramakrishna proved this ancient truth in our age by going through a period of twelve years of strenuous spiritual practices.

P. C. Mazumdar, a close associate of Keshab Chandra Sen, leader of the Brahma Samaj, writes about Ramakrishna in a reminiscent mood: "My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere which that wonderful man diffuses around him wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos which he pours into it whenever he meets me. Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Müller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines."

Narendra (pre-monastic name of Swami Vivekananda) became a formidable rationalist. A relative of Narendra, who was already a disciple of Ramakrishna, brought him to Dakshineswar. The magical touch of Ramakrishna started the process of transformation, which made this rationalist a mystic and a saint. Narendra was a talented singer and raised very easily his master's mind to the plane of super-consciousness. The period of discipleship was for five years, and for Narendra those were the days of ecstasy, ineffable joy, and peace that passeth all understanding. It was Ramakrishna who unsealed the vision and the divine faculty with which God had blessed Narendra in order to make him a worthy instrument for preaching a new gospel: the divinity of man and the harmony of religions.

After the ascension of Ramakrishna in 1886, Swami Vivekananda and his brother-disciples found a dilapidated house only two miles from Dakshineswar and began to live a life of renunciation, austerities, and meditation. He then left this monastery and went to the Himalayas; there, for a period, he lived the life of a begging friar. He himself describes his life of tremendous austerities of those days in the following words:

"Friendless, clad in rags, with no possessions,

Feeding from door to door on what chance would bring."

It was the pious wish of Alfred Tennyson to have a Parliament of Man and a Federation of the World. This wish was partially realized on this (American) side of the Atlantic. The World Parliament of Religions, which was held in Chicago in 1893, was a unique event in the religious history of mankind. For the first time in history, representatives of all religions met on the same platform at the Parliament of Religions. While living the life of a wandering monk in India, Swami Vivekananda had heard about this Parliament of Religions. He arrived in Chicago without credentials. It was the hidden hand of divine providence that made it possible for Swami Vivekananda to find a place in the Parliament.

William Ernest Hocking, Professor Emeritus of Harvard University, wrote about his impressions of Swami Vivekananda recently in the publication *Vedanta and the West*: "This was in some measure the story of my first encounter with Swami Vivekananda, though I was only one of an immense audience. In connection with the World's Fair in Chicago during the summer of 1893, there was held a Parliament of Religions. I was a casual visitor at the Fair, just turning 20, interested in a dozen exhibits on the Midway I had been reading Herbert Spencer, all I could get of his works. Spencer's *First Principles* had affected an inner revolution in my way of thinking. I was convinced by him: by his arguments for evolution and for a definite rejection of the pretence of belief about things that cannot be known: this new vista was an intellectual victory.... I would go for an hour and listen. I did not know the programme. It happened to be Vivekananda's period. The speaker came forward with a calm authority, but also with a fraternal at-home-ness: "Sisters and Brothers of America...". In an instant the immense audience was responding with a thunderous physical wave of greeting and recognition of the accent of inner assurance. He spoke not as arguing from a tradition, or from a book, but as from an experience and certitude of his own I can still hear the ring of his voice He was well aware of the books, but he was more immediately aware of his own experience and his own status in the world; and what he said would have to be taken into account in any final worldview. I began to realize that Spencer could not be allowed the last word. And furthermore, that this religious experience of mine, which Spencer would dismiss as a psychological flurry, was very akin to the grounds of Vivekananda's own certitude."

Swami Vivekananda sounded the clarion call of the harmony of religions at the final session of the Parliament: "If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive

possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of his resistance:

Help and not Fight;

Assimilation and not Destruction;

Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."

Since Swami Vivekananda gave this message at the Parliament of Religions, two world wars and the advancement of technology have created a new world situation. For centuries, the religions of the world had separate spheres of influence. Today, the religions of the world confront each other in the halls of the United Nations and in thousands of college campuses. To a thinker, a seeker of truth, this is a puzzling problem: Can salvation be attained by following the tenets of only one particular religion? Is the revelation of God to be found only in the scriptures of one particular religion? Arnold Toynbee will emphatically say, "No". This great historian has been telling the adherents of the great religions to cultivate an attitude of tolerance. Now, let us hear what Swami Vivekananda said more than sixty years ago: "I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all: I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law; I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of everyone."

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Inner Light

Swami Shraddhananda

What is the function of light? To reveal objects covered by darkness, and to illumine areas that are hidden. When we bring light into a dark room, we at once see everything in the room.

We often metaphorically assign light's function to mental and moral levels. We speak, for example, of the light of conscience. When the mind is troubled and cannot decide what is right or wrong, we say that a kind of darkness has blocked the mind. We need an inner light to show us the way. We call it conscience. Like light, it dispels the shadows of confusion and promotes clear action. Similarly, we could say that love is a light. When a person is lonely and has no one to care for them, life is really dark. But if someone appears who can understand and care for this person, the darkness disappears. Having new hope and joy, the world at once becomes meaningful with the light of love.

We could also speak of the light of compassion, the light of truth, the light of peace, and the light of knowledge. In each case a particular difficulty that can be compared to darkness is lifted and a positive experience of hope, joy, and fulfilment comes into being. These inner lights are more powerful than physical light. My world may be dark with regard to material possessions, yet my life may be shining in joy and peace because of the moral and spiritual light that has been kindled within me.

The most important inner light is the light of Consciousness. The Upanishads call it our true Self. It is the central light in the core of our being and it illumines all experience—including that of physical light. Even though we experience Consciousness all the time, it is very difficult to understand its real nature.

Consciousness is the true essence of all existence. It has neither beginning nor end. It is eternal, infinite, and ever shining. What we call physical light—the light of the sun or of the moon, lightning's light, the light of the stars—all these lights are "illuminated" (that is, these lights are known) by our inmost light—Consciousness.

Vedanta classifies normal experience into three levels of consciousness: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. When we are awake, consciousness is always associated with some object—a sight, a sound, a smell, a thought, or an emotion. Anything we know—externally or internally—first has to be experienced through consciousness. When we look into the mind, we see a ceaseless stream of consciousness or "experience" in continual motion. We sometimes refer to it as objective consciousness since it is related to objects.

When we dream a similar thing happens, but in a different way: when we dream, there are links of knowledge and experience just as in the waking state, but when we come back to the waking state, we see that those experiences were not real. The most absurd things happened which we somehow accepted in dreams as real. But so long as the dream lasted, it seemed as true as the waking state.

Who is the dreamer? It cannot be the waking mind. How can the rational, waking mind, which knows the pros and cons of everything, be fooled by the incoherent occurrences of the dream state? It seems that when we go into the dream state, another mind is functioning, and that dream-mind is also rational—on the dream level. The dream-mind is a great creator and can add the appearance of reality to ideas. The ideas that emerge from the dream-mind are objective realities just as in the waking state.

In deep sleep, there is also the light of Consciousness. Deep sleep is an experience of peace and tranquillity. We do not have objective experiences in sleep as we have in the waking or dream states. We not only forget our bodies when we dream, we also forget our worries, anxieties, duties, and responsibilities. This periodic forgetfulness of the waking identity is extremely necessary, not only for our bodies but for our minds as well. The mind's incessant movement—as we experience it in the waking and dream states—is a tiresome burden. We need relief from it. Sleep gives us relief; it is a pause from "knowing".

In sleep, we completely forget everything. We are not conscious of the body, mind, ego, or of the past or the future or anything else. When we return to the waking state, we say to ourselves, "Oh, what a wonderful sleep I had! I wish I could have slept two hours longer!"

We do not scrutinize and analyse our sleep experiences very deeply. In a naive way, we say, "Oh, my sleep was so peaceful. I was so relaxed." We do not ask: "What was this 'I'? Was this the waking 'I'?" The waking "I" always needs an objective experience: sight, sound, smell, and so on. It is intensely busy. The dreaming "I" also needs either the "objects" of memories from waking, or those of its own creation. In deep sleep, there is neither the waking "I" nor the dreaming "I". It is another phase of the personality. Recalling the sleep experience, we know that we did not vanish during that interval. In this phase of consciousness, we had no objective knowledge as we do in the waking or dream states; there was an implicit awareness of self-existence and peace without the mediation of what we usually call the mind.

Vedanta advises spiritual seekers to coordinate and analyse these three experiences of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, and from this, find out their real identity. A close examination of the three states gives us the insight that in the human personality there

must be a common element in the waking, dreaming, and deep-sleep states.

This common element is the true perceiver of the experiences in these three states. In dream, a person does not remember the waking self; in deep sleep, both the waking and dream selves are obliterated. Yet we nevertheless feel an inexplicable continuity of identity throughout the three states.

This perceiver, the witness of the three states, is the inmost Light in us—the Light of eternal Consciousness. Vedanta scriptures repeatedly describe the glory of this Light, which is our true Self. The consciousness that we experience in our waking and dream states, and even that which underlies our deep sleep, is a distorted, broken consciousness. Our true Self is pure Consciousness—Consciousness without an objective content. It is not bound by time or space or natural laws. It is the most fundamental Reality in this world, or any other.

The sixth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita prescribes a basic way to find this inner Light. Through the practice of concentration, we have to withdraw the mind from distracting thoughts and direct it to the Atman—the shining Self within us.

A little faith is necessary, because in the beginning we have no idea how to reach this inner Light. But if we have patience, perseverance, and devotion to the ideal, the mind develops inwardness and transparency and slowly becomes able to touch the spiritual Reality within.

Self-knowledge can also be attained by reflective reasoning, or *vichara*. The Kena Upanishad begins with this question: "Who is it that enables the mind to think, the prana to function, the ears to hear, the eyes to see?" The answer is found by discriminating between the "seer" and the "seen"—the Changeless and the changing. The senses and the mind are in a constant state of motion,

but the Self is the steady witness. Brain activity is possible only because of Consciousness, not vice versa. Consciousness is knowledge without any objective content. We are finally forced to see that all objective knowledge has its source in the Self—the inmost light of Consciousness.

In all periods of India's spiritual history there have been men and women who have discovered the truth of the Self. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, we read the experience of the sage Vamadeva: "It was I who have become the sun and Manu." (Manu is the progenitor of humanity as well as the ancient lawgiver; his code of conduct is the basis of Hindu social and religious law.) This "I" is not the waking "I" or the dreaming "I", but the true Self—the infinite Reality, eternal Consciousness, Existence, and Knowledge. Another sage proclaims in the Svetasvatara Upanishad: "Hear, O ye children of immortality, even gods and angels, I have discovered my true Self, that ancient, infinite Being within my heart, that Light of all lights beyond all darkness. By finding Him, one can conquer death. There is no other way."

Immortality is not a theological concept. It is not a state that we attain after death. It is a truth we can know here in this very life. We have to find for ourselves that we are really timeless and deathless. As long as the mind remains in *maya*, ignorance, we seem to be in a world of phenomena with beginnings and endings. But when we have discovered the changeless Truth, death loses its terror. The eternal light of Consciousness is indeed immortality. Whatever is, is in the Self; the Self is the totality of existence. The Taittiriya Upanishad says: "When a person finds existence and unity in the Self ... then only is fear transcended. So long as there is the least idea of Separation from Him, there is fear."

God is often described as light; He is the light of Consciousness. Who but a God of light could have created this universe of light?

All created things are objects of knowledge; they shine in Consciousness. Time, space, matter, energy, and life are, according to Vedanta, forms of the fundamental Reality that is Consciousness.

When we think of ourselves as material bodies, we are really Small. We are constantly afraid of the impact of matter and energy. Our bodies are just little clods of earth. How insignificant they are compared to the vast outer universe! Similarly, when we look upon ourselves as psychological entities, we are obsessed by a sense of littleness and fear. The individual mind has very little capacity of understanding. It is always disturbed by tensions and passions. Naturally we feel insignificant and frustrated—how little we know compared to the vast accumulation of human knowledge! But when we see our true Self as all-embracing, pure Consciousness, the Light of all lights, our identity will then not limit itself to the body or the mind; we will become limitless. The world will not terrify us anymore. We will attain the source of all knowledge.

The function of light is to reveal: any Portion of knowledge is really a kind of light. The mind has innumerable dark chambers; those who have never studied biology have a region of darkness in the mind as far as biology is concerned. If they study that subject, the chamber will become more or less illumined. The knowledge of astronomy can similarly become another illumined chamber. All the knowledge we acquire is a sort of progressive, yet nonetheless partial, illumination of the mind.

But Self-knowledge is total illumination. As the Mundaka Upanishad declares, by knowing the Self nothing remains unknown to us. When we have reached the inmost Light, we shall know that there is no more darkness anywhere.

From “Seeing God Everywhere”, p.105-115, Vedanta Press, Hollywood

Polish the Reflector

Swami Yatiswarananda

If the reflector is clean, the light is reflected in all its splendour, and then we see the light. So, what we have got to do now is to go in for some good scrubbing in order to remove all the layers of dust we have allowed to accumulate. The sense of sin can be very good in the case of some temperaments, but only if it serves as a goal. But a far better means to get rid of all these encrustations of impurity is to think of our innate purity which is our first nature. We are all our own ancestors, seen from the spiritual standpoint, and only reap what we ourselves have sown.

Reincarnation is not the most vital point. We have to try to get full illumination in this very life. So, reincarnation should never be stressed very much. If our present life is the result of our own past, then we can change our future. Karma is never identical with fate. The law of karma is the law of self-effort, intelligent, conscious self-effort, never a teaching of fatalism and lethargy.

Nobody is forced to take to spiritual life and to follow the path, but there are some funny people who are made that way. They cannot remain satisfied with leading the worldly life, and yearn for something higher, for greater freedom. There will always be many who fall down on the way. What to do? You just let them lie where they are and pass on. The one goal must always be kept sight of, without either looking to the left or looking to the right, without even caring for the results and the fruits. There must be no sickly sentimentalism; one day, everyone has to follow the path, and if a person falls down, let him fall. Your duty is to pass on and reach the goal. If somebody just accompanies you a bit of the way out of so-called love, this becomes very dangerous. Such people

only want to coil their so-called love around you like an octopus. Rather let their heart break before allowing them to do this. All such love is mere ego written with capital letters and nothing but that. It is the satisfaction of our own emotions and impulses, but never love in the true sense of the term. Such people only want to drag you down, entangle you in their meshes and possess you as their very own property.

There are people who are somewhat serious-minded from very childhood. They have never adapted themselves to the ideas of the worldly-minded, and for them there are but few dangers and difficulties. Never mind what people may be saying about heartlessness and so on if they just mean sentimentalism and emotionalism by heart and love. One must learn to be very stiff even if the heart breaks. True love never wants to coil itself around anyone and stifle him, and all other love is attachment and has to be got rid of. You must learn to be very, very stiff and uncompromising in this. Do not let yourself be caught in the meshes of such sentimental possessive love. 'Ah, we were meant for each other. We have been waiting for each other.' All sentimental nonsense and foolishness!

All the Great Ones, all these Incarnations have come and taught mankind the same eternal truths again and again, but the world just goes merrily its own way, and those are really very clever who are able to get out of its meshes. Empty emotionalism and sentimentality are one of the worst enemies in the spiritual path. If you only follow the path half-way without reaching its end, there will be no end of misery and trouble. There are the centripetal and the centrifugal forces acting on us. We are 'safe' if we fly off at a tangent, and leave the spiritual struggle altogether, and safe at the axis, but nowhere else can we find any safety.

The pure heart becomes the reflector of the truth. So does the purified, thoughtful mind. In the highest realization both are transcended; heart and mind cease to be. Awakened definite thinking becomes more and more alive to the ideals of higher life. The purer the mind, the better thinking it does, the better does it reflect. Most people just want to follow the beaten track, and so very naturally there comes a parting of the way between those who want to follow the higher life and attain to true love, and those who just go in for 'dolls and toys'.

How can you ever follow the beaten track once you have become awakened? It is in such moments, the moments of your first awakening, that you are put to the test, because in such moments there comes this natural parting of the ways. Then you must be able to see the fight through or give up the idea of spiritual life. But first you must get a good whipping to awaken your enthusiasm and whoever is not prepared to get his whipping and stand it, must be dropped as chaff.

We must be put to the test again and again, and we must be able to develop a spirit of determination that knows no fear and is undaunted. And if we get a good thrashing to whip up our enthusiasm, as I said, we must be prepared to stand it and see the game through.

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The Path of Spiritual Experience

Swami Ritajananda

Having spent three decades in the company of the children of Shri Ramakrishna, I consider it a privilege and a joy to have been associated with one of the chief religious organizations in the world. Truly, we cannot overlook the importance of religion among the factors which contribute efficiently to the building of a peaceful world. On the other hand, some people believe that religion is an instrument of confusion, which tends to divide peoples, to foment quarrels and so to contribute to bloodshed. This is the opposite of the spiritual influence of such great souls as the Buddha and Jesus Christ, who dedicated their lives to preaching peace to mankind. The message of these great beings did not disappear with them; it is still living and encourages all who work for establishing peace on earth. The message Shri Ramakrishna has brought to the world is likewise beneficent: that of the universality of religions. Without presenting any dogma to accept or reject, it is a simple concept, direct, full of force, which affects our lives and those of all around us. This was demonstrated in a striking way by a question put by Naren, who was a student at the time, and who asked Shri Ramakrishna, a priest of the temple, "Have you seen God?" Naren had put this question to many holy men, but none had given him a satisfying reply. Without hesitating, Shri Ramakrishna replied: "Not only have I seen Him, but I saw Him more clearly and vividly than I see you." That sentence of Shri Ramakrishna to his future disciple, Swami Vivekananda, expressed all that the Master had to say to the world as regards its religious faith. According to Ramakrishna's teaching, religion is a personal experience. God must be known, not accepted as an intellectual belief. We often

hear it said, "Seeing is believing": why should this not be true with respect to God?

Yet for most people this is an astounding idea. Probably young Narendra wondered what Shri Ramakrishna meant, and promised himself to find out if this man was mad, or if he held the secret he himself was searching. Like all twentieth-century men, full of curiosity and anxious to know, Naren kept on coming to the Master for verification of that affirmation: "I have seen God more really than I see you."

Many people think that seeing, hearing, feeling and touching things nearby are the proof of reality. If anyone speaks of something located beyond sensory perception, there is a temptation to shrug the shoulders and to wonder what is being talked about. Certain philosophical systems have been built upon belief in knowledge by sensory perception alone as the only knowledge worthy of faith: beyond that there is nothing. Obviously we come up against this strong objection: "God is not seen: consequently we cannot believe in Him." There is nothing new about this kind of doubt.

We have seen that to see a thing proves its reality. Then are we to judge the experience of love, for example, as not being real? Certainly, we do not see love. It is not a sensory perception. How narrow our existence would be if we were to consider sense-objects alone as real. And although the senses give us an impression of living reality, are we sure that we see the same object in just the same way? Are we sure we are seeing what is real?

Certain objects are illusory. We continue to see them, even while recognizing them as illusory, like the actions thrown onto a cinema screen. While viewing such scenes our senses accept them as reality. So, there can be an exception. What credibility is there, then, in sense perception? This cannot be the governing criterion for reality.

Sense experience gives us one kind of knowledge, but there are other kinds as well.

Let us consider the experience of the appreciation of worth, which is very real for us. A fine table attracts our attention: a song beautifully rendered fills us with enchantment. It is an experience that satisfies us aesthetically and is common to most of us. The appreciation therein is not the product of our senses; is it less real thereby?

Today, more than ever, it is impossible to ignore the numerous accounts of extra-sensory experience, and much research has been done in this field. Old superstitions have disappeared. Scientific methods have been used to evaluate the large number of reported cases, among those which indicate the various degrees of the possibility of having a knowledge not dependent at all on customary and sensorially valid channels. Obviously, there are charlatans. My only purpose is to assert that today, after years of intensive investigation, the value of these experiences is recognized.

From of old, all the religions have been associated with the mystical experiences of great prophets, who thereupon gave out the ideas they had received by revelation. The source of that revelation was beyond this world; in other words, it was considered as philosophy, not as religion.

In the Bible, we read that God spoke to Moses through a burning bush and gave him the Ten Commandments. The Bible speaks of other revelations received directly from God which showed perfect understanding. Shri Ramakrishna brought to the world that same ancient thought. His message is the ideal of knowledge of God, received through spiritual experience, personal and direct. This is the heart of the question.

The oldest sacred scriptures of India are the Vedas. We find in them a very beautiful chant which we recite every day in our

meditation prayers. This chant describes the Supreme Person, who, in sacrificing Himself, creates this universe. The anonymous Vedic Sage says: "I have known that Ancient One who dwells beyond the darkness. He is of the colour of the sun. In knowing Him one attains immortality." Further on, the Sage repeats: "I know Him." He explains the two ways of that knowing by saying simply: He is beyond darkness and is radiant like the sun.

In the Upanishads, we read again and again: "Seek the Real, the Brahman, who dwells within you." Later, when Hinduism accepted the approach of the Personal God, devotees wanted to have the vision of the Divine Being: they sought his presence; they wished to see him. The devotional literature of India gives us the prayers of thousands of those who asked this blessing. That hoary tradition has been confirmed in recent times by and in the vision of Shri Ramakrishna. But people ask, how are we to know if such visions are real or imaginary?

Let us look at this objection. Across the ages we find that many in different countries, belonging to different religious traditions and cultures, have described similar experiences. In the light of modern knowledge about extra-sensory perception and considering the universality of these experiences of the Divine, should we not suspect that these are real, but that they demand a new dimension of our understanding?

Another problem spreads confusion. When someone says, "I saw Christ" and another, "I saw Krishna... the Divine Mother... Shiva", are these visions of different beings or are they different aspects of the same Divine Being?

Is it said that God can be seen with our ordinary eyes? The Katha Upanishad teaches that God is not seen with these eyes, and that only the pure-minded can see him. To many persons all this appears strange and disquieting. Something has to happen in our

mental make-up to render these perceptions acceptable to us. We should remember that we move in two worlds, that of the senses and that of the mind. And we have to learn to go beyond the mental world, to go higher. A new eye has to open, an eye which possesses a new kind of vision. This depends on the development in us of another personality together with its power to go beyond physical limitations. Here we act in a new dimension in which physical conditions are transcended.

What we know of the spiritual world cannot be reduced to the dimensions of the physical. A sphere cannot be drawn or depicted in three dimensions on a piece of paper. Without developing the capacity to see the third dimension, one cannot see the sphere. This idea has been expressed and repeated again and again. For knowledge beyond our customary capacity, an appropriate insight and familiarity in a new dimension must be developed.

Plato has described people who lived in caves and watched the shadows projected on the walls by the light outside, believing them real. A few of them went out of the cave, saw the sun and understood that their vision had been erroneous. So do we understand that it is the realized soul who is capable of having a correct picture of things. This sort of assertion has the knack of making people angry: "Must we suppose that millions of people are wrong?" one asks, "Is it only a very few persons who are capable of comprehending things as they are?"

A realized man takes no heed of what the world thinks. He is often regarded as a madman by persons whose conceptions of life do not jibe with his. Such a man sees things in a different dimension; he finds it difficult to describe his condition in human language. When we study mathematics, we learn that the coordinates of a point are determined by reference to its origin; if the origin is shifted, the figure changes. Most of us have our

individuality as the centre of our life: I am Mr. So-and-so with set ideas and perceptions, and thus I see the world. But the man who has had a spiritual experience has altered his vision, and consequently his whole thought is different. All his relationships change.

So, we are faced with this question: "How is all this possible?" Spiritual experience occurs under special conditions and only in deep meditation. As we have said, the Supreme Being dwells within us. The Upanishads, the sacred Hindu scriptures, point out that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us. This is well known in the course of personal realization. After her spiritual experience, St. Theresa of Avila made this interesting pronouncement: "Yes, I saw God. You may ask me how I recognized Him? No, I had not seen Him before. I should not be able to say, 'I recognized God'. I know Him only through books. But I can tell you this: there is no doubt, whatsoever: I am convinced of definitely having seen God. He has given me profound conviction in the depth of my soul. He is real."

This is one of the important aspects of spiritual experience. The accompanying conviction is, in the depth of its own nature, overwhelming. One enters into contact with the Supreme Being.

Many things have been said about samadhi, and it is easy to talk. Some say that it can be had in meditation. If it is so easy as that, why should one follow the path of austerities? Why not find an easier way?

One day at our centre in Gretz, a lady said to me, "I want a teacher who will give me some spiritual experiences." I asked her, "Have you planned to do something in order to get such an experience?" "Oh no," she replied, "The Teacher will give it to me and then I shall do something."

Reading the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, we see that samadhi formed a natural part of his life. Many readers have said to

themselves: why only once in our lifetime should that be possible for us? The temple proprietor, Mathur Babu, and Hriday, Shri Ramakrishna's nephew, repeatedly demanded that the Master give them spiritual experience. Shri Ramakrishna advised them to be patient. "Wait; Mother will give it to you one day." Hriday was not content to wait. Once he went into the presence of Shri Ramakrishna, who was in meditation in the temple. Then he came out again like a maniac, crying uncontrollably without rhyme or reason. He shouted, "Please, take this away from me! I don't want it!" Mathur Babu had a similar experience. He was a man engaged in complex affairs, and had financial responsibilities, both of the family and otherwise. But he became totally indifferent to his work, his food and everything. Alarmed, his family said: "What has happened to Mathur Babu?" He went to Shri Ramakrishna himself and told him, "Let me become the old Mathur Babu once more. I don't want any more of your spiritual experience. You keep it for yourself." The common herd has not the self-mastery of a Shri Ramakrishna who could invent new ways of experiencing samadhi – while remaining normal, telling jokes, eating food, while meeting and mixing with people at all times in their life.

And so, we understand that an unlimited consciousness is not tolerated by a limited body. The customary centre of consciousness itself becomes shifted. Swami Vivekananda once had this experience. He became one with the Universal Consciousness; he could not tell the difference between himself and all that surrounded him. Everything appeared to him to be Brahman. His mother asked in surprise, "What has happened to my Naren?"

In the Taittiriya Upanishad, the pupil says, after his experience, "I am the food. I am the food-eater. I am the digestion; I am the Truth."

All that we have been saying are discrete thoughts of ours, real and separate. In the realm of spiritual experience all distinctions are effaced. There is no language adequate to describe how this can be and to explain the nature of such experience. Manifestations—secondary reality— become the sole means of communication.

It is necessary to give some explanation of the means of entering this new world. For some unusual persons, renouncing the world of the senses is an easy problem; they are able to dive deep into themselves and come in contact with the highest truth. But for most people this is not so easy; they have to follow certain preliminary disciplines. So long as you are attached to the things of the world, you are impotent and helpless to free yourself from it in order to go beyond. Then you need help and must find someone who can direct you and help you to attain the goal. Christ said to those who wished to be his disciples: "Sell all you have: come and follow me." Only thus will we be prepared to follow in the steps of him who knows the path and be capable of understanding the spiritual ideas expressed so simply in these words of Jesus Christ. All this is spiritually important. It is handed down in the few words we are able to grasp, when we have been helped to prepare ourselves for them.

The spiritual directors always tell us we must be detached. Only a mind which renounces everything worldly is capable of intense concentration, and that concentration is essential for going beyond the limits of the body. The Upanishads advise us to meditate on the symbol OM. But our mind is attached to so many worldly things that we begin to think about what is happening in our house, what the children are doing and so on. A deep and intense concentration at the time of meditation gives the meditator the power to let go of everything. Then we understand the counsel of

Christ, a Divine Incarnation: "Go, sell all you have; set your heart on Me, think of Me, meditate on Me."

Take the case of an aeroplane: when it is grounded it cannot go up to the heights. To leave this relative world, it must be set free. Then it goes to a higher realm where it sees everything from a new angle: it can come down again, when it likes; it has gone into space: it is free from any attachment which would bog it down.

Naturally, we do not care to have hallucinatory visions: we are not interested in opening new doors by injecting drugs or taking narcotics. That is nothing akin to spiritual experience and has nothing to do with spiritual life. If you are after a world full of marvels, produced by an altered blood-chemistry, you do not need the help of spiritual masters. The purpose of spiritual masters is to lead you along the road of your own development in such a manner that you can go to the source from which we come. That is spiritual experience. That connection with your inner being, that insight which transcends physical limitations, that breaking of the shackles of individuality—that is the real accomplishment. This is very important. The twentieth century is defined in utilitarian terms; what good does spiritual experience do us?

What is the value of the saints? They need not be healers. Their mere presence gives us something the world cannot give us. They present us with new horizons, new experiments, new verifications of Truth. Our mind may be surprised, incapable of comprehending the words of great souls, but it is alerted and made curious about, or even intuitively convinced of, the truth expressed. By such qualities is certified the worth of a saint.

Shri Ramakrishna, when speaking to his disciples, often impressed them with such words as these: "My boys, God can be seen. It is true. God can be seen—not with the physical eyes, not with the fleshly eyes, but with the spiritual eyes. A spiritual body

must be created. When that is developed you will see Him." And he would continue: "When the experience of God comes, it is like the sunrise: it is the dawn. Something happens before the knowledge of God: it is transformation in people's nature. They become egoless, humble, full of love."

So, Shri Ramakrishna gives us in strong terms the proof that spiritual experience is neither occult, nor physical, but something which can be developed in everyone, bringing in him a complete transformation, whatever may be his outlook on everything in this world. In this manner only can one arrive at the source of the creation.

Many people do not understand the thinking behind the Hindu religion, for they say, "Look at the living conditions of these people." Some think it is not natural to accept all that suffering and misery. Remember the illustration of the aeroplane. From the heights, the world is seen in a different perspective. There we have a complete panorama. So it is for the men of realization. The perfect universe is understood, is seen in true perspective. All is One: the differences are obliterated. When one stands back to view a painting as a whole, the coarse details of the grain are not visible; on the other hand, if one concentrates on one little detail, the painting as a whole loses its meaning. To give another example: while at a concert, if you fix your attention on a single instrument, you lose the wonderful harmony of the ensemble, the mingled notes of the orchestra. For a man who has had spiritual experience, the world is a painting in its totality. There is no real difference between things—whatever they may be—nothing is separate or outside. He and all the rest are One with their common source. Everything fits. The mind is not upset by that extra-sensorial sphere of consciousness which is natural to the totality. Consequently, the liberated man is defined as 'full of blessings' because he is incapable of discord. He has joy,

not in the usual sense of the word, but as the Lord Jesus Christ said, "The peace that passeth understanding." There is no lower or higher; all is indescribable harmony.

When this state is attained, the evolved nature of the man renders him more fit to serve the world, and he serves it better than any organization for the peace and welfare of mankind, because his reactions and insights are no longer like those of others. It is not easy to judge men and affairs, because our measuring scales are very small and we have to learn new values and see everything in a different light, playing upon the various things this game of life necessitates.

Spiritual experience carries out this great transformation. Visions of Christ or Krishna are no doubt valuable and interesting, but for the individual, so long as the interior transformation does not take place in him, he cannot reach the Source.

Realization is the knowledge of Brahman or Atman. That is our ideal. The questioning and scientific spirit of the modern world seems ideally adapted to the pursuit of this ancient Truth repeated down through the ages and expressed more recently by Shri Ramakrishna. We are growing more tolerant in the belief that the end of life is the same for all, and that the various faiths are diverse roads leading men toward this same goal. It is now certain that the man liberated from his old strictures and ancient prejudices devotes his life to the necessary preparedness, which will make him capable of plunging into himself, and discovering there his Source, knowing God and becoming one with the universal Whole.

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What the World Makes of Man and Men

Dr.Vayu Naidu

As a boy, at Kamarpukur, I loved Ram Mallick dearly. But afterwards, when he came here, I couldn't touch him. Ram Mallick and I were great friends during our boyhood. We were together day and night; we slept together. At that time, I was sixteen or seventeen years old. People used to say, "if one of them were a woman they would marry each other." Both of us used to play at his house. I remember those days very well. His relatives used to come riding in palanquins. Now he has a shop at Chanak. I sent for him many a time; he came here the other day and spent two days. Ram said he had no children; he brought up his nephew, but the boy died. He told me this with a sigh; his eyes were filled with tears; he was grief stricken for his nephew. He said further that since they had no children of their own, all his wife's affection had been turned to the nephew. She was completely overwhelmed with grief. Ram said to her: "You are crazy. What will you gain by grieving? Do you want to go to Benares?". You see, he called his wife crazy. Grief for the boy totally 'diluted' him. I found he had no stuff within him. I could not touch him.

The Parables of Sri Ramakrishna that have been chronicled continue to be relics in the original and in translation. They give the breadth and depth and scale of meaning of his experiences. The ocean of knowledge that is transmitted through the parables have the variety of life with an all-pervading luminosity that connects the evolution of a dancing particle of dust to emerge as a volcano; from embers to germinate into seed life.

The content of the Parables in Sri Ramakrishna's astute sensitivity to context takes different forms to get the purport of the infinite in the daily across to all sections of people he grew up with,

met, and who sought him out. Some of the Parables we have been reading have recalled myths, mythologies, folk tales, and the one cited here is an incident from his life.

From the entire incident recorded, there are specific sentences and words through which he illustrates the obstacles of the seeker, and indeed how he could see through people and how they evolved spiritually through life. Here are the key phrases the article pays attention to: (i) Ram brought up his nephew, but the boy died. He told me this with a sigh; (ii) since they had no children of their own, all his wife's affection had been turned to the nephew. (iii) "You are crazy. (iv) Grief for the boy totally 'diluted' him. I found he had no stuff within him. I could not touch him.

So here we have it. Sri Ramakrishna knew Ram Mallick from childhood into adolescence. The clearheartedness of his friend is a quality that was loved. No doubt their years of growing together were also during the time of Sri Ramakrishna's visions and spiritual experiences while still at Kamarpukur; the purity of Ram was in that realm.

Sri Ramakrishna relates gently the gradual call of the world and making a living that drove Ram Mallick on to open a shop at Chanak; it is the way we all move away from the focus on spiritual practice in the name of making a living, forgetting to reflect how we are consumed by it.

The next observation is that in spite of Sri Ramakrishna calling Ram to visit – almost like putting out a search light for the ones lost in the desert storm to return to their origins – Ram is preoccupied with the prospect of not having children. The acute citing of the 'sigh' is crucial for our understanding. It is each seeker's lost understanding of the awareness of connection that is more meaningful; Brahman/Divine Mother – whatever expression we use, That is ever here and there. The sorrow that is expressed

creates another choice of bondage – bringing up his nephew, and that is further compounded by the death of the boy, and the grief of this chain of accumulated cravings is unbearable to him. We see this in our own lives with our ceaseless preoccupations, or choices – Shreya or Preya - choosing between the good or the pleasant.

Sri Ramakrishna continues to follow through with the narration of the chain reaction, by relating the consequences it has on the wife of Ram, ‘She was completely overwhelmed with grief’; the way we see how the consequences of our actions have on our immediate environment – this could be work, family, community, nation, worldwide.

The next few observations of Sri Ramakrishna point out to us how the reaction of the senses can take over us – like grief. Grief is a valid emotion and the circumstance of the death in this incident too have called upon that emotion, and all sentient beings feel this primeval loss - animals and plants included. This incident is also a cautionary tale – about not being so consumed by any emotion. In the case of the spiritual seeker too, it creates a loss of mental balance. Sri Ramakrishna is calling attention to renouncing the pull of an emotion that can drag one away from empathy. Ram had so lost his own balance that he was accusing his wife of being crazy of ‘madness’. Grief for the dead nephew, possibly the loss of his future, created Ram’s inability to exercise empathy for his living wife.

Sri Ramakrishna proceeds to use the word ‘diluted’ which on first reading, as in translation, seems paradoxical. At first, we may think, ‘Surely, dilution means a softening by being watered down?’ But dilution here is a mitigation of vital forces. This sets into motion a binding to a wheel of action and reaction; not like the camel who eats the thorny cactus in spite of bleeding to satisfy its hunger and thirst. The ‘stuff’ within Ram had watered down by a precipitous

choice of making the outer world, Preya have more meaning than Shreya, of sound judgment.

Sri Ramakrishna's touch transformed the universe of those who sought out the Truth; he was willing to teach but as ever he discerned between the earnest seeker and disciple. 'I couldn't touch him', Sri Ramakrishna says candidly. This parable is wonderful evidence of the empathy that Sri Ramakrishna shows to all the people in the incident, as well as the listener. Ram was sent for, as Sri Ramakrishna had known his friend had started life as someone who was pure. The world had transformed his needs to a greater proportion than any inner call. The nephew's death, the wife's sorrow are all mentioned in Sri Ramakrishna's vast understanding of human suffering. But Ram being so locked in his grief which possibly combined pride that he could not let go, as he wanted to also wallow in it.

Set in a local moment, Sri Ramakrishna illustrates how like the razor's edge this path of the spiritual seeker is and many are the tests that must be undergone to awaken the 'stuff' within.

This parable as an incident is not being cited in isolation. It is for all in this time of Corona who have had losses of many kinds imposed on us – by deaths of loved ones, people whom we have only heard of, the statistics of those who have died. Much fear and anxiety is also propelled in such circumstances. In a time when we have to follow restrictions of movement, it has also offered us time to withdraw and consider our thoughts and actions, where ever circumstances allow. This Parable of Sri Ramakrishna holds up the 'stuff' we are all made up of. He is also cautioning us about how we lose ourselves by confining ourselves to grief, while the capability of empathy will lift us to a connection with what Is the consciousness of the Infinite, right here, right now.

you see what a great change has come over him?" And Hriday burst into loud laughter.

The possession of money makes such a difference in a man!

The power of the Mantra is tremendous. As a living seed holds the potential of the tree and is able to yield fruits and flowers in season, so the mantra has the power to bring spiritual progress and ultimately liberation from the world of suffering and death. The scriptures say that when the spiritual power is awakened, the mantra is seen in golden letters and sometimes is heard as clearly as the human voice. All these things are matters of experience. They cannot be known through intellectual understanding or mere discussion. One has to practice spiritual discipline for many years. In time, everything will be revealed from within oneself. The aspirant realizes God in and through the mantra which appears as the visible form of the Infinite Being, which is formless and nameless.

- Swami Saradananda

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To realize the spirit as spirit is practical religion. Everything else is good so far as it leads to this one grand idea. That realization is to be attained by renunciation, by meditation—renunciation of all the senses, cutting the knots, the chains that bind us down to matter...Try a little harder, and meditation comes. You do not feel the body or anything else. When you come out of it after the hour, you have had the most beautiful rest you ever had in your life. That is the only way you ever give rest to your system. Not even the deepest sleep will give you such a rest as that...Whose meditation is real and effective? Who can really surrender to the will of God? Only the person whose mind has been purified by selfless work...Work a little harder at meditation and it comes. You do not feel the body or anything else. When you come out of it after the hour, you have had the most beautiful rest you ever had in your life. That is the only way you ever give rest to your system.

- Swami Vivekananda

