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Prabuddha Bharata

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AUGUST 1986

CONTENTS

Integral Vision of Vedic Seers	325
About this Issue	326
Jnana-Marga: Its Meditation Techniques —(Editorial)	...	...	326
Living a Spiritual Life in Our World of Science —Swami Sastrananda	...	...	337
The Challenge of Vedanta to American Women—II —Ann Myren	...	...	344
The Ladder of Spiritual Ascent According to Jainism —Swami Brahmeshananda	...	...	350
Cultic Aspects of Bengal Vaishnavism —Prof. Ranjit Kumar Acharjee	...	...	358
Reviews and Notices	...	...	363
News and Reports	...	...	363
Notes and Comments	...	...	364



Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 91

AUGUST 1986

No. 8

Arise ! Awake ! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

'Truth is one: sages call It by various names'

कालादापः समभवन् कालाद् ब्रह्म तपो दिशः ।
कालेनोदेति सूर्यः काले नि विशते पुनः ॥

From Time came into being the waters, from Time the holy Word (Brahma), energy and space. By Time the sun rises ; into Time it returns.

Atharva Veda 19.54.1

कालो यज्ञं समैरयत् देवेभ्यो भागमक्षितम् ।
काले गन्धर्वाप्सरसः काले लोकाः प्रतिष्ठिताः ॥

Time created the Sacrifice¹ as an inexhaustible oblation to the gods. In Time live the celestial singers and nymphs. All beings and worlds depend on Time.

Atharva Veda 19.54.4

कालेऽयमङ्गिरा देवोऽथर्वा चाधि तिष्ठतः ।
इमं च लोकं परमं च लोकं
पुण्यांश्च लोकान् विधृतीश्च पुण्याः ॥

The sage Angiras and the divine Atharvan² meditate on Time. This world, the highest world and all the holy worlds and interspaces are controlled by Time. Having conquered all the worlds by Brahman, Time, the supreme God, moves on.

Atharva Veda 19.54.5

सर्वाल्लोकानभिजित्य ब्रह्मणा
कालः स ईयते परमो नु देवः ॥

*There are two famous hymns on Time (*kāla*) in the *Atharva Veda*. A few verses from the first hymn were given last month. Some verses from the second hymn are given here this month.

1. In the *Sambhitas* the ultimate Reality is regarded as a state of cosmic flux and the whole universe is believed to be going on as a great sacrifice. The Vedic fire ritual called *yajña* is a symbolic participation in the cosmic sacrifice.

2. Atharvan is the seer of the fourth Veda who taught it to the sage Angiras.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL discusses briefly some of the main techniques of meditation employed in Jñāna-mārga.

In LIVING A SPIRITUAL LIFE IN OUR WORLD OF SCIENCE Swami Sastranandaji points out that religious and scientific attitudes are complementary, and shows how such a holistic attitude can be maintained in different walks of life.

In the second and concluding part of THE CHALLENGE OF VEDANTA TO AMERICAN WOMEN Ann Myren discusses the implications of introducing Vedantic ideals for women, such as the primacy of motherhood, into American society. The author teaches social sciences at the College of Alameda, California.

THE LADDER OF PERFECTION ACCORDING TO JAINISM is a concise but precise and

authoritative exposition of the stages of spiritual progress in Jainism, and highlights the centrality of moral life in the Jain conception of spirituality. The author Swami Brahmeshananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order serving as a doctor at the general hospital of the Mission in Varanasi.

Prof. Ranjit Kumar Acharjee wrote a series of articles in the earlier issues of this journal on the founders of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism in which he expounded the main tenets of its philosophy. As a sequel, he now presents a brief account of the CULTIC ASPECTS OF BENGAL VAISHNAVISM. The author is head of the department of philosophy at Ramakrishna Mahavidyalaya, Kailashahar, North Tripura.

JNANA-MARGA : ITS MEDITATION TECHNIQUES

(EDITORIAL)

The pathless path

Anyone who tries to understand what the sādhana for non-dual experience is, is likely to be disappointed at the absence of details regarding the actual techniques in the books. It is obvious that neither Śaṅkara nor his followers intended Advaita to be a mere system of speculative philosophy ; yet, if you open any treatise on Advaita, you will find most of its pages devoted to discussions on maya, cosmology, refutation of the theories of other schools, and gloomy pictures of the phenomenal world. Occasionally one may come across some exultant statements about the author's experience of non-dual Reality,

but *how* he attained that experience he seldom explains. In his great commentaries Śaṅkara discusses with thoroughness dualistic meditations and rituals but has little to say about the exact practical method of getting non-dual experience. Swami Vivekananda too is more or less silent on this point in his famous lectures on Jñāna Yoga, although it is well known that Swamiji had the highest *nirvikalpa* experience on several occasions and has given expression to that experience in a few places especially in his 'Song on Samadhi'.

What is the cause of this paucity of details on Advaita sādhana ? It cannot be accidental. More probably, it must have

been caused by certain intrinsic features of the *sādhana* itself. The question naturally arises: Is there really such a thing as Advaita *sādhana*? Is the very word 'sādhana' admissible within the parameters of Advaita?

Etymologically, the word *sādhana* (or *sādhanam*) refers to an act by which an end (*sādhya*) is attained (by a striver, *sādhaka*). This would imply a three-fold division in Reality and movement in time and space, all of which Advaita regards as illusory. In non-dual experience there is no distinction between the seeker (*sādhaka*) and the end sought (*sādhya*). Therefore Advaita *sādhana*, if such a thing exists, must be devoid of the *sādhaka-sādhana-sādhya* trichotomy.

In the introductions to his commentaries on *Kena Upaniṣad* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and in various other contexts Śaṅkara has spoken of two different approaches to Reality. The first one involves the *sādhaka-sādhana-sādhya* (or *kāraṅka-kriyā-phala*) trichotomy; it includes ritualistic karma (the ultimate result of which is the attainment of the world of manes) and *upāsana* (the ultimate result of which is the attainment of the world of gods). The second approach is devoid of the trichotomous division and leads directly to the realization of the impersonal Absolute. This direct experience of Brahman is an ontological fact (*vastu tantra*) which is independent of human effort (*puruṣa tantra*).¹ For the realization of Brahman no effort is needed other than the removal of ignorance.² And this removal of

ignorance is not an act, a karma, but an ontological truth implied in the highest experience. Says Śaṅkara, 'For the acquisition of non-dual knowledge no effort is required; all that is needed is to stop superimposing the not-Self on the Self or stop identifying the Self with the not-Self.'³

No doubt, non-dual realization is also a form of cognition. But then, there is a basic difference between advaitic experience and the experience produced by dualistic meditation (*upāsana*). Śaṅkara says: 'Non-dualistic experience demolishes the cognition of such differences as the agent, instrument, action and results, which are superimposed upon the actionless Self... whereas in the experience produced by meditation these differences persist.'⁴

From the foregoing discussion it is obvious that Śaṅkara's main purpose was to establish a direct path of realization entirely different from the paths of *upāsana* (meditation) and ritualistic worship which are time-bound, goal-oriented efforts. This new path in which there is no distinction between the end and the means is indeed a 'pathless path'. It is this 'pathless path' that Śaṅkara has termed *jñāna*. What he meant by it is probably something like the 'sudden enlightenment' described in books

3. तस्मात् अविद्याध्यारोपितनिराकरणमात्रं ब्रह्मणि कर्तव्यं न तु ब्रह्मविज्ञाने यत्नः अत्यन्तप्रसिद्धत्वात् । . . . तस्माज्ज्ञाने यत्नो न कर्तव्यः, किन्तु अनात्मनि आत्म-बुद्धिनिवृत्तौ एव ।

Śaṅkara, Commentary on the *Gītā* 18.50

4. यथा अद्वैतज्ञानं मनोवृत्तिमात्रं तथा अन्यान्य-प्युपासनानि मनोवृत्तिरूपाणीत्यस्ति हि सामान्यम् । कस्तर्हि अद्वैतज्ञानस्योपासनानां च विशेषः ? उच्यते-स्वाभाविकस्यात्मनि अविक्रिये अध्यारोपितस्य कर्त्रादि-कारकक्रियाफलभेदविज्ञानस्य निवर्तकम् अद्वैतज्ञानम् ।

Śaṅkara, Commentary on *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Introduction

1. अपुरुषतन्त्रत्वाद् ब्रह्मविज्ञानस्य ।

Śaṅkara, Commentary on *Kena Upaniṣad*, Introduction

2. स च नित्यत्वात् न अविद्यानिवृत्तिव्यतिरेके-
णान्यसाधननिष्पाद्यः ।

ibid.

on Zen.⁵ It is a form of self-revelation which takes place spontaneously when certain interior conditions are fulfilled. Jñāna, as Śaṅkara conceived it, is not knowledge which has to be acquired, but an ontological fact of existence. It is not knowing but *being*. Any form of dualistic 'knowing' is merely *a-jñāna*, 'not-knowledge'. The Upaniṣads express this truth in the form of a paradox: 'It is unknown to those who know, and known to those who do not know'.⁶

Why did Śaṅkara attempt to establish a new, independent path? Are not the traditional paths of *upāsanā* (meditation) and ritualistic work capable of producing non-dualistic experience? Śaṅkara bases his stand on the fundamental thesis that unreality cannot lead to Reality.⁷ The Real and the unreal are entirely different and opposed to each other like light and darkness. Falsehood can never lead to truth. If a person mistakes a rope for a snake and holds on to that belief, he can never know the truth of the rope. Only by correctly seeing the rope will his mistaken notion go. This correct perception is a *new* experience totally different from the earlier wrong perception. As long as a person persists in retaining the old wrong knowledge, he cannot have correct knowledge. Truth is not a prolongation of error but a break with it. According to Śaṅkara, ordinary meditation and ritualistic

worship are based on certain preconceived notions about the ultimate Reality which are not ultimately true and so, through those methods, one cannot realize the true absolute Brahman beyond all attributes. For the realization of the latter we must break away from those methods based on error, and strike out a new path, the 'pathless path'.

Though Śaṅkara blazed a new trail, he did not leave behind elaborate details of that trail in his works. Many of these details may have remained as an esoteric tradition among his disciples and early followers. Much of this oral tradition seems to have been lost. When we study post-Śaṅkara treatises we find that several of them (e.g. *Vedānta-sāra* of Sadānanda and *Aparokṣānubhūti*) have frankly adopted Patañjali's system of Yoga as the practical means of realizing Brahman. It is therefore difficult now to state what exactly was the original Advaita sādhanā taught by Śaṅkara.

Classification of meditation techniques

The English word 'meditation' is a general term which covers various types of mental exercise. Most of these mental exercises are forms of cognition, though they are often supported by feeling and willing also. Cognition has three parts—a subjective part as the knower (*jñātr*), an objective part as the known (*jñeya*) and the process of knowing (*jñāna*) which connects the other two parts. Meditation is a state of concentration of mind in which consciousness is focussed on one of these three

5. In the words of Hui-neng, 'The truth of Zen opens itself from within and it has nothing to do with the practice of meditation.... The truth of Zen is absolute in which there is no dualism, no conditionality'. D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism* Ed. William Barrett (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1956) pp. 73-74

6. अविज्ञातं विज्ञानतां विज्ञातमविज्ञानताम् ।

Kena Upaniṣad 2.3

D.T. Suzuki himself points out the connection between this passage of *Kena Upaniṣad* and Zen in his book mentioned above, p. 120,

7. Vidyāraṇya does not seem to hold this thesis to be absolutely correct. In *Pancadasi* (9.1, 613) he states that a 'leading error' (*samvādi bhrama*) can lead to truth. The logic behind his argument, 'One may perchance obtain a thing by following a wrong line by mistake', is rather crude and unconvincing.

parts. Depending on the direction of the focus of consciousness, meditation techniques may be divided into the following four types.

1. *Objective meditation.* In this type concentration is achieved by focusing consciousness on an object, usually the image of a deity or on a mystic formula known as mantra. Patañjali's technique of *dhyāna* and Vedantic techniques of *upāsana* belong to this category.

2. *Subjective meditation.* In this type consciousness is focused back upon its own source, namely, the Self. This can be done in several ways. The process of 'enquiry' into the nature of the self (*ātma-vicāra*), meditation on *aśmitā* mentioned in Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra*, the *pratibodha* technique taught in *Kena Upaniṣad*—all these are subjective meditations.

3. *Reflective meditation.* In this type consciousness is fixed neither on the self nor on a definite object but on knowledge or the knowing process itself. This takes place when one practises *manana* or reflection on the meaning of a scriptural statement or on a metaphysical concept. In Christian spiritual tradition the word 'meditation' really refers to this kind of reflection. In Catholic monasteries 'meditation' on various Biblical passages is the major spiritual technique practised, especially by novices. Reflective or conceptual meditations are also practised by Buddhist monks, especially by those of the Theravāda school. *Manana* as a spiritual discipline was very popular in Advaita circles during the Middle Ages, but is no longer so. Nowadays people read and hear a lot but are becoming less and less capable of independent systematic, self-directed, deep reflection. It is of course true that all Indian schools of thought hold that *manana* can produce only indirect (*parokṣa*) knowledge of Reality. But, as

Vidyāraṇya has pointed out, this indirect knowledge is not only not erroneous but a great help in the practice of other types of meditation which produce direct (*aparokṣa*) experience of Reality.⁸ It is therefore good to know a little more about what *manana* really means.

Manana is always done on the basis of *śravaṇa*. The word *śravaṇa* is usually translated as 'hearing'. But Advaita teachers point out that *śravaṇa* really means 'determining, with the help of six marks (*ṣaḍ-liṅga*) the true import of scriptural statements.'⁹ Therefore it would be more correct to translate *śravaṇa* as 'study' of scriptures.

What then is *manana*? *Manana* is the application of the knowledge of scriptures in one's own life, even though it is indirect knowledge. According to Sureśvarācārya, *manana* is the logical process of *anvaya-vyatireka* by which one gains an indirect knowledge of one's true nature as Brahman. *Anvaya* 'identity' is a positive method; *vyatireka* 'difference' is a negative method. Both are necessary to gain correct knowledge. Sureśvara explains it as follows. Suppose there is a post which one misunderstands to be a man. The method of *anvaya* conveys the true nature of the thing—that it is a post. But by merely saying, 'This is a post, this is a post' does not remove the illusion that it is a man. To remove that misconception we have to add, 'This is not a man'; this negation represents the *vyatireka* method. Similarly, merely stating 'That thou art' (*tat tvam asi*) is not enough; it should be complemented by the statement, 'Thou art *not* a bound, sorrowful, mortal being'.

8. Cf. *Pancadasi* 7.51-55

9. श्रवणं नाम षड्विधलिङ्गैः अशेषवेदान्तानां
अद्वितीय वस्तुनि तात्पर्यावधारणम् ।

Thus through *manana*, consisting of the double process of *anvaya-vyatireka*, we gain a correct understanding of scriptural truths.¹⁰

4. *Ahaṅgraha meditation*. Unlike the other three types, here consciousness is not focused on anything; instead, consciousness is simply allowed to expand. In actual practice this means that the self identifies itself with larger and larger dimensions of Reality. Here 'identification' does not mean a subject-object relationship (as exists in the *objective meditation* mentioned above) which is called *saṁyoga* or union. *Ahaṅgraha* is a 'self-self' identification known as *tādātmya*. The effect of this meditation is a progressive expansion of self-awareness. Many of the *vidyās* found in the Upaniṣads belong to this type of meditation.

Meditation techniques in Jñāna-mārga

Jñāna-mārga is not the exclusive preserve of Advaita alone. The ancient meditation traditions of the Upaniṣads and the Yoga system of Patañjali may also be said to follow Jñāna-mārga. Even in the Advaita system various meditation traditions exist. Thus Jñāna-mārga comprises quite a large number of meditation techniques. They can all be classified under the four main types discussed in the foregoing section. Let us now study briefly some of these meditation techniques individually.

Upāsanās

Upāsanās represent some of the oldest forms of meditation which had their origin in ritualistic worship. They are objective meditations and are practised in the path of devotion as well as in the path of

knowledge. Here we are concerned only with the *upāsanās* of *Jñāna-mārga*.¹¹

Two questions are to be answered before we can proceed further. Meditation can be done only on an object and that too only on an object which has cognizable attributes. But Nirguṇa Brahman, being the eternal Self, cannot be objectified and, being impersonal, is devoid of attributes. How, then, can we speak of *upāsanā* with regard to Brahman? The answer given by the majority of Advaita teachers is that *upāsanā* can be practised directly on Saguṇa Brahman (Personal God) alone. Sadānanda, for instance, defines *upāsanās* as 'mental exercises pertaining to Saguṇa Brahman such as Śāṅḍilya Vidyā etc.'¹² Vidyāraṇya, however, emphatically asserts that *upāsanā* can be practised on Nirguṇa (attributeless) Brahman as well.¹³ He argues that since Brahman is knowable it can be meditated upon too.¹⁴ According to him, those who are unable to practise *vicāra* (enquiry) should practise *upāsanā* on Nirguṇa Brahman.¹⁵ Although he does not indicate clearly how attributeless Brahman can be directly meditated upon, he implies that such a meditation can be done indirectly, that is, through symbols (*pratīka*).

The second question is, what is the ultimate result of *upāsanā*? Here again

¹¹. The practice of *upāsanā* in the path of devotion was discussed in detail in the editorials of *Prabuddha Bharata*, May and June 1981 and in some of the subsequent editorials.

12. उपासनानि सगुणब्रह्मविषयमानसव्यापार-
रूपाणि शाण्डिल्यविद्यादीनि ।

Vedānta Sāra

13. निर्गुणब्रह्मतत्त्वस्य न हि उपास्तेरसम्भवः ।
सगुणब्रह्मणीवात्र प्रत्ययावृत्तिसम्भवात् ॥

Pancadasi 9.55

10. See, Suresvaracarya, *Naiskarmya-siddhih* 3.74

14. *Pancadasi* 9.59,60

15. *Pancadasi* 9.54,132

the majority of Advaitins, including Śaṅkara, hold that upāsanās lead directly to the realization of only Saguṇa Brahman. But since the realization of Saguṇa Brahman may in due course, in the higher worlds, lead to the realization of Nirguṇa Brahman (this course is called *krama-mukti*), upāsanā may be said to lead *indirectly* to Nirguṇa Brahman. Says Śaṅkara: 'Like ritualistic karma, meditations too produce results in this world (*dṛṣṭa*) or in the next world (*adrṣṭa*). Some meditations produce true knowledge and, through that, *krama-mukti*.¹⁶ However, Vidyāraṇya confidently declares that *nirguṇopāsanā* can lead *directly* to attributeless Brahman and, if a person fails to achieve this result, he is sure to get at least *krama-mukti*.¹⁷

Upāsanās have been divided into three types: *aṅgāvabaddha*, *pratīka*, *vidyā* (*ahaṅgraha*). Of these *aṅgāvabaddha* is the lowest of upāsanās. It refers to some ancient meditations which were associated with certain Vedic rituals like the Jyotiṣṭoma, and are no longer in vogue. The highest type of meditation is represented by the Vidyās; these will be dealt with in the next section.

The second type, *pratīkopāsanā*, represents the upāsanā proper. To avoid confusion, this type of meditation alone should be called upāsanā. In it a single thought-current is directed towards a definite object which is invariably regarded as a symbol (*pratīka*) of Brahman. Since these symbols serve as frames of reference in understanding Brahman, these meditations are also called *tatastha-upāsanās*.

16. अत्र हि कर्मवदेव च उपासनानि दृष्टफलान्यदृष्टफलानि चोच्यते । क्रममुक्तिफलानि च कानिचित् सम्यग्ज्ञानोत्पत्तिद्वारेण ।

Samkara, Commentary on *Brahma-sūtra* 3.3. Introduction.

17. *Pancadasi* 9.138-150

Pratīkas are of two types: *nāma* (name) and *rūpa* (form). The most famous of the sound-symbols is Om. How meditation on Om leads to realization of Brahman has been described by Gaudapada in the first chapter of *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*. As regards form-symbols, several of them are mentioned in *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*. Obviously, in the Vedic period, Sūrya (sun), Agni (fire), Dyau (sky) and other cosmic objects were widely used as symbols by the Vedic people in the practice of meditation. In modern times most of these *pratīkas* are no longer in use and have given way to anthropomorphic images of various gods and goddesses.

Vedāntic upāsanā is to be distinguished from Patañjali's technique of *dhyāna* which also often employs impersonal symbols such as 'sorrowless light'¹⁸ as objects of concentration. The *saṅnyama* techniques described in the third chapter of *Yoga-sūtra* also belong to an entirely different class of meditations. The difference between Vedāntic and Patañjali's techniques is this: the former is meditation on Brahman whereas the latter is meditation on Prakṛti. The symbols used in upāsanās are *brahmāśraya* (based on Brahman) whereas the symbols used in *dhyāna* are *prakṛtyāśraya* (based on Prakṛti).

Vidyās

Though *vidyās* are often classed under upāsanās, the two are quite different techniques. Whereas upāsanās are symbolic meditations, *vidyās* are analogical meditations. In upāsanā the main effort is to concentrate the mind on one specific *pratīka* or symbol. In *vidyā* attention is directed towards certain attributes or

18. विशोका वा ज्योतिष्मती ।

Yoga-sūtra 1.36

qualities of the ultimate Reality with the help of an analogy. Vidyā is a technique of 'grasping' the whole of Saguna Brahman by identifying one's inner self with It. This shows that a vidyā is an ahaṅgraha type of meditation (unlike upāsana which is an objective type of meditation). The immediate effect of *pratīkopāsana* is the transformation of consciousness, whereas the immediate effect of *ahaṅgrahopāsana* (i.e. vidyā) is the expansion of consciousness.

The difference between the two may be clearly seen in the following two examples pertaining to the sun. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* speaks of an *Āditya-upāsana*.¹⁹ As Bādarāyaṇa has pointed out, here the sun is to be regarded only as a symbol of Brahman and should be meditated upon as an object without making any attempt to identify the self with it.²⁰ The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* speaks of an *Āditya-vidyā* in the following terms: 'Of this Person in the solar orb, Bhu is the head..., Bhuva is the arms..., Sva is the feet...'²¹ Here the sun stands for Virāt, not as a symbol but as an analogy. The aspirant is not to concentrate his mind on the sun; instead, he is to identify his self with the Person-in-the-sun who stands for Hiraṇyagarbha, the sun serving only as a background for this identification. *Āditya-upāsana* is meant for concentration of mind, whereas *Āditya-vidyā* is meant for the expansion of the self. Evidently, the latter is a higher form of meditation than the former.

A number of vidyās like Śāṅḍilya Vidyā, Dahara Vidyā, Madhu Vidyā, Pañcāgni Vidyā, etc. are mentioned in the Upaniṣads. According to one account their number is thirty-two but many more must have

existed in the Vedic period.²² Most of these meditation traditions had become extinct centuries before Śaṅkara wrote his great commentaries. In the absence of *guru-parampara*, it is now difficult to know the real import of many of these vidyās and how to practise them.

However, some kind of new vidyā-like meditations for advaitic experience must have been developed during the Middle Ages and practised by sannyasins. Sri Ramakrishna has spoken of some of these meditations which he heard from his guru Tota Puri (whom the Master used to refer respectfully as Nangta, 'the Naked One'). While talking to Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar at Shyampukur, Sri Ramakrishna once said:

Nangta used to tell me how a jñāni meditates: Everywhere there is water; all the regions above and below are filled with water; man, like a fish, is swimming joyously in that water. In real meditation you will actually see all this.

Take the case of the infinite ocean. There is no limit to its water. Suppose a pot is immersed in it: there is water both inside and outside the pot. The jñāni sees that both inside and outside there is nothing but Paramatman. Then what is this pot? It is 'I'-consciousness. Because of the pot the water appears to be divided into two parts; because of the pot you seem to perceive an inside and an outside. One feels that way as long as this pot of 'I' exists. When the 'I' disappears, what remains. That cannot be described in words.

Do you know another way a jñāni meditates? Think of infinite akasa and a bird flying there, joyfully spreading its wings. There is the Cidakasa, and Atman is the bird. The bird is not imprisoned in a cage; it flies in the Cidakasa. Its joy is limitless.²³

19. आदित्यो ब्रह्मेत्यादेशः ।

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.18.6

20. See, *Brahma-sūtra* 4.1.4,5

21. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.5.3

22. For a detailed description of these vidyas see, K. Narayanaswami Aiyer, *The Thirty-two Vidyas* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1962).

23. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre, 1940) p. 915.

What Sri Ramakrishna has so vividly described here are *ahamgraha* meditations. Even if they are not regarded as *vidyās*, they are intelligible and of immense practical value to modern people.

Ātma-vicāra or self-enquiry

The most important spiritual exercise which is a characteristic and unique feature of Jñāna-mārga is *ātma-vicāra* or self-enquiry. It is a purely subjective technique which dispenses with every kind of object and objectification. It is an attempt to turn away from all objects and move backward into the self. This is the technique in which the negation process of *neti, neti* finds its most practical application. In the quest for the true Self every other thought and knowledge is discarded; the very tendency of the mind to conceptualize is given up.

Obviously, then, *ātma-vicāra* is not *manana* or reflection but a direct penetration into the self. It is not an attempt to convert an indirect (*parokṣa*) knowledge into direct (*aparokṣa*) experience. It begins with most immediate and incontrovertible experience of one's existence as the ego, and then seeks the foundations of this awareness; as such, it is a movement through *aparokṣa* experience from beginning to end.

Ātma-vicāra is not thinking about oneself, or brooding over one's past. That kind of thinking can give more knowledge about the ego but never about the transcendental Self. It should be noted that the Buddhists also begin their spiritual quest with the ego but then, through logical reasoning, reach the conclusion that there is nothing but emptiness beyond the ego. This shows that vicāra should be conducted only after gaining a sound understanding of the doctrine of Atman enunciated in Vedānta scriptures.

Vicāra as a technique of self-discovery was first developed by the Upaniṣadic sages. Its most authoritative source is Yājñavalkya's last instruction to his wife: *vijñātāram are kena vijānīyāt?* 'How to know the knower?'^{2A} Though Yājñavalkya did not give a clear-cut answer to the question that he raised, self-enquiry must have been practised for centuries. The credit for reviving this ancient tradition in modern times must go to the south Indian sage Ramana Maharshi. Through his spiritual realization he gave the tradition a much needed authenticity. He distinguished self-enquiry from other methods of spiritual practice and gave it an independent status. He showed how by questioning oneself 'Who am I?' it was possible to follow the trail of one's 'I'-consciousness to its source in the Atman. By thus clarifying and simplifying *ātma-vicāra* he brought it within the reach of the common man.

It is, however, good to remember that self-enquiry is not an intellectual process. It is essentially an intuitive process and, unless *medha* or intuition is developed through the practice of complete continence, it is not possible to carry self-enquiry beyond a certain inner limit.

Pratibodha technique

If we carefully study our thoughts and actions, we will find that they are mostly going on unconsciously, without our being aware of them. It is because a major part of our daily life is spent in an unconscious drift that we commit mistakes, fail in our efforts and succumb to inner impulses and external circumstances. One of the first steps in spiritual life, therefore, is to practise constant self-awareness. This constant self-awareness is known as *pratibodha*.

^{2A}. *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 4.5.15

The *Kena Upaniṣad* (2.4) says: *pratibodha viditam matam*, which Śaṅkara explains as: 'The Self is known when it is grasped as the witness of each state of consciousness.' This means that behind every thought and action there stands the silent witnessing self. By constantly holding on to this inner witness we can remain fully conscious and alert in the midst of all our activities.

What happens when we practise this *pratibodha* technique? First of all, it enlarges our self-awareness. How does this take place? Between every two thoughts there is an interval when the self remains in its own true nature as the self-luminous *pratyagātman* or *kūṭastha*.²⁵ As we practise the *pratibodha* technique, this interval lengthens and brings about a transformation of our consciousness. The second effect of practising *pratibodha* technique is a remarkable increase in our self-control. The Atman is not merely the source of consciousness but also the source of power; the Upaniṣad itself says, 'Through Atman one gets strength'.²⁶ When the inner Self shines forth, it radiates such power that all thoughts, impulses and emotions spontaneously get controlled.

It is the *pratibodha* technique that goes under the name Vipassana (or *vipaśyana* in Sanskrit) in Southern Buddhism. This ancient technique which had remained obscure for centuries was revived, developed, adapted to modern times and popularized by the Burmese Buddhist monk Mahasi Sayadaw and the Burmese government official U Ba Khin in the early forties of this century. At present thousands of people in Burma, Ceylon, USA, Europe and Australia are actively practising Vipassana. The method of 'choiceless awareness'

25. Cf. *Pancadasi* 8.3, 21.

26. आत्मना विन्दते वीर्यम् ।

Kena Upaniṣad 2.4

taught by the late J. Krishnamurthy is also only a modernized version of the *pratibodha* technique.

Śabda-aparokṣatva

Another doctrine of spiritual experience held by Advaita, and by no other school or sect, is the *śabda-aparokṣatva vāda*. According to this theory, spiritual experience has nothing to do with meditation or any other practice. If a person's mind has been sufficiently purified, the direct experience of Brahman takes place in him as soon as he hears the great statements of the Upaniṣads.

The original proponents of this doctrine derived it through their interpretation of Yājñavalkya's Upaniṣadic exhortation: 'The self is to be seen, is to be heard of, reflected upon and enquired into (*nididhyāsitavyaḥ*). Through the direct perception of the self, through hearing, reflection and transcendental knowledge (*vijñāna*) all this becomes known.'²⁷ From Śaṅkara's commentary on this passage it is clear that he regarded a combination of all the three means—*śravaṇa* (hearing), *manana* (reflection) and *nididhyāsana*—as necessary for the realization of Brahman. He says: 'When these (three) are combined, then only true realization of the unity of Brahman is accomplished, not otherwise—by hearing alone.'²⁸

In spite of Śaṅkara's clear statement,

27. आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदि-
ध्यासितव्यो मैत्रेयि । आत्मनो वा अरे दर्शनेन श्रवणेन
मत्या विज्ञानेनेदं सर्वं विदितम् ।

Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 2.4.5

Note that in the second line *vijñāna* replaces *nididhyāsana*.

28. यदा ऐकत्वमेतान्युपगतानि तदा सम्यग् दर्शनं
ब्रह्मैकत्वविषयं प्रसीदति, नान्यथा श्रवणमात्रेण ।

Samkara, Commentary on *ibid*

his followers were divided into two camps on the interpretation of the above passage. According to the Bhāmati school founded by Vācaspati Miśra, *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are all a chain of causes, contributory to the knowledge of the oneness of Brahman. Thus, *śravaṇa* is the cause of *manana*, and *manana* is the cause of *nididhyāsana*. These three are the causes of the knowledge of the said oneness, without any principal-subordinate relation among them. This view is evidently closer to Śaṅkara's commentary. But the Vivaraṇa school of Prakāśātma Yati holds that *śravaṇa* is the principal cause, whereas *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are subsidiary and serve only as aids to the former. It is the Vivaraṇa school that has propounded the *śabda-aparokṣatva vāda*. Ānandagiri, another interpreter of Śaṅkara, also seems to support this view.

The real source of the controversy is, however, deeper than the one stated above. It is centred on whether a sense organ (*indriya*) is necessary or not for direct perception of Brahman. According to the Bhāmati view, perception is possible only through an instrument (*indriya*) for, if the sense organ is defective, perception too will be defective. The mind is a sense organ, and only by exercising the mind through meditation can direct perception of Brahman take place, not through hearing of scriptures alone which can produce only mediate knowledge. Opposing this view, the Vivaraṇa school holds that the immediacy of cognition depends upon the object of knowledge and not the instrumentality of a sense organ. The mind is not a sense organ as it is necessary for all kinds of knowledge (not merely perception). Hearing can convey immediate knowledge if the object is immediate. There is no object more immediate than the Atman. So scriptural statements can produce direct perception of Brahman through a suffi-

ciently purified mind.²⁹ This point is illustrated by the story of the 'ten fools' who crossed a swollen river. On reaching the other bank they started counting their numbers. Since the counter forgot to count himself, the counting always showed only nine. Then a passer-by pointed to the counter and said, 'You are the tenth man'. As soon as they heard it, true knowledge of their number dawned in them.

Nididhyāsana

If in the Vivaraṇa school *śravaṇa* is considered the door to advaitic experience, *nididhyāsana* is considered the door to that experience in the Bhāmati school. This leads to the question, what is *nididhyāsana*? Unfortunately, a satisfactory answer useful to a sādhaṅka is not found in the traditional works on Advaita. According to Śaṅkara, *nididhyāsana* is only 'determined meditation'.³⁰ Sureśvarācārya, however, does not regard *nididhyāsana* as meditation. He points out that the use of the term *viññāna* in the place of *nididhyāsana* in the second line of Yājñavalkya's exhortation mentioned above shows that *nididhyāsana* is not meditation but higher knowledge. Meditation is an act (*mānasavyāpāra*), whereas *nididhyāsana* is a 'knowledge situation.'

Sureśvara holds the view that both *śravaṇa* and *manana* should be observed till *viññāna* (understanding of Brahman) manifests itself, which is what *nididhyāsana* really means. '*Nididhyāsana* is the culmination of the processes of *śravaṇa* and *manana* and is the understanding of

29. For a clear presentation of both the views see, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra ch. 8.

30. निदिध्यासितव्यो निश्चयेन ध्यातव्यः ।

Śaṅkara, Commentary on *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5

Brahman (depending upon others)'.³¹ In other words, *nididhyāsana* means the understanding of the meaning of the Śruti, *vākyārtha* or 'sentence-sense' (*vācya-vācaka-sambandha*). This *vākyārtha* is not the linguistic expression of liberation. It is only indirect knowledge and is the precedent of direct or immediate realization of Brahman.³² The person who wants to be liberated should, after acquiring knowledge of *vākyārtha*, proceed to remove his ignorance in order that he should attain the knowledge of the *avākyārtha* '(the Reality) beyond the sentence-sense'.

At this point it may be useful to state the *prasaṅkhyāna* theory of Maṇḍana Miśra, the author of *Brahmasiddhi*. According to Maṇḍana, knowledge of Brahman springs from *prasaṅkhyāna* or 'continuous meditation'—not directly from *mahāvākya*. The Upaniṣads convey *vākyārtha* through the process of *śravaṇa* and *manana*, but this *vākyārtha* is mediate and relational knowledge. Hence it does not culminate in the awareness of the real nature of Brahman. Brahman is *avākyārtha* which is absolute and immediate. This is attained only through the continuous meditation on the *vākyārtha*.³³ *Prasaṅkhyāna* is the repetition (*āvṛtti*) of *śravaṇa*

and *manana*.³⁴ Sureśvara criticizes Maṇḍana's view. Sureśvara holds that repetition of mediate knowledge does not produce immediate knowledge. He says: since according to Maṇḍana *śravaṇa* and *manana* produce only mediate knowledge, *prasaṅkhyāna*, which is a mere repetition of this mediate knowledge, cannot produce any *new* knowledge, that is direct realization of Brahman.³⁵ Suppose a person *infers* the existence of fire in a distant hill from the smoke rising there. By repeating that inference can he directly *see* the fire? No.

It is obvious that if one understands *nididhyāsana* as meditation, it will be the same as the *prasaṅkhyāna* of Maṇḍana. In fact, that is what Vācaspati does. But Sureśvara rejects *prasaṅkhyāna* as a direct means to Brahman experience. So he interprets *nididhyāsana* not as meditation but as the intuition (*vijñāna*) of the real meaning of *mahāvākya*s which falls short of direct realization of Brahman. Perhaps, for Sureśvara *nididhyāsana* is almost equivalent to *savikalpaka samādhi*.

Though Sureśvara's criticism of Maṇḍana's theory of *Prasaṅkhyāna* may be valid, his own conception of *nididhyāsana* is neither clear nor convincing. It is doubtful whether Yājñavalkya, when he instructed his wife Maitreyi about the self, had in mind *sāmānadhikarāṇya*, *sambandhatrayajñāna* and other abstruse principles of logic. In all probability, Yājñavalkya originally meant *nididhyāsana* to be either a process of penetration into the self

31. अपरायत्तबोधोऽत्र निदिध्यासनम् उच्यते ।
पूर्वयोरवधित्वेन तदुपन्यास इष्यते ।

Suresvara, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad-Vārtika* 2.4.217

32. Cf. Suresvara, *Naiskarmya-siddhih* 3.28 (*Vākyārtha-pratipatti* is based on subject-object relation, but *ātma-pratipatti* is not based on subject-object relation.)

33. अपरे तु बुवते वेदान्तवाक्यजनितम् अहंब्रह्मेति
विज्ञानं संसर्गत्मकत्वाद् आत्मवस्तुयाथात्म्यावगाह्येन
न भवति । किं तर्हि, एतदेव गंगास्रोतवत् सततमभ्या-
सतोऽन्यदेव अवाक्यार्थात्मकं विज्ञानान्तरं उत्पद्यते ।

Suresvara, *Naiskarmya-siddhih*, 1.67 (prose)

34. Cf. युक्तिशब्दावृत्तिलक्षणात् प्रसंख्यानात् ।

ibid 3.124 (prose)

35. युक्तिशब्दो पुराप्यस्य न चेद् अकुरुतां प्रमाम् ।
साक्षाद् आवर्तनात् ताभ्यां किम् अपूर्वं

फलित्यति ॥

ibid 3.124 (verse)

through *vicāra* or an intensification of the intuitive awareness 'I am Brahman'.

Conclusion

We have only given a bare outline of the different spiritual techniques belonging to the path of knowledge. The details are to be learned from a competent guide.

It is a matter of deep regret that although the philosophy of Advaita is being popularized in India and the West by religious preachers and academic teachers,

the same amount of interest is not seen in learning and propagating the specifically advaitic forms of *sādhana*. It is as a corrective to this lopsided situation that we should view the increasing popularity of Zen, Vipassana, TM, Choiceless Awareness and several other techniques which have brought meaningfulness and succour to hundreds of thousands of people in modern times. Seen in a larger perspective, all these new methods, in spite of the propagandist exaggerations of their exponents, belong to the broad path of *Jñāna-mārga*.

LIVING A SPIRITUAL LIFE IN OUR WORLD OF SCIENCE

SWAMI SASTRANANDA

Science and spirituality

We live in a world where many encounters take place between 'science' and 'spirituality', in the form of confrontation or conciliation, as exalting one at the cost of the other or finding a harmony. This essay seeks to stress the positive aspect of this encounter and suggest how thoughtful spiritual aspirants could live and work in a world where science and its applications have become dominant.

In this context we take the term 'science' to connote a rational quest for truth and knowledge, based on experiment, verification and practical demonstration—an objective approach founded mainly on external and quantitative data. 'Spiritual' is taken to refer to another quest, also for truth and knowledge but on a plane which goes beyond the merely material and the finite, which is vast and unlimited, the dimension of quality and values. It is basically a subjective approach though also subject to reason, verification and practical testing, through means mainly

internal and qualitative. Both of them are to be evaluated by their demonstrable effects on the lives of the persons concerned and on mankind.

The quest of such a spiritual seeker will be: how to lead a life based on spiritual truths and values in a world dominated by science and technology on the one hand and by the tension of mounting material needs and greed, hatred and fear, violence and terror, in a world distracted and dehumanized.

It is needless to say that the theme is a very vast and intricate one, and we can here only touch upon a few aspects of it and launch the reader on his own explorations.

Two dimensions of human existence

There are no two absolutely separate and independent entities such as 'worldly life' and 'spiritual life'. Life is one. Man and human life are integral wholes though manifesting at various levels—gross and subtle, potential and transcendent. Existence

is one though it is an undefinable mixture and interplay of the limited and the unlimited, the one and the many, the real and the apparent, the known and the unknown.

We have our gross world, limited and changing, grasped by our senses; and also a subtle world which includes the mind and is known through its effects on the gross. Both are 'material', dependent, and are subject to various other forces. That which is unchanging, unlimited, non-dependent, and not affected by matter or material forces but manifests in and operates through them, is the Spirit. Man has a body of gross matter and mind of subtle matter, but he is their operator and master. Deeper and vaster than his outer, limited personality is the inner real person, his real self, the Spirit. His outer dimensions keep on changing, with a beginning and an end; but his inmost core, the spiritual dimension is unchanging, whole, timeless, free and independent.

His personality which is dominated by his body and senses and the primitive urges of lust, greed, hatred, fear, selfishness and ignorance, and which is subject to disease, aging, death, bondage and suffering, constitutes his lower nature. Imperishableness, knowledge, purity, freedom, joy, selflessness, love and compassion characterize his higher nature. It is not reasonable to speak of human nature only in terms of his weaknesses, errors and the ugly side of his lower or brute level. He can and does function on the higher plane also, manifesting his higher or divine nature, with all its strength, enlightenment, beauty and nobility.

A spiritual seeker is one who, being aware of both these aspects of his 'nature', strives through appropriate thought, action and way of life, to assert the 'divine', the 'spiritual'. That is his quest.

Life as the manifestation of the Spirit

The Spirit (for which the terms the Self or the Divine may be used synonymously in this essay) which constitutes his higher nature, is beyond time and space, is the one reality and existence which pervades everything, which one ultimately encounters beyond the smallest particles of matter that could be measured or conceived, and beyond the immeasurable cosmos of the astronomer. It is the ultimate basis of all life, energy and intelligence. It is the ground and goal of the great values: Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Perfection. It is the true source of real freedom, peace and fulfilment. Either through his own direct experience, or through an unshakable faith in the life and teachings of some spiritual luminaries, the seeker becomes fully convinced that this Divine Spirit is the one enduring reality underlying and pervading all creation and creatures, their inalienable essence and the one worthy and indispensable goal and purpose of his life; all else is but passing, unsubstantial and not worthy of being the end or goal of life. This outlook strongly permeates and influences his thoughts, feelings and actions, nay his life itself.

Involvement through detachment

Only to the extent the world and its constituents serve as a means to the attainment of, or to express, the Divine, does he accept and value them and utilize them; even so he does not become dependent on, or attached to them. Their gain or loss does not affect him. All these, by their very nature, come and go. So why be needlessly exercised or excited over them, why long and labour for them strenuously?

His ideal is somehow to realize that spiritual core and dimension of himself and

all that exists, which is the one Existence beyond our worldly life and death, the one light of pure consciousness of which our intelligence and phenomenal consciousness are but pale reflections and refractions, and the one abiding Bliss beyond all our pleasures and pains. For the sake of his spiritual goal, he may, for the time being, even 'attach' himself voluntarily to anything, person or course of action but would promptly detach himself from them the moment they no longer serve the Divine purpose or become obstacles to it. Call him an 'opportunist' if you like; he is a blessed opportunist who seizes every opportunity for the attainment of the Divine but shares the resulting joy and blessings with all those who are ready to receive them.

Being unattached does not mean that he remains unmoved like a stock or stone, bereft of interests and feelings. Like any human he also eats and sleeps, walks and talks, works and plays, takes up a profession and makes a good living, holds office or serves in the ranks, even takes up arms if inevitable, and is a responsible, responsive and worthy member of his family or society. All of these he does, perhaps with greater excellence than many, but only to the extent and so long as they help, and not hinder, his main purpose, the Divine quest. If his spiritual quest demands, he does not also hesitate to resort to fasts or vigils, silence or solitude, poverty or hardships, renunciation of property, possessions, family, home, office, and of even his native country and society itself. But whatever he does, he does with great determination, with enthusiasm and with only goodwill and blessings in his heart.

To him his family and friends are as fellow-travellers who share the same railway compartment for the time being but part ways as soon as their destination is reached. During the journey he treats them

all with great friendliness, courtesy and regard, extending a helping hand wherever needed, as if they were all his own. But when parting comes, he accepts that also as a matter of course and gets busy again with his own primary pursuit. Similar is his outlook when his near and dear ones depart: the Lord brings and He takes away; blessed is He either way! He looks upon his home and his own body not as his 'own' but as abodes of, and instruments of service for, the Divine. As such he takes good care of them as far as possible, utilizing proven scientific knowledge and techniques for the purpose, but is ever ready to vacate them when they prove uninhabitable or hindrances to his higher quest.

Harmony of head and heart

The creed of a true spiritual aspirant may be summed up as: 'The cosmos is my home, Truth is my goal and its quest is both religion and science for me.' In this empirical world where he has to do or say something, he does so in a very rational, efficient and practical way. He is keen to avoid wastage or redundancy of any kind. For the fulfilment of his legitimate worldly needs and duties he fully utilizes his own intelligence, talents and efforts, taking the help of science as far as practicable. Where pursuit of knowledge is concerned, he is imbued with the true spirit of science and its disciplines—inquiry, experiment, verification and error-elimination. He is ever open to newer and vaster facets of truth and knowledge, however startling and unsettling they may be. All his life he is a 'learner' and never makes strident or dogmatic assertions. Without a proof that fully convinces both his head and heart, he does not either easily accept or reject any proposition, idea or phenomenon.

However, his spiritual realization or faith prevents him from being an agnostic. He is convinced that the Spirit, which is the true Existence and the light of all-pervading Consciousness, provides the key and answer to seemingly insoluble enigmas, paradoxes and puzzling questions of life, which conventional science either cannot answer or ignores as irrelevant or beyond its legitimate scope. Besides, while science is amoral and is not concerned with the moral character of its seeker, spirituality very much needs the rigorous discipline of moral purity also. As such, the spiritual seeker can pursue only that knowledge and those courses of action which are not aimed at selfish or partisan interests, self-aggrandizement or harming others; he pursues only those which ennoble him and promote universal oneness and good.

Even those disciplines and practices which are regarded as purely 'spiritual' are carried out in the framework of intelligent understanding, deep reflection, full conviction and for a worthy and noble end. His prayers and meditations, worship and philanthropy are for the purpose of self-purification, illumination and liberation from limitations and bondage. For the acquisition of worldly assets or the cure of ailments he resorts to intelligent and diligent effort, science and technology. He looks to the Divine only for grace, purity, light and love. He has no attraction for 'miracles' or 'miraculous powers'. For him, miracles are but phenomena which we are unable to comprehend or explain with our present level of knowledge. A miracle today may become a commonplace occurrence tomorrow. Life itself and all creation, and man himself in particular, are miracles. Whatever and whoever can dispel our ignorance, selfishness and bondage are really miraculous. That in the midst of so much darkness, death, selfishness and

hatred, there persist the lights of truth, life, love and kindness is a mighty miracle. That in spite of so much sorrow, suffering and bondage, the gateway to immortal joy and freedom is ever open, that we too can enter it and become divine, and that each one of us is potentially divine—what greater miracle can there be?

The actions of a person with such an integral vision proceed not only from a reflective and rational intellect but also according to the guidance and approval of a pure heart and clear conscience. The intellect serves as a check against errors; but it is the heart which is the arbiter of values, which translates ideas into living truths and motivates noble actions. In our empirical world of time and space, of day-to-day life and actions, he can be precise, punctual, prudent and very practical; but he can also become totally absorbed in his spiritual dimension with what seems to others as an utter unconcern, a reckless abandon, a self-satisfied solitude. He can be sharp as well as tender, as needed—all apparently paradoxical yet delightfully harmonious. He does not rush to react when adversities strike. He knows when to act and when to remain quiet. Like a master mariner he takes advantage of favourable wind, adjusts the sails suitably when it is adverse, and vigorously pulls the oars when there is no wind—all the while steadily pressing on his craft to its destination. He has a basic faith, if not living experience, that the Divine underlies everything, and everything will eventually work out to that end, the Divine, which is both the ultimate motivating power and beckoning destiny.

Inner poise

Consequently he can lead a relaxed and serene life even when being alert and active. He is caring, careful, yet carefree.

Where most others would get agitated, shout or take some precipitate action, he reacts with a calm patience. Knowing that 'all this will pass', he is not overly excited or eager to counter unpleasant or painful situations, nor does he grab and hold on to pleasant and enjoyable situations. Where social evils, injustice or disasters occur, he is very much concerned and does his intelligent best to remedy the situation. But where it is clear that nothing could be done, he does not go on vainly weeping and wailing or complaining and cursing. Be it an incurable cancer or the threat of an imminent nuclear holocaust, he does all that that is possible for him to do, either by himself or in concert with others, and is ready for any degree of sane self-sacrifice; but, if all these fail, he will not on that account sink down crushed, thinking that all is for ever lost. For he is convinced that the inner core or dimension of himself and everything, the divine Spirit, is imperishable and indestructible while all that is of the world is bound to change or go sooner or later. He does his real best and then remains at rest and in peace.

An energetic and enthusiastic American young man, eagerly looking for a job, was being interviewed for the post of a railway pointsman. The grilling began: 'Now, young man, two express trains are coming at full speed from opposite directions on the same track. What are you going to do?' 'I shall change the tracks for one of them', was the prompt answer. 'But the point has jammed!' 'I shall hoist the signal arm up.' 'The keys for the signal are missing!' 'I shall show the red flag.' 'Some one has misplaced the flag!' 'Sir I always wear a bright red jersey underneath my shirt, and in such an emergency I'll immediately strip off the shirt and stand right on the track!' 'But, young man, it is night!' 'In that case, I shall call my sister!'...The interviewers were mystified.

'What for would you call your sister?' 'Just to say: "Come on Sis, and see the darnedest crash ever!!"'

When nothing else can be done and death or destruction is inevitable, the true spiritual seeker can remain a calm witness even of that, be it his own body disintegrating or the world coming tumbling down. No, not impotent fatalism or callousness this; it is a supremely wise detachment, an intense awareness that while all that is worldly is perishable, deeper and vaster than that is the Spirit which is imperishable, the ever-present existence and eternal peace and which is the real and ultimate ground and goal of man and the universe, of the atom and the cosmos. When everything considered 'nearest and dearest' is gone, he can still retreat or rise to the level of his Divine Self and rest there serenely.

Śiva, the great God of Hindu mythology, the legend relates, was sitting rapt in his usual great meditation. Suddenly he was disturbed by one of his followers who came running breathless to break some terrible news. Śiva's divine spouse, his most beloved and devoted consort Sati, had gone to her father's place, on her own, to take part in a grand sacrificial ceremony, though Śiva himself had been deliberately kept out of it. There, to her dismay, she found her own father running down her husband in most insulting and abusive terms, right in her presence. Unable to bear the humiliation, she had immolated herself. 'Lord! Sati has immolated herself!', the messenger blurted out. Śiva did not jump up in all-consuming rage or sorrow. He wanted confirmation of the news before he took any step. 'Sati has immolated herself—really?' 'Yes Lord. It is, alas, true!' 'In that case' Śiva stated, with a serenity which the messenger was not prepared for, 'I can now continue my

meditation absolutely undisturbed!'—and quietly became reabsorbed.

This was the same Śiva who, out of his divine compassion for the world, had earlier equally calmly drank up the deadly poison which was about to destroy all creation. Śiva could remain unmoved by any kind of disaster since he was immovably established in his infinite, immortal dimension, the Divine Self, the true spiritual dimension of all.

Way of a medical practitioner

In whatever station of life he is placed, the true spiritual seeker has his own way of functioning, combining the rational empirical approach of science and the ennobling values and integrating power of the spiritual dimension. Suppose he is a medical doctor. Side by side with his professional competence and continual efforts to upgrade his knowledge, he will also attend to his patients with great patience, care and regard. He will not needlessly resort to drugs or surgery; but stressing the preventive side, he will try to educate the patient to improve his health by natural and safe means and proper life-habits, as far as possible. He will not subject himself also to needless pressure and strain, and resort to questionable means of getting relief in order to win public acclaim or make a fast buck. He will try to work at an optimum level so that while giving his best possible attention and care to the patients, he can still remain calm, relaxed and alert. This way he does real justice to his profession and the patients even if, thereby, their number becomes less than what his ambitions would go in for. When success in treatment and the patients' adoration come in abundantly, he will remain humble and detached, realizing that in curing and saving lives it is not merely his own skill and efforts but

also other factors, known and unknown, that have made it possible. When failure and censure come, in spite of having done his professional and personal best, then also he will not be upset. He will strive to make use of his profession as a means for self-education and improvement, self-purification and reverent service, and as a way of worshipping the Divine, the Divine that dwells in the hearts of all, himself as well as his patients and his staff. This need not involve the neglect of any of his legitimate needs. In the name of excellence or service, he will not over-reach himself, exert himself too much and end up distracted and frustrated. His medical ministrations will be flavoured by an inner detachment, humility and reverence and by outer dignity, cheerfulness and enthusiasm.

Way of a housewife

If the seeker happens to be a housewife, she will cheerfully manage the household, cook, serve and take care of her husband and children in a thoughtful and efficient way, avoiding all wastage—using minimum materials, equipment, time and energy. Intelligently and skilfully she will make use of modern scientific knowledge and proven traditional wisdom regarding nutrition, health and hygiene, and maintenance of the home. She will go about her tasks with inner serenity, and her graceful manners will make all concerned including herself happy. She will serve the members of her family and guests with simple yet nutritious and tasty dishes, with a loving heart and generous hand, but would never overfeed them in the name of hospitality or 'mothering'. She would not eagerly expect compliments nor sulk when they do not materialize. She will look upon her home as an abode of the Divine and the members of the family as gifts of the Divine, will take care of them devotedly, as an important part of her over-all spiritual life and

practice. She will think and feel that the Divine is the ever-present, inner and outer witness of all her actions and thoughts, and as such try to make them worthy of divine approval. Maintaining a clean and tidy home and being pure in her life and conduct, she will by her own purity, selflessness and dignity prove to be a potent force for the spiritual orientation and character-building of her husband as well as children. Finishing her really necessary tasks efficiently and expeditiously, she will save as much of her time, energy and thoughts as possible, and utilize them after making due allowance for rest and relaxation, for her personal spiritual advancement and also for helping her family members in their educational, cultural and spiritual progress.

Way of a businessman

If the spiritual seeker is an industrialist or business executive, he will try to adopt the most appropriate technology and techniques, not only from technical and commercial but also ecological and human viewpoints. By meticulous planning and prudent utilization of resources—natural and human—he will endeavour to make the undertaking both profitable and pleasurable, and that also not only for himself or the company but also for the staff and workers, and specially for the consumers—for the optimum benefit of all concerned. In the process, if more effort and sacrifices are needed, he will be the foremost to undertake them, convinced that that is the most fruitful and royal way to success, prosperity and industrial peace. This will be his solid service to the nation and his worship of the Divine. Maintaining his premises in a tidy and aesthetic way, as if it were a holy temple, he will also ensure that the items produced are quality products, dependable. His pricing will be fair and he would avoid extravagant advertisement

gimmicks and perquisites for himself or other company high-ups. Resisting the temptation for thoughtless expansion and greedy booking of orders, beyond the capacity of the company, he will invariably honour quality and time-schedules contracted for, after due deliberation. In this way he will combine science and spirituality in his profession.

Practical Vedanta

Thus for a true spiritual seeker, science is not something to be ignored, shunned or be afraid of; science would be a natural part of his quest for the Spirit, which stands for the one, whole integrating Truth. As he is concerned with truth and life in their fullest dimension, conflicts and confusions which may beset partisan advocates will not arise in his case. His thought, outlook and life embrace science and spirituality in their true sense. Shining examples of this may be found in Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda of modern times. Remarkable insights, inspiration and nourishment may be discovered in and through their magnificent idea and ideal of 'Vijñāna' or living Truth (which is also, by a happy coincidence, the Sanskrit term used by modern Indian languages for 'science') and 'Practical Vedanta', life of Truth. Utilizing reason and science appropriately as a flight of stairs, the seeker ascends to the roof, the Spirit, only to discover that both the roof and the stairs, as also the climber, are essentially of the same substance. That essential substance is the one all-pervading Existence, pure and radiant Light of Consciousness, the beginningless Beginning and the endless End of all matter, energy, life and thought; subtler than the smallest conceivable nuclear particle of modern physics and vaster than the mind-boggling cosmos of the astronomer.

In the authentic spiritual luminary, one

may perhaps discover the legendary or ancient 'alchemist' come true, one who has discovered the 'elixir of immortality' which is imperishable Existence, as also the secret of transmuting 'base metal' into precious 'gold'—the brute into an angel; the ignorant, selfish human into an enlightened, selfless and blessed divine being.

The spiritual seeker pursues the quest of Truth in a scientific way, methodically, rigorously correcting all possible errors, using his intellect habituated to deep reflection and constant discrimination. But the Truth he pursues satisfies not only his intellect and reasoning but also his purified heart and vigilant conscience. His 'science' is not just 'amoral'. It is based on the highest morality, transcends it and culminates in the 'Truth' which conduces and works for the highest good of all creatures. Never would he think of using science for self-aggrandizement or for dominating and destroying others, be they men, animals or plants. His Truth is that which liberates, bestows fearlessness and unbounded compassion and kindness, and provides motivation and energy for promoting the cause of universal freedom, peace and unity.

Thus both the 'scientific' and the

'spiritual' find a tangible though undefinable integration in an authentic spiritual adept. Science becomes the blessed means and the Spirit the sublime end. Later, science again becomes the medium of expressing the Spirit, in the form of Sri Ramakrishna's 'Vijñāna' and Swami Vivekananda's 'Practical Vedanta'. True science matures into spirituality, and a truly spiritual man is essentially a 'scientist'.

An insatiable thirst and a consequent search for truth in all its dimensions, a constant testing and self-correction, deep reflection and meditation on the object as well as the subject, a readiness to accept newer and even radically new facets and dimensions of truth, absence of egoistic and dogmatic assertions and haughty condemnations of what one cannot understand as irrational or superstition, a spontaneous and reverent urge to promote the good of fellow-beings, an irresistible longing to become free and fearless at heart—these are some of the characteristics we may discover in one who is a scientist and a spiritual seeker in one. He adopts scientific means and attains spiritual ends; and this essay is primarily addressed to those who, in whatever manner, subscribe to such an ideal.

THE CHALLENGE OF VEDANTA TO AMERICAN WOMEN—II

ANN MYREN

For most women and men marriage is an unavoidable commitment, but their lives must still have a spiritual basis. Swamiji recognized this and wrote to Mary Hale in 1896, 'You are perfectly right now—marriage is the truest goal for ninety-nine per cent of the human race.'²⁴ As a

prophet, Swamiji's task was to tell people how to act, what to strive for, to clarify the real goals in life. If wedlock is to be the condition of most of the people, then marriage must somehow be connected with spiritual goals. Only then can we have social conditions which allow the optimal development of the individual.

How can marriage help men and women attain the primary goal of life, spiritual knowledge? Swamiji went right to the

²⁴. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1956), Vol. 6, p. 372. (Hereafter referred to as CW with date of edition, volume and page.)

heart of the matter when he said that 'self-sacrifice, indeed, is the basis of all civilisation.'²⁵ It is the basis of marriage, too. Self-sacrifice means renunciation and selflessness ; it is the key to all relationships in society. 'The formation of society, the institution of marriage, the love for children, our good works, morality and ethics are all different forms of renunciation', Swamiji wrote to Mary Hale in 1896.²⁶ We renounce selfishness, egoism, hatred and other negative human tendencies, in order to create a society which allows the individual person the greatest development.

For those who have not committed themselves to a life of strict renunciation, either internal or external, marriage is the appropriate course, but ideally it should never be based on purely selfish interests. Marriage, like single life, must encompass the ideals of spiritual life. Now, when a woman marries, one of two roles will be dominant in her life: she will be viewed either as a wife or as a mother. Of the two ideals, wifedom and motherhood, Swamiji pointed out that the idea of being a mother dominated Indian society while the idea of being a wife dominated the West. He thought that the East and West could both gain by some adjustment in their ideals. India should give more consideration to the wife, and the West should give more consideration to the mother. He admired American men for their treatment of their wives. However, he thought that motherhood should remain the highest purpose for a married woman. We should pay particular attention to this idea here in America because motherhood has become a problem. We must examine Swamiji's belief that motherhood, not wifedom, is the highest ideal in marriage and see what individual and social benefits come from this change in ideals.

Bearing in mind that the purpose of life is the realization of the Infinite, Swamiji naturally sought in social relationship the experiences which would take the individual person toward the spiritual ideal. It is an ancient Indian belief that motherhood is more sacred than wifedom. Wifedom is always personal, but motherhood is the abandonment of personality, the core of renunciation.²⁷ There is always the touch of carnality in being a wife, even if the marriage is chaste, but there is never that association with being a mother. Now, the purpose of life for all, married or unmarried, mother, wife, father, husband, daughter or son, is to work toward renunciation. Being a mother is the highest ideal which marriage can offer. Ideally, she, the mother, is a model of renunciation. It is extremely important that children have the example of an unselfish, forbearing, loving mother, who raises her children with care and affection. This is because it is the mother who implants spiritual ideals in the children. And it is also the mother who gives to the child the first practical illustration of renunciation.

Swamiji's final opinion on the matter of marriage and wifedom was in a letter to Mrs. Bull written about a month before he died. He wrote that great respect for motherhood is necessary for two reasons. Motherhood sanctifies marriage and makes it inviolable. The two conditions, sanctity and inviolability, must be fulfilled before society can attain to the ideal of perfect chastity. Thus we can see the necessity for chaste women and chaste marriages. Marriage must be based on more than mutual attraction and love. If it is not sanctified, given a spiritual meaning or made holy, then there will be no great nuns or monks,

25. CW, 1974, 7:269.

25. CW, 1956, 6:378.

27. Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of the Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1912), Vol. 1, p. 89.

because the young will have had no practical lessons in renunciation.²⁸ The effect of the elevation of motherhood is to lessen the role that the attraction of sex plays in marriage. And the purpose of marriage is fulfilled with the commitment to family and the raising of children. In such an environment children will have an opportunity to understand the highest values of society, which are spiritual values.

Swami Vivekananda criticized that form of marriage which had for its purpose only individual pleasure. The result of such marriage is 'evil children, wicked and demoniacal.' And he observed prophetically that 'man in every country is producing these brutal children, and ... multiplying the police force to keep these brutes down'²⁹ According to him, it is the children who are born of lust who bring evil. In India the belief is that highly developed souls choose to be born of highly developed parents. We see this in the example of Sri Ramakrishna's having been born to extremely pious and spiritual parents and also in Swami Vivekananda's own life. Accordingly, the basis of marriage must shift from self-indulgence and fulfilment of sense enjoyment to a higher ideal, a spiritual ideal. Clearly, it was the Swami's conviction that the married have the most significant role in the regeneration of society. It could be said that the whole problem of whether there are good or evil people must be solved by mothers and fathers.

Of course, the Swami's own birth, which came about after devout worship and austerity on the part of his mother, gives us an indication of what he thought to be the best attitude of those desiring children. His mother fasted and prayed, performed austerities because she deeply desired the

birth of a son. When the Swami was born, she felt her prayers answered. What a wonderful beginning for a child, an answer to a prayer, a gift from God entrusted to parents for their loving care! Is it any wonder he said to American women:

The child must be prayed for. Those children that come with curses, that slip into the world, just in a moment of inadvertence because they could not be prevented—what can we expect of such progeny? Mothers of America, think of that! Think in the heart of your hearts, are you ready to be women? Not any question of race, or country, or false sentiment of national pride.... Do you pray for the children to come? Are you thankful to be mothers or not? Do you think you are sanctified by motherhood or not? Ask that of your minds. If you don't, your marriage is a lie, your womanhood is false, your education is superstition, and your children, if they come without prayer, will prove a curse to humanity.³⁰

The Swami confronted American women with bold, powerful words and ideals. We must ask ourselves, was Swami Vivekananda right? Do American women think themselves sanctified by motherhood? Or more directly, *should* American women think themselves sanctified by motherhood? Should women think themselves blessed by becoming mothers? Unquestionably, millions do; but other millions do not. It cannot be denied, there are millions of good people in this land who raise fine human beings; we cannot quibble about that. Many children are deeply desired, many are prayed for. But the question is, what is the state of the national ideal of motherhood?

There is a great deal of confusion about the ideal of motherhood in the United States today. We find on television the image of the 'super mom', a woman, dedicated to husband, family, children and job, who conveys the message that all of

28. CW, 1959, 5:179-80.

29. CW, 1960, 3:408-9.

30. CW, 1955, 8:60.

these tasks can be done expertly by one woman. Then we often find a rather derogatory implication when people say, as American as mom and apple pie.' Other messages about mother are sent to the public regularly. She gains status when she earns part of the family income, but not so much as to be a threat to the husband. When mother as wife becomes middle-aged, she can be discarded for a younger woman. Or she can dump her husband for a life of independence or a new mate. For some women it is all right, if not preferable, to have children out of wedlock. Apple pie may be in good shape, but mom certainly is not. Is it any wonder in this materialistic society that the young people do not really know how to shape their lives ?

Swami Vivekananda's life with his own mother shaped his ideas about motherhood. As already mentioned, he was very much desired by his parents. He was a difficult child, no doubt, but whenever he became too obstreperous, his mother was able to bring him under control by pouring cold water on his head and saying the name of Śiva. When little Naren heard the name Śiva, he knew he had to behave. So we see that Bhuvaneshwari, his mother, set limits for him, as all good parents do. Also she saw to it that he had a sound moral education at home. It is said, for example, that she taught all her children to be truthful even unto death, to be chaste, to be dignified and to respect the feelings of others. Another very important teaching for the future Swami was always to respect the liberty of others. He practised all these virtues throughout his life. This kind of positive morality, when taught by a mother, gives a child foundation for life. There was also one other effect Swamiji's mother had on him. According to his earliest biography, his mother was responsible for his intellect. He said, 'I owe my intellectual

life to my mother.'³¹ The Swami's assertion is supported by the fact that he was taught by his mother for the first ten years of his life.³² Now, anyone who has come into contact with Swamiji's intellect through his writings will surely be impressed by that statement. It really is rather awe-inspiring to think that behind the vast, brilliant, sweeping intellect of the great Swami stood his mother.

Swami Vivekananda consistently taught that ideals were necessary for the best development of both the individual and the society. Thus to have better mothers and, through them, better children, the ideal of motherhood must be understood and practised. First, a mother must have 'ownership' of her own body. Actually in the nineteenth century there was a movement among women for 'ownership' of their bodies.³³ A woman should feel that her body is her own and has a high purpose ; it is not solely for sense pleasure. The purpose of motherhood is the highest in the world, and should thus receive the respect of all persons. It is the mother who brings us into the world, who shapes our lives, who gives us our ideals. It is she who nurtures the body of the child, and it is she who can control the circumstances of conception which, according to Hindu belief, dictate the kind of soul born to parents. That is why Swamiji asked if the women of America were ready to be mothers. Already, at the time when he was in the United States, materialism and its concomitant, sense pleasure, were the dominant values. Otherwise, would the

31. Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1, p. 86.

32. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 3rd. edition, 1984) Part Two, p. 421.

33. William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 89.

prophet Vivekananda have confronted the women of America with such critical observations ?

The very nature of the tasks which prophets come for are determined by the times in which they appear. The conditions of the world in different epochs call forth these God-men to bring power and ideals to humanity which will make possible beneficial changes for individual persons and for society. Now, Swami Vivekananda came at a time when America seemed to be approaching the height of her powers. Industrialization was under way, slavery had been ended, women were active and contributing to society. In general the twentieth century augured well for the future of America. However, there were serious problems too. First, industrialization which improved the standard of living also contributed to the breakdown of the family. Large families were no longer valuable to a non-agrarian society, and the size of the family began to shrink resulting in a more mobile labour force. Industrialization also encouraged the employment of women outside the home, causing further changes in the family. If any institution has been battered in America in the twentieth century, it is the family. Second, two major world wars caused great social disruption, tremendous suffering, and ushered in many social changes. The general morality of the nation suffered as a result of the First World War. The 'Roaring Twenties' signalled to many people that the old conventions between the sexes were out and a new looseness regarding sexual behaviour was acceptable. The Second World War further emphasized the trends already started by the first war. Following on the heels of the second war came the birth control pill, which brought a revolution in sexual behaviour throughout society. We have not in the least begun to cope with the changes in sexual attitude in

our permissive society. If the birth control pill was the innovation of the 1950's, the revitalized women's movement was the innovation of the 1960's. Women now are faced with all kinds of choices which they never had before: equal education, equal freedom in matters of sex, and equal employment outside the home. It is no wonder the roles of women and men are in total disarray. There simply has been too much change too fast.

It is in times like ours, when society seems to have lost its way, that prophets come. If there is no problem, there is no prophet. Prophets come to reestablish *dharma*, goodness and righteousness, the things which hold society together. Although the precise forms of the problems, which would beset America in the twentieth century, may not have been known to Swami Vivekananda, it is apparent from his message to Americans that he knew what was ahead for America. And he gave his message to American women based on his own prophetic knowledge. The first part of Swamiji's message to American women affirmed already existing qualities that would help women to raise themselves spiritually. He saluted American women, praising their virtues; they were spiritual in the highest sense, pure, learned, free, energetic, independent. In short, when Swamiji became acquainted with the women of America he saw a great future for them, yet he also became, as we have seen, sharply critical of them. When he was in India in 1897, Swamiji was sent newspaper clippings from America which criticized his statements about American women.³⁴

The Swami taught about the need for excellent mothers, the need for chastity, and the need for spiritual life. But he really summed up his whole message in

34. CW, 1959, 5:133.

one short phrase, 'The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence.'³⁵ Independence is the cardinal idea in Swamiji's teaching for women in this new age. It is independence on which all of the other virtues hinge. However, independence, as Swami Vivekananda viewed it, was not just economic or social which is the type of independence lauded by women's groups today in America. Swamiji went much further, right to the root of the problem, and advocated the kind of independence which is the source of all independence. He taught the doctrine of the Self which declares that the individual person is the whole of God or Brahman. From this truth we see that women by their very nature are independent. A woman who manifests her real nature necessarily manifests independence; that is, she manifests the Self. This is the spiritual ideal for women in this new age.

Do you realize how earth-shaking his message of independence is? After eons of patriarchy and dependence, of women being secondary to men and often at their mercy, Swami Vivekananda advocated that women declare their independence from men. Of course he starts at the spiritual level, not at the material. What he is telling women to do is to realize the Self, or Brahman, and if they do that, they will have strength, courage, energy; they will have gone beyond sex distinctions and will be able to show what true womanhood is. All the problems in society will take on a new perspective when they are tackled by women of spiritual realization.

Some women have already taken up lives solely devoted to these realizations and others will surely do this, and they will act as models for other women. These women who are secure in their independence and totally dedicated to spiritual

living will establish and administer convents, the purpose of which is the realization of God.

A second, much larger group of women who work in the world, will do so leading lives of purity, and pursuing spiritual goals. It is these two groups of women who will be able to demonstrate to other women the meaning and value of independence. These women must go beyond the body and the mind to the knowledge of the Self and become 'real women' to use the Swami's words. They will be the often invisible agents of change in the society. By manifesting the highest spiritual ideals, they call to the attention of others the social necessity of the virtues of purity, chastity, forbearance, unselfishness, renunciation, and a host of other essential qualities. Remember, Swamiji said, 'Society must pay homage to truth or die.'

One time when Swamiji was at Belur Math in 1901, he talked extensively about Indian women and the need for a convent for them. He outlined the purpose of and training in such a convent. Although he was talking about Indian women, his concluding statement is universal; it has meaning for all women. He pointed out the fact that in the highest truth of Parabrahman there is no distinction of sex. Sex distinctions are perceived on the relative plane, and the more we raise our consciousness, the less we will be aware of sex distinctions. When we finally attain the undifferentiated Brahman, then the ideas of man and woman will vanish. Swamiji pointed out that this was actually observed in the life of Sri Ramakrishna who reached states of consciousness where the perception of sex differences was absent. Thus we may conclude, the Swami said, that in truth, in the *real nature* of a man or woman, there is no difference. The Swami ends this conversation with his disciple by saying, 'if one amongst the women became

35. CW, 1955, 8:198.

a knower of Brahman, then by the radiance of her personality thousands of women would be inspired and awakened to truth, and great well-being of the country and society would ensue.³⁶ From this we can conclude that what America needs are women who will devote themselves to the realization of Brahman: what we need even more are women who actually realize Brahman.

Now, we know that all women are not going to take up a life devoted solely to spiritual ends and pursue single-mindedly the realization of the Self. Most women will marry and raise families. But these women also must be devoted to spiritual truth. One of their tasks is to spiritualize marriage. In order to do this there are certain understandings about themselves they must have. For example, they must know what independence is, for it is women who must create the conditions of the family. Further, a woman must conceive of herself as the spiritual Self, and not as body. As Swamiji said, marriage must be sanctified; it must be made holy; it must lead wives and husbands to spiritual growth. Families must develop where the children see by example the practice of spiritual virtues.

^{36.} CW, 1974, 7:216-19.

Forbearance, renunciation, love, dispassion, purity, chastity must all be living values if we expect young people to struggle for spiritual self-realization. Just as Swamiji said, there will be no great nuns or monks unless marriage is based on something more than mutual attraction and love. Marriage must be given spiritual meaning; it must be sanctified.

Swami Vivekananda said, 'The new cycle must see the masses living Vedanta, and this will have to come through women.'³⁷ Now the question is: can American women fulfil the Swami's prophecy? Are they to bring a new age to humanity? Are they ready to give up the tired and worn-out ideas about themselves that have been drilled into them from time immemorial? Are they ready to give up patriarchy and dependence for equality and independence? Are American women ready to give up their dependence on the body and the mind; to stand as independent women and to seek the truth about themselves? Are American women ready to be pure Spirit, to be the Self, and to live their lives by that truth? If they are, then the new age is dawning.

(Concluded)

^{37.} *Ibid.*, p. 95.

THE LADDER OF SPIRITUAL ASCENT ACCORDING TO JAINISM

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

In the mystic literature of almost all the major religions of the world, the stages through which a spiritual aspirant advances from the lowest to the highest level of spiritual attainment are found described in greater or lesser detail. Apart from their theoretical importance, such descriptions have great practical value. They help an aspirant to assess his progress, to determine

where he stands on the ladder of perfection, to see the next step ahead and to undertake necessary means to climb on to it. However, the descriptions of spiritual unfolding vary from one religion to another, and even from one author to another, since they depend upon the spiritual technique employed. For example, the progress of a spiritual aspirant

practising the Yoga of Patañjali is assessed according to the depth of concentration achieved, while the devotional schools determine a soul's progress according to its proximity to the Lord. Jainism lays great stress on moral life and conquest of passions. The progress in this religion, therefore, is determined on the basis of the degree of moral perfection achieved.

According to Jainism, each soul is inherently pure, conscious, blissful, omniscient and omnipotent; but, owing to past karmas, its inherent perfection is concealed. The task before the aspirant is to prevent the accumulation of new karmas (*saṁvara*) and to remove the already accumulated ones (*nirjara*). To the extent the karmic covering is made thinner, the light of the soul shines forth, just as the sun shines with all its glory the moment fog is removed. Since karmas are also responsible for moral imperfections, spiritual progress is determined by the extent of the removal of karmic impurities. A brief account of the karmas as described in Jainism is therefore imperative in this context.

*Karmas according to Jainism*¹

Karmas are classified into eight main types, four of which are *ghātin* or obscuring and four *aghātin* or non-obscuring. The four *ghātin* karmas are *jñānāvaraṇīya*, *darśanāvaraṇīya*, *mohanīya* and *antarāya*; they obstruct the soul's infinite knowledge, faith, bliss and power respectively. The four *aghātin* karmas are *āyus*, *nāma*, *gotra* and *vedanā*; they determine the soul's longevity (period of embodiment), personality, species and the experience of pleasure and pain in a given span of life; they however, do not obstruct the soul's

perfection. From the point of view of spiritual ascent, *mohanīya* karmas are the most important. These are twenty-eight in number and are classified into two main categories: *darśana mohanīya* and *cāritra mohanīya*. The *darśana mohanīya*, three in number, obstruct the faith and right attitude of the soul and are responsible for keeping it at the three lowest rungs of spiritual ladder. The twenty-five *cāritra mohanīya* karmas prevent the soul from following right conduct and are responsible for desires and passions and for various grades of immoral conduct. These are of two types: those responsible for sixteen *kaṣāyas* and those responsible for nine *no-kaṣāyas*. There are four basic *kaṣāyas*² or evil tendencies or passions: anger, egoism, deceit, and greed or attachment (*krodha*, *māna*, *māyā*, *lobha*).³ Each of these has four degrees.

1. *anantānubandhin*—intense deep rooted and permanent.
2. *apratyākhyāni*—voluntary and uncontrollable.
3. *pratyākhyāni*—voluntary and controllable.
4. *saṁjvalana*—mild, in seed form only. When a person neither considers anger etc. as evil nor abstains from acts prompted by them, he is said to have *anantānubandhi* karma, since it would entail *ananta* or infinite bondage. Next, although one may not justify one's evil tendencies, when owing to long-standing habit they become instinctive and uncontrolled, they are said to belong to the second degree known as *apratyākhyāni*. When, however, one is

2. *Kaṣāya* is generally translated as 'passion'. We have, however used both 'passion' and 'evil tendency' for it.

3. In Jainism the words *māyā* and *lobha* have connotations which are different from those in Vedānta. *Māyā* means deceit and crookedness of thought, word and deed. *Lobha* means greed as well as attachment.

1. See chart at the end of the article.

able to control them at will, they are called *pratyākhyāni*. Finally, when these passions persist only in their seed form, without external manifestation, they are called *saṁjvalana*. The task before the aspirant is to overcome these passions by degrees.

There are nine *no-kaṣāyas*, the quasi-passions which can stimulate the production of *kaṣāyas* or passions. These include three types of sex desires (called *veda*) and laughter, attachment, aversion, fear, sorrow and hatred (*hāsya*, *rati*, *arati*, *bhaya*, *śoka*, and *ghṛṇā*). These are eliminated only in the ninth and tenth stages, when most of the *kaṣāyas* are removed. The progress of the soul from the fourth to the twelfth step in spiritual development is determined by the elimination of *cāritra moharīya* karmas. In the thirteenth stage the remaining three *ghātin* karmas are eliminated. Finally the soul ascends to the fourteenth and final stage and attains total freedom when the *aghātin* karmas too are removed.

Jain scholars recognize two paths by which spiritual ascent can take place: (a) by destruction (*kṣaya*) and (b) by suppression (*upaśama*) of the karmas. These paths are called *kṣapaka śreṇi* and *upaśama śreṇi* respectively. The difference between them becomes evident in the first four stages and in stages from the seventh to the eleventh. An aspirant travelling by the *upaśama śreṇi* sooner or later slips down to the lower stages.

It may be pointed out here that there are two views regarding the importance of external renunciation and conduct. According to one view, internal renunciation, purity of intention, nobility of character and knowledge are all important irrespective of purity of action and flawlessness of conduct. One may commit the vilest crime, and yet remain completely free

from sin if one is totally unattached.⁴ On the same grounds, even though a householder may not be able to practise moral virtues to the highest perfection, he can still attain liberation. The other view, also held by Jainism, holds that although intention is important, action too is equally important, and perfection cannot be achieved unless both are perfected. Hence a monk alone can attain the highest perfection, although in exceptional cases a householder may also reach the goal. Even in such cases the conduct of the person must be immaculate irrespective of whether he takes monastic vows or not.

Among those who lay equal stress on both external and internal renunciation, some are of the opinion that external renunciation must be the result of internal renunciation or should follow it. Others hold that one may initially renounce externally and perfect one's conduct, even before inner perfection is achieved, as an aid and a preliminary step to the latter. It can be safely assumed that Jainism holds the second view.

Another subject intimately related to spiritual ascent is that of *dhyāna*, or meditation. In Jainism all thinking or *dhyāna* is classified into four types:⁵ *ārta* or sorrowful, *raudra* or violent, *dharma* or virtuous and *śukla* or pure. Of these the first and the second spring from anxiety, anger, violent desires and craving for sense pleasures, and are spiritually degrading. The third consists of purifying, religious thoughts. The fourth is pure concentrated meditation undertaken in very high stages of spiritual development. Each of these four dhyanas has four sub-types.

With these preliminary remarks, let us now study serially the various steps of

4. Cf. *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.38.

5. For details readers are requested to see the article 'Meditation techniques in Jainism' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, February 1985, p. 68

spiritual ascent which in Jainism are called *guṇa-sthānas*.

1st stage: *mithyātva guṇasthāna*

Mithyātva, or state of ignorance of or perverted attitude towards one's real nature, duty and aim of life, is described in detail in Jain literature. This is the lowest rung of the ladder and a person standing here cannot be considered a Jain, since he lacks even a basic understanding of the path. He has erroneous notions about reality and mistakes untruth for truth, adharma for dharma and vice-versa. He is extrovert, sensuous and strives for sense-enjoyments which he considers the goal of life. He has no moral guidelines. Psychologically, he is overpowered by desires and passions, and possesses to an intense degree anger, greed, egotism, and deceit. Another feature of a person in this stage is bigotry, narrowmindedness and obstinacy regarding his erroneous beliefs. He has either no intellectual capacity to reassess his preconceived notions, or lacks the willingness to modify them.

Most worldly people belong to this *guṇasthāna*. Some may in due course awaken to the right attitude and gradually advance towards perfection. This stage also includes materialists and those who do not accept a spiritual goal of life, though they may be morally more advanced than mere brutes.

Right attitude (*samyag-darśana*), right knowledge (*samyag-jñāna*) and right conduct (*samyak-cāritra*) are the three pillars of Jainism. In the *mithyātva guṇasthāna* all these three are obstructed. When right attitude and faith awaken, the individual ascends to the fourth *guṇasthāna*.

4th stage: *avirata-samyag-dṛṣṭi guṇasthāna*.⁶

As the name suggests, the individual in

6. The second and third stages will be dealt with after the 4th.

this stage gains right attitude (*samyagdṛṣṭi*) towards reality and about one's own nature and aim of life but is not able to abstain from undesirable actions (*avirata*). This stage marks the beginning of a righteous life and is given great importance in Jainism. The individual in this stage gives up his obstinacy and corrects his erroneous beliefs and notions. He gains right attitude although he is not able to act accordingly. He has right vision but his conduct is not in accord with his faith. He neither abstains from sense pleasures nor desists from causing injury to creatures.

Samyag-dṛṣṭi literally means right vision. Its original meaning was right attitude or vision regarding life and about oneself. However, in course of time the meaning changed to 'right faith', and thus traditionally *samyag-dṛṣṭi* means faith in prophets, saints, scriptures and the tenets of Jainism, without which none can be a Jain nor can one ascend to the fourth step of the spiritual ladder. This stage can be compared to 'conversion' or spiritual awakening and is understandably given great importance in Jainism, as in all other religions. Faith, undoubtedly, is the basis of all spiritual endeavour, and the greater the faith, the more the chances of spiritual advancement. Although a man with strong faith runs the risk of becoming bigoted, shallowness of faith makes one unstable and confused.

No one can ascend to the fourth *guṇasthāna* unless he has suppressed or conquered the *darśana mohaniya* karma and the *anantānubandhin* quartet of passions.⁷ If these are merely suppressed, the individual remains in danger of slipping back to *mithyātva*. In other words, if one accepts faith blindly, or for some

7. In the last analysis, karmas alone are responsible for passions, spiritual inertia and other defects. Hence the karmas responsible for them must be understood wherever not mentioned.

ulterior motive without being convinced of its significance, it will not remain permanent. If, however, faith is backed by deep conviction and understanding regarding the value of moral, higher life, it will remain stable.⁸

*3rd stage: samyag-mithyā-tva-dṛṣṭi
guṇasthāna*

The order of describing the *guṇasthānas* has been deliberately altered here since in spiritual ascent the soul reaches the fourth stage directly from the first and can come to the third and second stages only in descent. Thus the third and the second are stages of decline and can be experienced only after one has 'tasted' the right attitude of the fourth stage.

The third stage is a stage of doubt when an individual vacillates between right and wrong attitudes (*samyag-mithyā-dṛṣṭi*). Truth and falsehood both appear equally valid and the individual is not able to differentiate between them. Nor is he able to decide whether to lead a life of sense-enjoyment or of self-control and righteousness. According to scholars, this stage of indecision cannot last longer than 48 minutes (*antarmuharta*) when the individual either ascends to the fourth or descends to the second stage.

2nd stage: sasvāda guṇasthāna

This is a momentary stage of transition between the third and first stages when the individual retains the memory of the right attitude experienced in the fourth stage. Individuals in the first and second stages do only the first two types of undesirable thinking. *Dharma dhyāna* is possible only in the third and subsequent higher stages.

8. None the less, in most cases, faith is blind, and Jains are in no way less bigoted than the followers of other religious faiths. This is indeed paradoxical since none can be a true Jain without being liberal and broad-minded.

*5th stage: deśa-virata samyag-dṛṣṭi
guṇasthāna*

Although numerically the fifth, from the point of view of spiritual aspiration and struggle, this is the first stage. In this stage an individual becomes an avowed householder, a *śrāvaka* by taking the twelve vows of a householder. He gives up prohibited and immoral acts and restricts his sense-gratifications and selfish activities. He now labours to control these aspects of the four *kaṣāyas* which had become instinctive and over which he had no control (*apratyākhyāni*).

*6th stage: pramatta sarva-virata
guṇasthāna*

At this stage a Jain becomes a true spiritual aspirant. He ascends to a higher stage of moral development. He now spontaneously desists from those sinful practices which he had earlier tried to bring under voluntary control (*pratyākhyāni*). He takes formal monastic vows and becomes a *śramaṇa*. He is now a *sarva-virata*, one who abstains from all external sense-gratifications and from causing injury to creatures. But he is still *pramatta*, not sufficiently careful to avoid occasions of sin or sinful thoughts (*pramāda*).⁹ Owing to attachment to the body and obligation to maintain it, he may commit such acts as may cause harm to other living creatures. Evil tendencies and passions (*kaṣāyas*) persist in subtle form (*saṃjvalana*). For example, he may not get outwardly angry but cannot help getting irritated or annoyed mentally. However, a clear concept of the goal and abstinence from evil actions greatly helps him to gain strength for subtler harden struggles ahead. An aspirant at this stage

9. As many as 37,500 *pramadas* are described in Jainism.

may engage in activities like preaching and writing etc. for the good of others.

7th stage: apramatta samyag guṇasthāna

This stage is reached when an aspirant, now a monk, is able to detach his consciousness or atman from the gross physical body temporarily, and to relinquish the idea of agentship. He also gains sufficient mental alertness, *apramatta*, to avoid minor defects and lapses caused by carelessness. However, since identification with gross body is hard to overcome, the aspirant cannot stay longer than 48 minutes in this stage and slips back to the lower one. Most monks live oscillating between these two stages. Ultimately however, the aspirant is able to totally relinquish body-consciousness and ascend to the eighth stage.

In this *guṇasthāna* the aspirant totally gives up all thinking related to violence, untruthfulness, theft and hoarding, which constitute the four types of *raudra dhyāna*. He may still engage in *ārta dhyāna*, but most of his time is spent in *dharma dhyāna* and its various modifications. He is also able to do the first type of *śukla dhyāna*.

The journey from the seventh stage onwards proceeds in two ways depending upon whether the subtle passions (*kaṣāyas*) are suppressed (*upaśama śreṇi*) or destroyed (*kṣapaka śreṇi*). During the initial stages, suppression to some extent is inevitable, but sooner or later the aspirant will have to eradicate the subtle deep-rooted passions. If he proceeds on the moral path by the *upaśama śreṇi*, he will reach the eleventh stage from where he will fall down to the seventh. But if he roots out the passions, he will ascend to the twelfth stage directly from the tenth, from where there is no fall.

8th stage: apūrvakarāṇa guṇasthāna

This is a special stage and a very import-

ant milestone in the spiritual journey. It is characterized by a unique hitherto unexperienced (*apūrva*) joy and various spiritual realizations consequent on the reduction of karmic coverings. There is no more identification with the body, and among passions only subtle greed and deceit (*saṁjvalana lobha* and *māyā*) remain.

Another special feature of this stage is the acquisition of sufficient spiritual energy to undertake the subtle intense struggle ahead. The aspirant realizes in retrospect that the soul's journey so far had been made possible not so much by its inherent strength—though it had always tried to manifest its inherent powers—but with the help of favourable circumstances. The journey further on will predominantly be through self-effort rather than through destiny. For the first time the aspirant gets a glimpse of the desired goal and feels certain of its attainability.

The seeker's spiritual strength and mastery over karma manifest themselves at this stage in the form of a five-fold technique called *apūrvakarāṇa*, through which the aspirant rapidly reduces his karmas. The technique consists of:

1. *sthitighāta*—reducing the duration of fruition of past actions (*karma vipāka*);
2. *rasāghāta*—minimizing the intensity of fruition of actions;
3. *guṇa-sreṇi*—arranging karmas in such a way that their effect can be experienced even before the actual time of their fruition;
4. *guṇa-sankramaṇa*—transforming the nature of the effect of karmas, e.g. turning an evil karma to bear an advantageous fruit; and
5. *apūrvabandha*—minimizing the duration and intensity of fruition of karmas being performed in the present time (*kriyamāṇa karma*).

9th stage: anivṛttikarāṇa guṇasthāna

The aspirant ascends to this stage by suppressing or destroying all lustful desires, which in Jainism are called *veda*, and all passions except subtle greed.

10th stage: *sūkṣma saṁparāya guṇasthāna*

In this stage the remaining six *no-kaṣāyas* (*hāsya, rati, arati, bhaya, śoka* and *ghṛṇā* or laughter, attachment, aversion, fear, sorrow and hatred) are removed.

11th stage: *upaśānta-moha guṇasthāna*

This unfortunate, dangerous and necessarily impermanent stage is reached when the last of the twenty-eight *mohanīya* karmas responsible for subtle greed (*saṁjvalana lobha*) is suppressed. *Samjvalana lobha* is interpreted by some scholars as deep-rooted attachment to the body, and clinging to life. Since the subtle aspects of evil tendencies are merely suppressed, they reawaken and the aspirant slips back to the seventh stage after 48 minutes.

12th stage: *kṣīṇamoha guṇasthāna*

Aspirants progressing by annihilating the evil tendencies go to this stage directly from the tenth. This is the stage of moral perfection when all *cāritra mohanīya* karmas are destroyed, and is also called *yāthākhyāta cāritra*. The soul remains in this stage for 48 minutes only.

13th stage: *sayogī-kevalī guṇasthāna*

During the last part of twelfth stage *darśanāvaraṇīya, jñānāvaraṇīya* and *antarāya* karmas are also destroyed and the individual no more remains a struggling aspirant. He becomes a *kevalī*, an omniscient one, and obtains perfect faith, bliss and power. The four *aghātī* karmas however remain owing to which physical, mental and vocal activities called *yoga* continue but which do not entail bondage. A person in this stage is also called *arhat* or *sarvajña* and is equivalent to the *jīvan-mukta* of Vedanta.

14th stage: *ayogikevalī guṇasthāna*

With the natural exhaustion of *aghātī*

karmas which are responsible for the specific body, stipulated duration of life and experiences, the soul attains this stage of perfect freedom. He is now a *siddha*. The duration of this stage is the shortest, equivalent to the time required to pronounce five short vowels of Sanskrit alphabet. It is called *ayogī* because there is absence of all physical, vocal and mental activity, which in Jainism is called *yoga*. This stage compares well with the *videha-mukti* of Vedanta.

Summary

According to Jainism there are five conditions of bondage: perversity of attitude (*mithyātva*), non-abstinence from sense-pleasures and violence (*avirati*), spiritual inertia or carelessness (*pramāda*), passions or evil tendencies (*kaṣāya*) and threefold activity of the body, speech and mind (*yoga*). Of these *mithyātva* is first to go in the fourth stage of *samyag drṣṭi*. Lay and monastic vows in the fifth and sixth stages eliminate *avirati*. *Pramāda* is removed in the seventh stage. The destruction of the four *kaṣāyas* takes the longest way. Starting from the fourth stage it is completed in the twelfth stage. Finally the threefold *yoga* ends in the last stage.

Of the four types of thinking (*dhyāna*), *raudra dhyāna* persists up to the sixth stage. This means that even after taking monastic vows undesirable thoughts may persist. *Ārta dhyāna*, another undesirable thinking dominated by sorrow and depression may persist up to the eleventh stage. *Dharma dhyāna* starts in the fourth (and third) stage and reaches its culmination in the eleventh. The aspirant is able to do the first of the four types of pure thinking (*śukla dhyāna*) in the seventh stage but is able to take up its second type only in the twelfth stage. These two meditations are based on scriptural texts. In the thirteenth stage, the *kevalī* does the third type *śukla*

dhyāna, and liberation is attained by the fourth type in the final stage.

A review of the duration spent in each stage shows that the aspirant stays for the longest period in the fourth, fifth, and sixth *guṇasthānas*. These therefore are given great importance and described in greater detail in Jain scriptures. The eighth, although a very important stage, lasts for a short period only. The five-fold technique described in that stage can be applied repeatedly from the sixth to the tenth stage for the rapid elimination of karmas.

This brief review may be concluded by reminding the readers that descriptions are necessarily imperfect and these stages are better understood through practice and actual experience.

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2. Muni Amolaksiji, *Mukti Sopān* (Hindi) (Hyderabad: Sri Sukhdev Sahayaji Jwalaprasada, 1915).

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CULTIC ASPECTS OF BENGAL VAISHNAVISM

PROF. RANJIT KUMAR ACHARJEE

It is now well known that Caitanyaite Vaiṣṇavism, the prevalent school of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal, developed on the already existing vast canvas of the Vaiṣṇava faith of the Indian subcontinent, and theological legacy. But Caitanya with his intensely devotional and charismatic personality revitalized the faith and added a new cultic dimension to it. As we know, Caitanya himself wrote almost nothing, for he had no time or willingness to do so. Almost the whole of his time was spent in ecstasies or in conversation on divine love and *līlā*. God vision preoccupied him entirely, and his life itself was his message to mankind.

Like other religious movements, Bengal Vaiṣṇavism too has two aspects: philosophy and cult. The foundations of Caitanyaite philosophy were laid by the six gosvāmins of Vṛndāvan, especially Rūpagosvāmin and Jīvagosvāmin. The philosophical aspects of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism were discussed by

us in a series of articles published earlier in this journal. So here we confine our discussion to the cultic aspects of Caitanyaite Vaiṣṇavism.

The Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa episode associated with the pastoral life of Kṛṣṇa in the cowherds' village of Vṛndāvan forms the very texture of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, and its entire theology and cult centre on it. Of the four famous Vaiṣṇava schools of the North, Nimbārka and Vallabha sects propagate the worship of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and accord an exalted position to Rādhā. The followers of Viṣṇusvāmin are also saturated with the Rādhā-bhāva. But there is something very striking and innovative in the approach of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worship.

It is fairly well known that it was after his return from Gaya that Caitanya's yearning for God took the form of an intense love for Kṛṣṇa whom he regarded, not as a mere incarnation of Viṣṇu, but as

the Supreme Person known as the Bhagavat representing the Ultimate Reality. He cried for Kṛṣṇa in a spirit of total and absolute self-surrender and unswerving, passionate devotion. For him to realize Kṛṣṇa was the supreme end of human life and the only way to the attainment of the highest bliss. The means for the attainment of this goal that he taught was to love Kṛṣṇa simply for His own sake without any desire for earthly gain or heavenly reward. And he found in Rādhā's intense and unselfish love for her beloved Kṛṣṇa the whole secret of the means of realizing God.

But before his meeting with Rāi Rāmānanda on the bank of the river Godavari during his south-Indian pilgrimage, Rādhā and her divinity had not probably captivated Caitanya's emotional life, as it did in later years. From the records available it appears that Rādhā figured for the first time in Caitanya's devotional life after his engrossing dialogue on spiritual matters with Rāmānanda. It was Rāmānanda who highlighted a new mode of spiritual practice (*sādhana*): to adopt the attitude of a Gopī and meditate on the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa day and night. For the Gopīs of Vṛndāvan, Kṛṣṇa was the most lovable, perfect Beloved and the supreme embodiment of bliss. They abandoned everything and consecrated their existence to the love of Kṛṣṇa without any ulterior motive. Caitanya accepted this *gopīprema* as the ideal of God-realization.

Gradually, the joint worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa as the highest object of meditation came to be recognized as a special feature of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. In later years, great philosopher saints like Rūpa and Jīva wrote theological treatises elucidating the mystical and philosophical significance of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa relationship. In their doctrinal formulations Rādhā is essentially

not different from Kṛṣṇa: she is none else but the personification of the infinite potency of love and bliss inherent in the very nature of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa as the Bhagavān, the Supreme Reality, possesses three powers or śaktis: *svarūpa śakti*, *jīva śakti* and *māyā śakti*. Of these *svarūpa śakti* has three attributes, namely, Sat (existence), Cit (pure consciousness) and Ānanda (bliss); these act as powers and *hlādinī* is the power of bliss which is of the nature of infinite love. Rādhā as the *hlādinī śakti* of Kṛṣṇa is the most perfect embodiment of unalloyed joy and bliss. Bengal Vaiṣṇavas explain the apparent separation of Rādhā from Kṛṣṇa by suggesting that Kṛṣṇa in order to enjoy the blissful aspect of his own nature effects this separation. As a consequence, Rādhā appears as the eternal Enjoyed and Kṛṣṇa as the eternal Enjoyer.

They imply nothing but the self-love of God which divides through His own contrivance, His own self as the Lover and the Beloved. He, as the Perfect One, possesses within His own self infinite possibility or power of beauty, love and bliss; but how can He realise His self as such unless He creates a second to Him—a mate to Him—a Rādhā who is nothing but an embodiment of beauty, love and bliss that are implied in the very nature of God? His eternal Līlā (sports or love-dalliances) with Rādhā, therefore implies his eternal process of self-realisation through self-transfiguration. Rādhā serves as a clear looking-glass in which the Lord of bliss finds Himself reflected.¹

Caitanya placed himself in the place of Rādhā and longed with all the tormenting pangs of heart for union with his beloved Kṛṣṇa. Some pre-Caitanya Bengali poets like Jayadeva and Caṇḍīdāsa had eulogized *sakhī-bhāva*, rather than *Rādhā-bhāva*. *Sakhī-bhāva* is the attitude of the female companions of Rādhā; they did not

1. Dr. S. B. Dasgupta, *Aspects of Indian Religious Thought* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1977) pp. 195-96

aspire after union with Kṛṣṇa ; their sole longing was only to witness the playful eternal love-making of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa tattva is undoubtedly the central idea of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. But this divine love-episode has been symbolically interpreted to represent the spiritual yearning of the devotees to be united with the Divine. Rādhā's passionate love for Kṛṣṇa has been taken as an allegorical representation of man's devotional love for God.

The religious attitude of Bengal Vaiṣṇavas underwent some significant changes with the passage of time when Caitanya came to be worshipped as the dual incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in the same body. It is believed that Caitanya combines in himself the eternal bliss of Kṛṣṇa and the passionate love in its plenitude symbolized by Rādhā. During his stay at Navadvīpa after his return from Gaya and even before his sannyasa, his followers had looked upon him as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The *Caitanyabhāgavata* of Vṛndāvanadāsa gives several descriptive accounts according to which Caitanya himself declared his avatārhood. These narratives show the belief of his followers that he was no other than the incarnation of Viṣṇu who had descended here on earth for the salvation of mankind through *nāmakīrtana*. Caitanya was respected at Puri as a great lover of God, a saintly person ; no one tried to worship him as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. But Advaita Ācārya and Śrīvāsa unequivocally proclaimed that Caitanya was an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa in the aspect of Rādhā. According to them, the dual nature of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā incarnated in the person of Caitanya. From certain old biographical texts it appears that some prominent Navadvīpa disciples developed a doctrine named *Gaurapāramyavāda*, according to which, Caitanya was the highest reality and object of adoration. Narahari Sarkār of Śrīkhandā and his

disciple Locanadāsa gave a new orientation to the concept of the divinity of Caitanya by developing the doctrine of *Gauranāgaravāda* which conceived the devotees as *nāgaris* in love with Caitanya as *Nāgara*. Vṛndāvanadāsa however condemned it in unqualified terms. The Vṛndāvana Gosvāmins, in spite of their deep and unqualified veneration for Caitanya's divinity, never approved of this attitude of the Navadvīpa circle and avoided any discussion on this theme in their theological treatises.

It is gathered from *Caitanyabhāgavata* that, after the passing away of Caitanya, the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava community disintegrated and divided into at least three sub-sects, namely the followers of Advaita, of Nityānanda and of Gadādhara. During the last decade of the 16th century and in the beginning of the 17th century, attempts were made by Narottamadāsa to integrate these sects into a homogeneous creed. He also sought to reconcile *Gaurapāramyavāda* with the theological doctrines expounded by the Vṛndāvana Gosvāmins. In the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja also a similar attempt can be discerned.

Another striking feature of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism of Bengal is its treatment of Bhakti. The idea of Bhakti is as old as the Upaniṣads and the Mahābhārata, but Bengal Vaiṣṇavism added a new dimension to it. The ancient Vedic religion was predominantly a sacrificial religion and the cult of Bhakti was not a familiar phenomenon, though some resemblance to Bhakti might be found in the *R̥g-Vedic* hymns addressed to Indra and Varuṇa. R. G. Bhandarkar has tried to trace the origin of Bhakti to the Upaniṣadic idea of Upāsana or fervent meditation.² Bhandarkar's view

2. R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg: Trubner & Co. 1913) p. 23

notwithstanding, the word Bhakti has nowhere been clearly used in the principal Upaniṣads excepting the *Śvetāśvatara* where a spiritual aspirant is advised to cultivate *parābhakti*—supreme devotion to the Supreme Reality. The efficacy of Bhakti as a means of God realization was first emphasized in the *Gītā* and highlighted in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and *Bhāgavatam*. Through these religious texts, the cult of Bhakti received great prominence and gradually became an inalienable part of the Vaiṣṇava religious tradition.

The Vaiṣṇava Bhakti movement as it exists today was inaugurated by Rāmānuja in the South in the 11th century, was replenished and augmented by a host of other teachers and saints in the subsequent centuries, and culminated in the concept of Prema-bhakti propounded by Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. Unlike the earlier teachers who regarded Bhakti as a means to liberation (*mukti*), Caitanya and his followers taught Bhakti as an end in itself, the highest value (*parama puruṣārtha*), superior even to *mukti*. Bhakti as love for love's sake, untouched by knowledge or work is a characteristic feature of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. The doctrine of Prema-bhakti which Caitanya practised all through his life and popularized among all people, irrespective of caste, creed and sex, lost much of its purity and profundity in course of time and degraded into some sort of erotic sentimentalism. As a consequence the higher spiritual aspects of the cult of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa gave way to grosser form of erotic mysticism known as *parakīyaprema*—the unconventional love between a man and a woman not socially united by marriage. This new form was popularized through lyrical poems and was ultimately assimilated by the Sahajīyas into their cult. The Vaiṣṇava Sahajīyas gave Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa love-dalliance a new meaning and significance, and brought it down to the

mundane level in the actual love affairs of men and women. Gradually, the *parakīya* ideal of the Sahajīyas led to the emergence of the *Vairāgi-Vairāgiṇī* sect which caused a good deal of moral degradation in Hindu society and ultimately brought considerable disrepute to Caitanya-ism.

It is well known that Caitanya himself repudiated all form of eroticism and led the austere life of a monk. His attitude towards women throughout his life was above criticism. Indeed his was a spotless personality. Although he did not have any prejudice against married life, he was very strict and rigorous in maintaining the dignity and discipline of ascetic life. As regards the basic principles of sannyasa, Caitanya would not budge even an inch to accommodate any compromise. On one occasion, he scolded his dear disciple Haridāsa (junior)—popularly known as 'Choṭa Haridāsa'—for begging a quantity of rice from an aged Vaiṣṇava widow named Mādhavi Devī, with the intention of preparing some sweet delicacy for Caitanya. Although the incident was a minor one, Caitanya took it very seriously and ordered Haridāsa not to come within his sight. In order to set an example, Caitanya did not relax the punishment and ignored the pleadings of the devout Vaiṣṇavas to pardon Haridāsa. So stern was Caitanya's attitude that, as reported in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Haridāsa ultimately drowned himself at the confluence of three rivers at Prayag. This incident shows that Rādhābhāva, Kāntābhāva, Sakhībhāva in their degraded forms have little relation to the glowing image of that God-intoxicated prophet of purity, discipline and devotion. Neo-Vaiṣṇavism inaugurated by Caitanya has been alive in Bengal and its adjoining areas during the last five centuries. But it has lost its original lustre and vitality.

Though the cult of Caitanya is still dear to the heart of Bengal, the people of Bengal seem to have forgotten that majestic, assertive and powerful personality who faced the oppressive Kazi, his aversion to everything base, sensuous and erotic, and his intense and absorbing love for the Lord. Another very important aspect of Caitanya's Bhakti movement is his introduction of *kīrtana*, congregational singing of the names of Kṛṣṇa. One form of it, known as *nagar-kīrtana* or processional singing conducted on a grand scale in the streets, is an unconventional mode of worship which was unknown in Bengal before the advent of Caitanya. Its uniqueness lay in the fact that it involved mass participation thus affording an opportunity to break down the barriers of caste, creed and sex. *Nāmakīrtana* on account of its simplicity and devotional fervour, soon achieved tremendous popularity, and people belonging particularly to the lower strata of the society found in it a new mode of religious practice in which they could freely participate along with the members of other communities including the Brahmins, who so long had enjoyed a monopoly in religious matters. Centuries of humiliation and exploitation in social and religious fields by the priestly class had alienated a large number of lower-caste Hindus from Hindu society and made them embrace Islam in order to uphold their dignity as men and also to secure a social footing. In Caitanya's religion of love with its catholicity and simplified mode of prayer known as the *kīrtana*, quite different from the complicated Vedic practices and injunctions, they found a new light, a novel way of life, a universal fellowship. Thus they turned to Caitanyaism and hailed him as their emancipator. *Kīrtana*, especially *nagar-kīrtana* created an unprecedented spiritual ambience in

society which ushered in an era of spiritual resurgence and moral regeneration.

Caitanyaism is an epoch-making event in the history of Bengal and it influenced the religious history of north-eastern India in various ways. Though predominantly a religious movement, its influence on the life of Bengal was fairly widespread. It was instrumental in bringing about a renaissance in the cultural and social life of Bengal and provided an unprecedented stimulus to literary creativity. It infused a new life and vitality into the moribund mentality of the people of Bengal who had lost their manliness and self-respect owing to the oppressive subjugation under their Muslim rulers. In the literary sphere, Caitanya's life, activities and teachings enkindled the creative imagination of poets and writers, both Vaiṣṇavas and non-Vaiṣṇavas; as a result, there was a spurt of phenomenal growth in literary activities. There was a revival of art, and literacy spread among the different sections of the society. Low-caste Hindus regained their emotional bond with the mainstream of Hindu society. With the spread of Caitanyaite Vaiṣṇavism to different parts of northern India, especially Vṛndāvan and Mathurā, a close cultural and economic relation developed between Bengal and North India.

As a spiritual movement, Bengal Vaiṣṇavism stands out as another shining example of man's unceasing quest for God, his eternal yearning for love and bliss. It has shown the way to divinizing human love. Caitanya preached a new religion of love based on intense devotion, purity and simplicity, and also love for mankind. In modern society which is being increasingly deprived of love, owing to the dehumanizing effects of rationalism and materialism, Caitanya's all-embracing gospel of love has an imperative need and place.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

THE HOLY WATERS (*Indian Psalm-Meditations*): TEXT BY MARTIN KAMPCHEN; ILLUSTRATIONS BY JYOTI SAHI. Published by Asian Trading Corporation, 150 Brigade Road, Bangalore 560 025. 1984. Pp. XV + 142. Price not mentioned.

The first thing that strikes one about this book is its title itself: *Holy Waters*. There is nothing more symbolic of the unity and purity of life than water. Life is impossible without water. It admits of no division; it can be limited but not divided; the waters of the earth mingle freely in the oceans. From immemorial times water has been treated as holy, especially in India where it is liberally used in every ritual and ceremony. Some of the most beautiful hymns in the Vedas are those addressed to the waters and rivers.

The book under review is a collection of simultaneous reflections on some of the psalms of the Bible and choice passages from Hindu spiritual literature, illustrated with wood-cuts. The reflections are by Dr. Martin Kampchen, a West German scholar who has made India his home. The illustrations are by the renowned Indian artist Jyoti Sahi. Trained at the Camberwell School of Art in London, Jyoti Sahi has been trying to adapt Christian themes to India's spiritual and artistic traditions. He is perhaps the most creative and successful artist of this genre in India now. The motifs presented in *Holy Waters* have an ethereal quality reminiscent of the wood-cuts of Nandalal Bose.

The Meditations of Dr. Martin Kampchen are quite unique. They are centred on two sets of themes: the five elements and eight sentiments. These two have been interwoven in such a way that each element appears as a symbol of a couple of sentiments. Thus the element space has become a symbol of compassion and courage, air of fear and fury, fire of wonder and yearning, water of sorrow and peace. The fifth element earth (*prithvi*) is not associated with any sentiment here. In India Mother Earth has been traditionally associated with forbearance and tolerance. It is of course true that this sentiment is not included among the *nava rasa* of Indian rhetoric (*alamkāra sāstra*), but the omission of this virtue from the book may perhaps be unconsciously motivated in a Freudian sense, for toleration and forbearance are conspicuous by their absence in the Semitic tradition. This remark is not intended as a slur, for it is quite obvious that the chief purpose of this book is to strengthen interreligious understanding and intercultural solidarity. Dr. Kampchen has not only devoted several years to the study of Indian thought but has also been assiduously trying to interpret and popularize it in Germany. His meditations reveal the remarkable breadth and vigour of his mind. Most of the reflections are interesting and stimulating though a few are rather trite.

This book was originally published in German. The present handy volume in English is elegantly printed in a simple format.

S.B.

NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION, BELUR MATH RELIEF WORK DURING JUNE 86

Saurashtra Drought Relief: Besides daily distribution of drinking water to 5,107 families in Rajkot city, 14,805 kg wheat, 949 kg pulses and 6,171 kg molasses were further distributed through Rajkot Ashrama among 36,833 persons belonging to 220 villages of 10 Taluks in Rajkot and Surendranagar districts. Water is also being supplied everyday to 2,550 cattle. In 56 villages 71,387 kg green grass and 31,100 kg dry grass were distributed for the benefit of 8,782 heads of cattle. In addition, 20,260 kg wheat and 42,475 kg dry grass were sold at half-price to lower middle class families affected by the drought.

Maharashtra Drought Relief: Besides distributing 29,70,000 litres of drinking water in the drought-stricken Pune and Ahmednagar districts, our Pune and Bombay Centres jointly supplied 11,341

kg grains, 270 saris, 267 dhotis, 271 pieces bed sheets and 271 sets of utensils to 567 families in 35 villages in the said districts.

Karnataka Drought Relief: Through our Bangalore Ashrama two cattle camps have been organized at Tirumani and Valur villages of Pavagada Taluk in Tumkur district where fodder, water and medical facilities are being provided for 1,000 and 400 heads of cattle respectively.

Sri Lanka Refugee Relief: Sri Lanka refugees were given through our Madras Mission Ashrama milk (to 29,330 persons) and 15 kg biscuits, 84 vessels and 9 kg tooth powder.

Karnataka Fire Rehabilitation: In the wake of a devastating fire at Kottalam village in Tumkur district, our Bangalore centre has taken up the work of constructing 20 Janata houses for the fire-victims. Besides, fodder distribution centres have also been started in this and nearby villages.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Quarrels over Language and Land

Although the work of the Venkataramiah commission, appointed to settle the dispute between Punjab and Haryana, proved to be infructuous, the report submitted by it is memorable at least for the postscript included in it. 'When the whole of India belongs to all the Indians what does it matter if there is a slight variation in the limits of a state?' asks Justice Venkataramiah. 'India is no doubt an indestructible union of states but we have no indestructible states.... No boundary of a state is unalterable. It is just a matter of administrative convenience.'

The judge then touches upon the most vital issue in Indian polity today—language. 'It is really a curious phenomenon that people believe in the division of the country on the assumption that a strip of land belongs to a religion, to a language, or to a script. Sometimes people are made to believe that a religion owns a language. They are told that Sanskrit belongs to Brahmins, Hindi to Hindus, Urdu to Muslims, Punjabi to Sikhs and English to Anglo-Indians.' Even the settlement of boundary disputes does not eliminate the danger inherent in language chauvinism. This was pointed out by the judge: 'If any section of people living in one state is encouraged to look upon another state as its true homeland and its protector on the sole ground of language, then this would cut at the very root of the national ideal.'

Linguistic and religious fanaticism owes its origin to the belief that homogeneity is the only way to attaining prosperity. This belief, however, has no real basis. Did the expulsion of Indians from Uganda and Hindus from the erstwhile East Pakistan bring prosperity to those countries? Nor will the forced migration of Hindus from Punjab or of Sikhs from Delhi and other states will bring prosperity to those states. There are people who dream of a 'Hindu Rashtra'. But events in Belgaum and Assam and the now forgotten mass frenzy in Tamil Nadu during the 60s have given sufficient indications as to what to expect, should that dream ever come true. Even a casual study of India's past, made sordid by endless internecine wars, is enough to dispel the very urge to dream such foolish dreams. The time has come for all Indians to realize that the nation's strength lies in its linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural pluralism. When different religious and cultural groups live together, they cancel out one another's crests and troughs and thus bring about greater cohesion. Unity in diversity is not merely an inescapable fact of the Indian ethos but also a sound pragmatic philosophy of life.

This nation has already wasted lots of energy, money and human lives for most trifling causes. This diversion of human resources is a sign of escapism, the tendency to avoid difficult issues of nation building, which is deeply rooted in the collective unconscious of the people. Says Justice Venkataramiah: 'Economic well-being does not depend upon language or religion. It depends upon the capacity to work, the capacity to produce, and the capacity to save and to invest.... The prosperity, wealth and capacity of our people depend not on the size of the state in which they live but on how strong India is.' When will the people of India awaken to this simple truth? When will their shameful bickerings over language and land end?
