



Prabuddha Bharata

or

Awakened India

VOL 93 DECEMBER 1988



Editorial Office

P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt. Pithoragarh 262 524, U.P.

Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700 014
Phone: 29-0898



Rates of Subscription
(inclusive of postage)

	Annual	Life (30 years)
India, Nepal & Bangladesh	Rs. 20	Rs. 300
U.S.A. & Canada		
Surface Mail	\$ 14	\$ 200
Air Mail	\$ 28	\$ 450
Other Countries		
Surface Mail	£ 10	£ 150
Air Mail	£ 15	£ 250

Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

DECEMBER 1988

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No. 12

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

VISIONS OF DIVINITY

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

To those who have heard much of the personal appearance of the Swami Vivekananda, it may seem strange that it was not this which made the first outstanding impression. The forceful virile figure which stepped upon the platform was unlike the emaciated, ascetic type which is generally associated with spirituality in the West. A sickly saint everyone understands, but who ever heard of a powerful saint? The power that emanated from this mysterious being was so great that one all but shrank from it. It was overwhelming. It threatened to sweep everything before it. This one sensed even in those first unforgettable moments. Later we were to see this power at work. It was the mind that made the first great appeal, that amazing mind! What can one say that will give even a faint idea of its majesty, its glory, its splendour? It was a mind so far transcending other minds, even of those who rank as geniuses, that it seemed different in its very nature. Its ideas were so clear, so powerful, so transcendental that it seemed incredible that they could have emanated from the intellect of a limited human being. Yet marvellous as the ideas were and wonderful as was that intangible something that flowed out from the mind, it was all strangely

familiar. I found myself saying, "I have known that mind before." He burst upon us in a blaze of reddish gold, which seemed to have caught and concentrated the sun's rays. He was barely thirty, this preacher from far away India. Young with an ageless youth and yet withal old with the wisdom of ancient times. For the first time we heard the age-old message of India, teaching of the Atman, the true Self.

The audience listened spellbound while he wove the fabric as glowing and full of colour as a beautiful Kashmir shawl. Now a thread of humour, now one of tragedy, many of serious thought, many of aspiration, of lofty idealism, of wisdom. Through it all ran the woof of India's most sacred teaching: the divinity of man, his innate and eternal perfection; that this perfection is not a growth, nor a gradual attainment, but a present reality. "That thou art." You are that now. There is nothing to do but to realise it. The realisation may come now in the twinkling of an eye, or in a million years, but "All will reach the sunlit heights." This message has well been called, "The wondrous Evangel of the Self."

SISTER CHRISTINE

(Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda)

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is an attempt to show how Vedanta, the science of religion, interpreted by Swami Vivekananda, anticipated many modern discoveries, and how this Vedanta will help the scientists to evolve a more humanistic and holistic science, instead of a purely rational and experimental science.

DIKSHA OR INITIATION is based on the answers to the questions of the devotees which Revered Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, gave at the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, in 1987.

VIVEKANANDA TODAY is a thoughtful article on the relevance and need of Swamiji's ideas in the modern context. It is by Swami

Bhavaharananda, Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay.

THE EYE OF GOD is an interesting article on how deeper spiritual visions open in individuals through selfless work and intent meditation. It is by Margaret Bedrosian of the Department of Comparative Literature, University of California, Davis.

BACKWARD CLASSES: VIVEKANANDA AND GANDHI is a thoughtful article on the problem of the backward classes by Swami Devendrananda, Ramakrishna Mission, Narendrapur.

THE WAY TUKARAM REALISED GOD is by Swami Vipashananda, Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay.

VIVEKANANDA-VEDANTA: THE FULFILMENT OF MODERN SCIENCE

(EDITORIAL)

A shift of the centre of civilisation from the West to the East, and a growing importance of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in the West—these are the two prominent trends that sociologist P.A. Sorokin had discovered in recent times.¹ Indologist A.L. Basham said that it is Vivekananda who had initiated what is called 'the counter-attack from the East.'² It is the inundation of the ideas of Advaita Vedanta that Swamiji interpreted for

modern man in the language of modern science. This "Counter-attack from the East", this impact of the ideas of the mystic and monistic Vedanta which Vivekananda preached nearly a century ago, is being recognised by the today's writers on the development of modern science.

Michael Talbot in his book *Mysticism and New Physics*, says that the ideas on space-time-causation explained by Vivekananda in *Jnana Yoga*, are "interchangeable" with the space-time-continuum ideas first theorised by Herman Minkowski. Discussing Vivekananda's ideas a little further, Talbot writes, "Vivekananda further expresses a view that has become the backbone of

1. Edited by Swami Lokeshwarananda, *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, (R. K. Mission Institute of Culture, 1985), p. 11.

2. *Swami Vivekananda in East and West*, (R.K. Vedanta Centre, London), p. 214.

quantum theory. There is no such thing as strict causality.”³

To interpret Vedanta in the language of modern science was his “mission”, his “life’s work” as Vivekananda repeatedly told his disciples. Today A.D. Reincourt in his book on the confluence of modern physics and Eastern Philosophy, entitled *The Eye of Shiva*, admits, “From its modern awakening with Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, eastern mysticism has begun to adapt its revelations to the entirely different cultural framework proved by science and technology, without in any way sacrificing what is valid in its traditional understanding of the phenomenon itself.”⁴ The new discoveries of science are, in fact, bringing science closer to religion. Talbot writes, “Most importantly the new physics is offering us a scientific basis for religion. This is something new in the history of Western Civilisation, and its impact will certainly be felt in every aspect of our lives.”

We are listening to the echo of what Schopenhauer predicted in the last century on the epoch-making impact of the Vedantic mysticism of the Upanishads on the thoughts of the coming ages. He said, “In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. ... The world is about to see a revolution in thought more extensive and more powerful than that which was witnessed by the Renaissance of Greek literature.”⁵

Schopenhauer had made the prophecy before Vivekananda went to the West. It came true through the emergence of Vivekananda, and his scattering of Vedantic thoughts in the very West where science

had virtually dethroned religion. Will Durant wrote in his last book, *Lessons of History*, “Civilisation advances westward.”

* * * *

The first confrontation of science and religion occurred on the 1st of July, 1858, when the forty nine year old biologist Charles Darwin announced his epoch-making discovery, *Origin of Species*, to the Linnaean Society in London. The new discovery that man came not from Adam and Eve but from Apes, immediately aroused both “theological tempest” and “scientific controversy which testified to the strength of its demonstration.” A year after this, the Epoch-making book on *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, appeared on the 24th November 1859. The discovery showed to humanity, the “favoured races”, as Darwin called man, that the ultimate Favourmaker God, may not be the same that is projected by popular religions. In his autobiography Darwin wrote, “I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation. The fact that many tales of religions have spread over large portions of earth like wild fire had some weight on me.”⁶

At once it brought a furore in the religious world of London. A contemporary Londoner wrote, “Cardinal Manning declared Darwinism to be a ‘brutal philosophy—to wit, there is no God, and the Ape is our Adam.’ Protestants and Catholics agreed in condemning it as ‘an attempt to dethrone God’, as a ‘huge imposture’, as ‘tending to produce disbelief of the Bible’, ‘to do away with God’, and ‘turning the creator out of doors’.”⁷ Such are fair sam-

3. Michael Talbot, *Mysticism and New Physics*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 114.

4. A.D. Reincourt, *The Eye Of Shiva*, (New York: William Marrow and Co., 1981), p. 501.

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Mayavati Memorial Edition), Vol. III, p. 109.

6. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, (London and New York: Unit Library, Ltd., 1902), p. 462.

7. Edward Clodd, *Pioneers of Evolution*, (London: Watts and Co., 1903), p. 75.

ples to be culled from the anthology of invective which was the staple content of nearly every criticism.

Newton brought the idea of God as a Machine-man, a mechano-morphic God who runs the universe in perfect order. Darwinism destroyed even this God. Western men were thrown back on historical and comparative religions. Max Muller tried to show the origin of religion in element worship. Herbert Spencer tried to trace religion from ancestor worship.⁸ But these attempts failed. Western rationalists lost faith in religion. The clerics charged Huxley, "the Apostle Paul of Darwinism", of "Gross materialism."⁹

In the X-Club formed in London in 1874 scientists like Tyndal, Huxley and others openly rejected the church-religion and created the new "Church-scientific" and declared themselves as the "new bishops" of this religion. In 1896 Vivekananda came to London, and interpreted in clear, rational language of his lectures delivered in London, the basic ideas of Vedanta Philosophy, which are as follows:

1. *The Absolute* has become *the relative* through space, time, and causation. The Relative space-time reality is, in fact, nothing but the Absolute itself. Everything, therefore, is God or Absolute, in essence.

2. The Absolute cannot be two. It is one. Therefore, there is always a deeper underlying unity behind everything in this universe. This One or Unity has been described by the monistic Vedanta Philosophy as Advaita (Non-dual: A=Not, dvaita=two).

3. Matter is a form of energy. Mind is matter, only finer. Consciousness creates or projects mind and matter, the mental and the material universe. Consciousness is the primary cause behind all creation.

All forces are expressions of one single force, Prana; and all matters are derived from one basic matter Akasha.

4. The microcosm, the smallest particle, contains potentially the macrocosm, the universe, inside itself. Man, the microcosm, therefore, contains within himself, the potentiality of the Infinite Godhead.

This is expressed in the Vedantic way as Atman (the individual soul) is Brahman (the Infinite Self). All human evolutions, physical, intellectual, social, or spiritual, are consciously or unconsciously directed towards the manifestation of this Infinite Self in individual, or collective life. This Infinite Self is described, according to Vedanta, as Absolute Existence, Absolute Consciousness, and Absolute Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda). Infinite cannot be two. Therefore, the Absolute is sometimes expressed as one Consciousness (of which the myriad individual consciousnesses are but temporary manifestations), or One holistic Existence (of which all finite lives are only relative space-time-bound manifestations), or one Supreme Bliss (of which the finite joys of life are only fragmentary manifestations).

Sometimes, Vivekananda's language strangely anticipated the very words and ideas of Einstein spoken some twenty years later. Here is, for instance, an example:

"A straight line infinitely projected becomes a circle, it returns back to the starting point."¹⁰ When Vivekananda speaks of space-time, he also brings the idea of causation, and makes it clearer than Einstein's concept of space-time relativity:

"The Absolute has become the universe. By this is not only meant the material world, but the mental world, the spiritual world—heavens and earths, and in fact, everything that exists. Mind is the name

8. *Complete Works* (M.M. Edition), 6: 41.

9. *Pioneers of Evolution*, p. 91.

10. *Complete Works*, 4: 215.

of a change, and body the name of another change, and so on, and all these changes compose our universe. This Absolute has become the universe by coming through time, space, and causation. This is the central idea of Advaita. Time, space, and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when It is seen on the lower side, It appears as the universe. Now we at once gather from this that in the Absolute there is neither time, space, nor causation. The idea of time cannot be there, seeing that there is not mind, no thought. The idea of space cannot be there, seeing that there is no external change. What you call motion and causation cannot exist where there is only One. We have to understand this, and impress it on our minds, that what we call causation begins after, if we may be permitted to say so, the degeneration of the Absolute into the phenomenal and not before."¹¹

When Vivekananda speaks, "In the world of science, the forces are gradually narrowed down in search of one underlying force", he anticipates the Grand Unification Theory (GUT) dreamt of by Einstein, and partially realised first by Maxwell, and subsequently by Abdus Salam, Sheldon Glashaw, and Steven Weinberg. When he speaks the ancient Vedantic idea, "According to the plane of existence in which we are, we see the universe"¹², he strongly anticipates the revolutionary idea of quantum physics exposed in the idea of "Schrodinger's cat" or the Everetee-Wheeler interpretation of quantum physics, which considers external reality as the "observer-created reality".

But Vivekananda left nothing hazy or half-explained. In the four series of lectures on Jnana-Yoga, Raja-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, and Karma-Yoga, he explained all the aspects of the Advaita philosophy, anticipa-

ting all the questions that can be posed by today's materialistic philosophers of science. The new findings of science, he knew, are only modern discoveries of ancient Vedantic truths realised through the mystic meditation of seers. In London he said, "In the light of Vedanta you will understand that all sciences are but manifestations of religion, and so is everything that exists in this world."¹³ This religion which Vivekananda speaks of is the religion of Vedanta based on universal principles and not on persons or deities. Instead of sciences which are "materialistic and denouncing", Vedanta philosophy is "positive and constructive", said Vivekananda. The Advaita Vedanta philosophy is the science of religion according to Vivekananda which discovered "out of the old deities, out of the monotheistic God, the Ruler of the universe", "the Impersonal Absolute", the "oneness through the universe". To this Impersonal Absolute, Holistic unity, modern science is slowly converging.

Nineteenth Century science began with a triumphant journey of what Rupert Sheldrake, the renowned plant-physiologist of Cambridge, calls "traditional monistic materialism"¹⁴ which considers matter as the only and the ultimate reality. But since the discovery of quantum physics and relativistic physics, mind has become an equally powerful contender with matter, in the world of science. The new physics advocated what is known today as "interactionism" which asserts, in the words of Rupert Sheldrake, "mind or ego, soul, psyche, spirit, or conscious, self, somehow interacts with body (or matter) through the brain". This "interactionism", says Sheldrake in his latest revolutionary book on morphogenetic fields entitled *The Presence of the*

11. Ibid., 2: 130-131.

12. Ibid., 4: 207.

13. Ibid., 2: 116-117.

14. Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past*, (New York: James Books, 1st Edition, 1988), p. 211.

Past (1988), "is vigorously defended by a number of philosophers, including Karl Popper, and is surprisingly widely supported by scientists, including quantum physicists such as Werner Heisenberg, Wolfgang Pauli, and neurophysiologists such as Wilder Penfield, John Eccles, and Roger Sperry."¹⁵

In the conclusion of his latest book *A Brief History of time* (published in 1988), the well-known astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, who has made outstanding contributions about the origin of our Universe, says that most of the scientists so long were preoccupied with *What* the Universe is, instead of *Why* the Universe is. He admits that "science became too technical and mathematical for philosophers, or anyone except a few specialists."¹⁶ But he hopes, "however, if we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason, for then we know the mind of God."¹⁷

This final "answer", this "ultimate triumph of the human mind", which can unify mind and matter, sense-world and the supersensuous beyond, the many and the one, the Macrocosm and the Microcosm, the Absolute and the relative, the ultimate Godhead and the individual being, the Infinite Ocean with its myriad waves, the cosmic tree and its multidimensional leaves, lies, so far as human knowledge goes, in the monistic or Advaitic philosophy of Vedanta.

15. Ibid., p. 211.

16. Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From Big Bang to the Black Holes*, (London and New York: Bantam Books, April 1988), p. 174.

17. Ibid., p. 175.

In London, Vivekananda boldly asserted that man can never remain satisfied with the "how" of things. He must know the "why" of things. "This present, this expressed", he said in the West, "is only one part of that unexpressed. The sense universe is, as it were, only one portion, one bit of that infinite spiritual universe projected into the plane of sense consciousness. How can this little bit of projection be explained, be understood, without knowing that which is beyond."¹⁸

He predicted the inevitable emergence of the thing metaphysical in our investigation of things material:

"Take anything before you, the most material thing—take anyone of these most materialistic sciences, such as chemistry or physics, astronomy or biology—study it, push the study forward and forward, and the gross forms will begin to melt and become finer and finer, until they come to a point where you are bound to make a tremendous leap from these material things into the immaterial. The gross melts into the fine, physics into metaphysics, in every department of Knowledge."¹⁹

After 40 years of Vivekananda's preaching, Einstein admitted that physicists must take "intuitive leap"²⁰ in order to discover further frontiers of matter. American physicist William Press said that Hawking himself discovered truths about the edge of the universe by broad, mystic, "key overview ideas". A scientific writer thought that these ideas came to Hawking as "spiritual revelations."²¹

Today after nearly a hundred years later, modern science is returning to the religion

18. *Complete Works*, 4: 204.

19. Ibid., p. 4: 204.

20. Heinz R. Pagels, *The Cosmic Code*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), p. 41.

21. Swami Jitatmananda, *Modern Physics and Vedanta*, (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1986), p. 79.

and the Absolute God of the Advaita Vedanta. The "Wildfire" of Vedanta has indeed spread all over the world of science today not as "false religion" as Darwin feared, but as the only solution to the problems of modern science, as Nobel physicist Erwin Schrodinger asserted. Schrodinger's *My View of the World* and *Mind and Matter* were the first explosions that established the monistic or Advaita Vedanta as the only way out of the problems of science. Today by the end of 1980s at least ten similar books by scientists like Fritjof Capra, David Bohm, and Scientific writers like A.D. Reincourt, Gary Zukov, Michael Talbot, and others have virtually brought new waves of scientific-philosophic thinking, all of which converge to the central dictum of Advaita Vedanta with which Fritjof Capra concluded his best-selling book *Tao of Physics*: "Atman is Brahman; Brahman is Atman." This is the simple, "complete theory" which Stephen Hawking dreamt of, or the single, simple sentence of which physicist Wheeler thought as the solution of the problems of physics.²² In 1950, physicist Erwin Schrodinger brought the equation of ATMAN=BRAHMAN as the solution to the emerging problems of science.²³ "The greatest truths have been forgotten because of their very simplicity. Great truths are simple because they are one of universal application," said Vivekananda.²⁴

Gary Zukov, in the conclusion of his celebrated book on Modern Physics, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, writes, "The study of complementarity, the uncertainty principle, the quantum field theory, the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanism, produces insights into the nature of reality very similar to those produced by the study of Eastern philosophy." Zukov writes, "We

are approaching the end of science. ... The end of science means the coming of western civilisation, in its own time and on its own way, unto the higher dimensions of human experience." Zukov feels that "the physics of nature, like human experience, is infinitely diverse", and that "physicists are more than discovering the endless diversity of nature, they are dancing with Kali, the Divine Mother of Hindu Mythology." Zukov retells the old Indian story. Rama, the God, walks while Sita who is Maya, or God's veiling power, follows Him. Lakshmana, Rama's brother, a human being, who walks behind Sita, can see Rama or God, only in glimpses because of the obstruction by Sita. This is, according to Zukov, the journey of modern physics from "intellectual entrenchment" to "intellectual openness" which "invites the intellect to leap forward, though at great risk of present hegemony."²⁵ The hegemony of the three hundred years old classical science is virtually breaking today because of the new discoveries of quantum and relativistic physics, and the increasing impact of the ideas of monistic Vedanta on today's science.

John Dobson, the California astronomer-physicist, wrote in his book *Advaita Vedanta and Modern Science*, "Classical physics has given way to relativity and quantum mechanics. Our old notions of time, space and causation were wrong. The new map, based on relativity theory and quantum mechanics, arose, from a new understanding of causation—a new understanding of the nature of necessary interaction, in physical measurement, between the perceiver and the perceived, or rather, between the instrument of perception and the thing perceived. From this new understanding has come a sea-change in our

22. Ibid., p. 71.

23. Ibid., p. 71.

24. *Complete Works*, 6: 35.

25. Gary Zukov, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*. (New York: McGraw Hill Paperbacks, 1979), pp. 330-331.

physics on the basis of which it is now easy to square it with Advaita Vedanta. Swamiji said that science and religion would meet and shake hands. That time has come."²⁶

* * * * *

Is there any newness in Vivekananda's interpretation of the Advaita Vedanta? Probably there is. When Shankara appeared on the Indian scene, the Buddhist Nihilists were preaching everywhere that there is no God, and that everything in this world is transitory; and the Mimamsakas advocated only rituals for a happy living. Shankara accepted the illusory or transitory nature of things, but proved that this transitoriness can be felt only in the background of something that is permanent. That eternal substratum of this illusory world is Brahman, which is our real Self. The goal of life is to realise the Self. Shankara's final dictum was: Brahman alone is real while this world is illusory, and that all beings are in essence, Brahman.

When Vivekananda appeared in the West, the dominant philosophy was scientific materialism which believed in the reality of matter which could be tangibly felt by our senses. Anything mystical, or supersensuous, or God, was found unnecessary by science which itself became the new religion for the rationalists. Vivekananda established in the same way of Advaita that this very finite matter has infinity as its background. The second part of Shankara's dictum that each being is, in essence, Brahman, gained primary importance with Vivekananda. That is why he interpreted the Isha Upanishad as the deification of the world, or God in everything. That is why he interpreted the Katha Upanishad as macrocosm within microcosm. This was his own crucial realisation under

the peepul tree of Kakrighat near Almora. That is why, like his master Shri Ramakrishna, he saw in man not a transitory entity of flesh and blood, but the potentiality of eternal Godhead. That is why, his Vedanta became practical, positive, and dynamic in day to day life. According to the orthodox school of Shankara, in the higher levels of consciousness this phenomenal world ceases to exist, while in the Vivekananda-Vedanta this world is deified.

There is yet another special feature in Vivekananda's interpretation of the ancient Vedanta philosophy. Till then Vedanta philosophy had remained divided into three watertight systems: the Dvaita philosophy of the school of Madhva, the Vishishtadvaita of Ramanuja, and the Advaita philosophy of Shankara. The exponents of each of these three streams of Vedanta philosophy always tried to eliminate the other two and to establish its own validity. Vivekananda, following the footsteps of his Master, Shri Ramakrishna, interpreted Vedanta philosophy for the first time in history, in a comprehensive way which included all these three streams of thought. By Vedanta, Vivekananda always meant all the three schools of Vedanta: dualism, leading naturally by the process of reason to qualified monism, and qualified monism culminating in the same way in the Advaita. Dualism, qualified monism and non-dualism are only three gradually ascending stages of vision which unfold themselves as man develops finer and finer intelligence.

This was not only a historic achievement in the field of Indian philosophy but it was also the beginning of a far more comprehensive philosophy of life, for Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta negated nothing, either of heaven or of earth, but made a bridge between the two. Said Vivekananda: 'Develop one idea at the expense of all the rest.' The modern way is 'harmonious development' ... 'He who gets the whole

²⁶. John Dobson, *Advaita Vedanta and Modern Science*, (Chicago, Illinois, Vivekananda Vedanta Society, 1983), p. 3.

must have the parts too. Dualism is included in Advaitism (monism).²⁷

Popular religions founded on a Person could not accept science which is based on universal laws or principles. Vivekananda for the first time made reason, and universally acceptable principles, the basis of the religion of Vedanta, and made it compatible with rational sciences. He made it a philosophy which transcends reason but contradicts it never. "Philosophy is empty if it is not based on science. Science discovers, philosophy interprets," said Einstein.²⁸ Today scientists may turn to Vivekananda's ideas for correctly interpreting their apparently unexplainable findings like E.P.R. Paradox, Schrodinger's Cat, Max-Born's probability wave, or even Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.

* * * * *

What gives Vivekananda's words a higher validity is not mere intellection, but the power of realisation that backed every word spelt out by him. Advaita Vedanta was not an intellectual preoccupation with him like that of a university professor. Like Buddha and Shankara he, too, spoke with authority, with a power behind every word that transformed his listeners. To the American disciples he told, "What you only grasp intellectually may be overthrown by a new argument; but what you realise is yours for ever. Talking, talking religion is but little good. Put God behind everything—man, animal, food, work; make this a habit." With a prophet's confidence he said, "We first perceive, then reason later. We must have this perception as a fact, and it is called religion, realisation."²⁹ Again he said, "Cogitating is applying reason and establishing this knowledge in

ourselves by reason. Realising is making it a part of our lives by constant thinking of it."³⁰ And this is Vivekananda's imperative to the modern world of scientific thought.

William James, the greatest philosopher-psychologist of nineteenth-century America, who hailed Vivekananda as "Master", wrote, "The paragon of all monistic systems is the Vedanta Philosophy of Hindusthan, and the paragon of Vedantist missionaries was the late Swami Vivekananda. ... We all have some ear for this monistic music: it elevates and reassures. ... Oneness overcomes *moral* separateness at any rate. In the passion of love one has the mystic germ of what might mean a total union of all sentient life. This mystical germ wakes up in us on hearing the monistic utterances, acknowledges their authority, and assigns to intellectual consideration a secondary place."³¹

Mr. A.D. Reincourt finds that the "main emphasis" in the Eastern mystical view is "to yoke or bind together scientifically all the elements of the personality which are normally autonomous and scattered; also to put to an end the intellectual automatism which characterises normal day-to-day living." And he finds in Vivekananda the reason for this basic Eastern view. Mr. Reincourt writes, "As Swami Vivekananda put it, 'All the different steps in Yoga are intended to bring us scientifically to the Superconscious state or Samadhi.'³² It is at this superconscious state (not the conscious or unconscious, as is known in the West) that man feels the unity of existence. Einstein equated matter with energy. Vivekananda explained that matter is only another form of mind and mind is only

27. *Complete Works*, (1972), 7:87.

28. William Hermanns, *Einstein: The Man and the Poet*, (Branden Press, Inc. Brooklyn Village, M.A. 1983), p. 144.

29. *Complete Works*, Vol. VII, pp. 77, 75.

30. *Ibid*, p. 38.

31. Shankari Prasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsha*, (Bengali), Mandal Book House, Vol. II, pp. 41-42.

32. *The Eye Of Shiva*, p. 142.

finer matter: "Now that which we call matter and mind are one and the same substance. ... Mind at a very low state of vibration is matter. Matter at a high rate of vibration is what is known as mind."³³ Vivekananda called Newton and Galileo "prophets of physical science", and the Upanishadic seers "prophets of spirituality".³⁴ Like those rishis Vivekananda declared that in the ultimate analysis "the whole universe, mental and material will be fused into one. ... It is the finding of unity towards which we are going."³⁵

The Bootstrap theory of Geoffrey Chew, the concept of the "implicate order" by David Bohm, the successful experiment of Bell's Theorem by Clauser and Freedman—all these have arrived at the vision of a holistic universe where every particle is connected with every other particle even at the farthest end of the universe. The old paradigm or set of values in the Newtonian science was based on the Cartesian division of mind and matter, of God and man. The new holistic paradigm is based on the basic interconnectedness of the entire universe, and an inseparable connection between mind and matter.

Vivekananda anticipated this holistic paradigm of new science long before discoveries were made: "One atom in this universe cannot move without dragging the whole world along with it. There cannot be any progress without the world, following in the wake, and it is becoming every day clearer that the solution of any problem can never be attained on racial, or national, or narrow grounds. Every idea has to become broad till it covers the whole of this world, every aspiration must go on increasing till it has engulfed the whole of humanity, nay, the whole of life, within its

scope."³⁶ The lopsided development of modern science, with its sole emphasis on intellect ignored the holistic vision. As a result, altruistic feelings among the scientific community got suppressed. Such a state brought the disaster of the two world wars. But shocks of human annihilation opened new visions to many scientists. Robert Oppenheimer's memorable speech after the first successful atomic explosion at Alamogordo, is an open confession of this fact: "But there is another thing: we are men too. We cannot forget our dependence on our fellow men. ... I mean also our deep moral dependence in that the value of science must lie in the world of men, that all roots lie there. There are the strongest bonds in the world, stronger than those even that bind us (the atomic scientists) to one another, are deepest bonds that bind us to our fellow men."³⁷

"With the nuclear holocaust threatening us, what we need for survival is synthesis, the ecological perspective, the holistic view," says Physicist Fritjof Capra who, like others, feels that the Darwinian concept of the struggle for existence, natural selection and adaptation, will never explain the phenomenon of higher human evolution. He says, "The new paradigm is the holistic, ecological world view. And we need this shift of perception." Rene Weber, while interviewing physicists like Fritjof Capra and David Bohm, opined that today's Nobel-Prize-winning physicists must also become Buddha. The highest scientific mind must also be combined with the noblest Buddha-heart. Capra thinks "that both Einstein and Bohr were primarily meditative and intuitive and at the same time they were the greatest of physicists." About Niels

33. *Complete Works*, Vol, 6: 34.

34. *Ibid.*, 6: 5.

35. *Ibid.*, 6: 4.

36. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 269.

37. Robert Oppenheimer, *Letters and Recollections*, Edited by Alice Kimball Smith and Charles Weiner (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 325.

Bohr, Capra said, "Bohr's science was his mysticism" ... and added that "in the Eastern traditions, the most enlightened becomes the most ordinary. And so these greatest sages just went around cutting firewood and drawing waters".³⁸

Prof. Maurice H. Wilkins, who shared the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1962 with Francis Crick and James Watson, made the startling revelation in January 1986 that "about half of the world's scientists and engineers are now engaged in war programmes". In a recent interview on Science and Religion held in Bombay he says: "I feel very strongly that most scientists today are being led increasingly into rather limited ways of thinking without much open-mindedness, doing things for material needs."

"Most scientists," Dr. Wilkins further says, "shy away from the political, psychological, spiritual and other dimensions. The leading scientists who do really important pioneering work are not so bad. But the ordinary average scientists are rather like that. If they find an interesting job, sort of like doing an intellectual crossword puzzle which is well funded, gives them a secure position, valuable for national security, with a good salary, lots of facilities, etc., then they go to work on all these needs. The whole question of merely spiritual and other dimensions is pushed out of the scene normally."³⁹

Modern science with its "reductionist arrogance" ignored both the mystical and the holistic aspects of life. In many ways this "reductionist arrogance" of science, as Theodore Roszak put it in his book *Where the Wasteland Ends*, reduced the Infinite

man to puny guinea-pigs. This, he says, is born of the "Judeo-Christian mania for desacralisation." In the epilogue of Heisenberg's celebrated book *Physics and Beyond* Ruth Nanda Anshen reiterated this very idea: "Our Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman heritage, our Hellenic tradition has compelled us to think in exclusive categories. But our experience challenges us to recognise a totality richer and far more complete than the average observer could have suspected, a totality which compels him to think in ways which the logic of dichotomies denies."⁴⁰

This dichotomy which was a product of fundamental ontological dualism between mind and matter, man and god, human consciousness and external reality, resulted, as A.D. Reincourt said, in the "Schizophrenic culture of the Western civilisation".⁴¹ Prof. Fritjof Capra wrote: "Human progress, then has been a purely rational and intellectual affair, and this one-sided evolution has now reached a highly alarming stage; a situation so paradoxical that it borders insanity. We have piled up tens of thousands of nuclear weapons; enough to destroy the entire world several times over." "All this suggests," writes Prof. Capra, "a profound imbalance in our culture. ... Further reflections show that the roots of this cultural crisis lie in the imbalance between two modes of consciousness which have been recognised as characteristic aspects of human nature throughout the ages. They are usually called the rational and intuitive modes of the scientific and religious modes."⁴² "Theories only lead to fighting", cautioned Vivekananda long ago.

38. Edited by Ken Wilber, *The Holographic Paradigm and Other Essays*, (Shambhala Publications 1982), pp. 242-248.

39. *Interviews with Nobel Laureates and other Scholars*, (Bombay: The Bhakti Institute, 1986), pp. 36-37.

40. Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond*, (New York: Harper and Row Publications, 1971) pp. 256-257.

41. *The Eye of Shiva*, p. 158.

42. Edited by Satish Kumar, *The Schumacher Lectures*, (London: ABACUS Sphere Books, 1982), pp. 122-123.

These two aspects of human mind have been described by Chinese thinkers as the *Yan* or the active, rational, competitive, and the *Yin* or intuitive, co-operative, emotional and the mystical aspects of our mind. The time is ripe for a shift from a purely rational materialism to a holistic-intuitive-humanistic paradigm. Capra quotes an old Chinese saying: "The *Yan* having reached its climax retreats in favour of *Yin*: the *Yin* having reached its climax retreats in favour of *Yan*."⁴³

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In the conclusion of his well-known book *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis*, Julian Huxley, a spokesman of post-Darwinian Theory of Evolution, said that in spite of all the revolutionary discoveries in human evolution, scientists have found out only "an apparent purpose ... much a product of blind forces"; behind the "progressive evolution of man". Vivekananda defined the real purpose behind all human evolution in his inimitable words, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal of life is to manifest the divinity within." The amoeba is only Christ involved. And the entire evolution from amoeba to Christ is only a continuous struggle to manifest the infinity of the soul or the "thing within". Later biologist Pierre Teilhard Chardin had accepted this entire Vedantic concept in his well-known book *The Phenomenon of Man*. Huxley found another conflict between the spiritual progress and the worldly progress of man. "Another struggle still in progress is between the idea of a purpose directed to a future life in a supernatural world, and one directed to progress in this existing world. Unless such major conflicts are resolved, humanity can have no major

single purpose, and progress can be fitful and slow."⁴⁴

Vivekananda-Vedanta resolved this dichotomy between a world-negating religion and a world-based progress. This newness of the holistic Vedanta of Vivekananda has been clearly explained by his Western disciple Sister Nivedita: "It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for here he becomes the meeting point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular."⁴⁵ Astrophysics today proves that in the smallest particle there is the potency of the entire universe. In Vivekananda-Vedanta, this truth was given a humanistic orientation. "The world is homogeneous and modern science shows beyond doubt that each atom is composed of the same material as the whole universe. ... Man is the most representative being in the universe, the macrocosm, a small universe in himself." At the centre of Vivekananda's Vedanta, which he called the "Science of Religion" is Man, "The Taj Mahal of temples of God".⁴⁶ The end of all science is to manifest this Infinite, the Buddha-man, the Christ-man in all human beings. Romain Rolland found in Vivekananda's universal Gospel the fulfilment of purely rational aspirations of the West, and, "Europe and Asia are two halves of the soul. Man is *not* yet. He *will* be".⁴⁷

Vivekananda dreamt of a complete man, and said, "Would to God, that all men were so constituted that in their minds all

43. Ibid., p. 123.

44. Julian Huxley, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1945), pp. 577-578.

45. *Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. xv.

46. Ibid., 2: 321.

47. Romain Rolland, *Life Of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama).

these elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion and of work were equally present in full. That is my ideal, my ideal of perfect man." In 1896 he said in London: "In Shankaracharya we saw tremendous intellectual power, throwing the scorching light of reason upon everything. We want today that bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful infinite heart of love and mercy. This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands".⁴⁸

Vivekananda himself was the greatest and the most successful embodiment of this

48. *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 140.

ideal. In him Shankara's intellect combined with Buddha's heart, Shri Ramakrishna's world-transcending mysticism combined with practical, down-to-earth activities of the Napoleonic dimension. "Art, Science and Religion are but three ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita," he said.⁴⁹ In the Vedanta of Vivekananda the purely materialistic, rational, and experimental science finds fulfilment in the mystic and humanistic philosophy of Advaita which also satisfies the reasonings of today's scientists.

49. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. XVI.

DIKSHA OR INITIATION

REVERED SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDAJI MAHARAJ

Question: What is the meaning and significance of Diksha (specific spiritual instructions from a guru, or initiation) in the life of a disciple?

Answer: Many people have often put questions like that. What is Diksha? Now, in the scriptures and in other literature also there is mention of some sort of initiation in every case of learning a new thing. In helping a child to write first on a slate, the teacher takes the hand of the child with a pencil in it and writes. That is also a sort of initiation for knowing what the letters are. Similarly, there are different forms of initiation in Islam, Buddhism, etc. In Hinduism, getting the Gayatri-mantra and the Yajnopavitam (sacred thread) is also a form of initiation. There is mention of initiation before undertaking a Yajna or sacrifice. So different types of initiation are there. But we are not concerned with all

kinds of initiation. People who are initiated by us have a particular form of initiation in mind. They want to know what it is. As we read the *Lilaprasanga* (*Shri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*), written by Swami Saradananda, we find three kinds of Diksha mentioned there. One is the Anavi or the Mantra-diksha, i.e., Diksha given through mantra. We find that Shri Ramakrishna gave Diksha-mantras, as mentioned in that great book, at least to three persons—Shri Vaikunthanath Sanyal, Swami Niranjanananda and Tejanarayan. That is Mantra-diksha, Diksha given through mantra. We also know that Swami Vivekananda had Rama-nama-mantra from Shri Ramakrishna at Cossipore, and soon after that he went round and round the house there one whole night with a stick on his shoulders as though he was protecting Shri Ramakrishna from other people. The writer of the *Punthi* (*Shri Shri Ramakrishna Punthi*), Shri Akshaya

Kumar Sen says that on the Kalpataru day, that is on 1st January 1886, he got a mantra from Shri Ramakrishna. Besides, we also know that Shri Ramakrishna wrote mantras on the tongues of some people. So, that way he gave Mantradiksha. Then there is also the Shakti-diksha. That means transferring one's power (Shakti) to another. The guru, Shri Ramakrishna, transferred his power to some of his disciples. One outstanding instance is known to you all. Two days before his Mahasamadhi he transferred all his powers to Swami Vivekananda, then Narendranath, and said: "After giving all this to you, I have become a fakir (one possessing nothing)." Also, as you read the *Kathamrita (The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna)* and the *Lilaprasanga*, you will find that Shri Ramakrishna is transferring his powers to others by touching them in the course of debates and thus silencing them. Besides, it is well known that on 1st January 1886 many went into spiritual ecstasy and some had the vision of their chosen deities at his mere touch. That way he transferred power to many persons. That is the Shakti-diksha. The third kind of Diksha is the Shambhavi-diksha, where the guru and the taught do not know what is happening, but somehow the power of the guru gets transferred into the disciple without the knowledge of either of them. For example, many who simply visited Shri Ramakrishna accepted him for life as their guru and believed they had their life's purpose fulfilled. So it certainly did occur in the cases of many who came in contact with Shri Ramakrishna, saw him from a distance perhaps, or had his touch or a talk with him casually. Thus these are the three kinds of initiation discussed in the *Lilaprasanga*. But here we are not concerned with all the three. We are concerned with the common kind of Mantra-diksha given by us to some aspirants. What does it mean? The other day, just a few days ago, one girl came to me and said, "I have

got no new inspiration during the Diksha." I said, "Well, it is a two-way process. On your part, to get new inspiration you must be prepared for it." Again, in the scriptures they say that the guru must have certain qualities, without which one cannot become a guru.

"Shrotriyo Brahmanishthah": He must be a Shrotriya and a Brahma-nishtha. Shrotriya denotes one whose conduct is according to the Vedas, according to the scriptures; whose conduct is beyond any criticism. He must be truthful, he must be sincere, he must be God-loving and all that. Then he must be a Brahma-nishtha, always merged in thinking of God, of Brahma, and so on. These are the qualities of the guru. And in the *Vivekachudamani (The Crest Jewel of Discrimination)* and other places they also say that the guru should be "Avrijino-akamahatah". The word Avrijina has two meanings: one who is sinless, and also one who is sincere, i.e. free from crookedness, one who is not deceiving his disciples. He must also be Akamahata, not inflicted by passions, by desires, for getting wealth and all that. These are the qualities that are needed in the guru. In the shishya also there are many qualities that are needed to be a true disciple. To get any inspiration just at the time of initiation one needs a background. What is that background? It is enumerated in the *Vedanta-Sutra-Bhashya* by Shri Shankaracharya that there should be *Satsampatti*, six kinds of treasures, in the pupil. What are they? They are Shama, Dama, Uparati, Titiksha, Shraddha, Samadhana. He must have control over his body and mind, and then he must be a little detached from worldliness. He will not exactly be a monk, but his mind should not be totally engrossed in worldly things. It must have some sort of detachment from it. Otherwise how will it run after God? If it is all given to the world, then nothing is left to think of God

or follow God. So there must be some sort of detachment. Then there should be Titiksha: *Sahanam Sarva-duhkhanam Apratikara-purvakam*. Titiksha is forbearance. What does it mean? It is not giving a tit for tat, but remaining silent when one is maltreated or one is deprived of something. He understands that he is deprived of something, still he does not react. That sort of a mental attitude is called Titiksha. And it also includes bearing up against all sorts of sorrows without being baffled by them. That is Titiksha. Then there should be Shraddha, faith—faith in the guru and faith in the scriptures. Then there should be Samadhana, concentration of mind. The guru is teaching something but the disciple's mind is wandering here and there—that kind of wandering will not help in the communication of the mantra from the guru to the disciple. So he must be equipped with all these qualifications. Then again, as Shri Ramakrishna said, there should be Vichara, discrimination between the permanent and the impermanent, right and wrong, good and bad: *Nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka*. Then there should be *Iha-amutra-phalabhoga-viraga*, dispassion for enjoyments here and hereafter. Last of all comes Mumukshutva, longing for liberation. There must be hankering for getting liberated. That is what makes religion truly what it is. All other factors are within the domain of morality, but that Mumukshutva makes it what true religion means. It converts it into spirituality. When the disciple is prepared with all these things and goes to a competent guru, then the Diksha is real Diksha. He gets real inspiration and gets uplifted. But even if the guru is not so competent and the disciple is not so prepared, still there can be a Diksha. How? Now, boys can be taught in different classes by different people. For teaching ABCD a first class M.A. need not be brought in; an ordinary man can teach them the alphabet. Similarly for teaching a boy in, say, class six or class seven, you don't even

need a graduate; a matriculate can very well teach him. Similarly in imparting spiritual knowledge also there may be different classes of gurus with different powers, and the disciples also can be of different standards. There can be communication between them even though they are not of the highest order—neither the guru nor the taught. Even so, there can be communication of spirituality or spiritual knowledge. Hence, as I said, unless the shishya, disciple, is fully prepared, he should not blame the guru that he is not getting everything that he should get. For acquiring proper eligibility, proper competence, a disciple must prepare himself. Without his preparation the guru cannot do everything. Even Shri Ramakrishna said, referring to a disciple, "Look at this one. This man wants me to prepare the curds, then prepare the butter and put it into his mouth! He will do nothing. He expects me to do everything for him." That is not the sort of attitude that a disciple should have. Then, what does Diksha mean to the disciples in ordinary cases? It means that he is taking a vow, a sort of Pratijna, that throughout his life he will be following the instructions of the guru. For what? For the realisation of God he will endeavour all his life. But God will come when it pleases Him. Here I repeat one incident from Holy Mother's life. One Swami who was undergoing Tapasya, austerity, in Rishikesh, wrote to Holy Mother, "Mother, I have been calling upon God all these years and nothing has happened so far." The Holy Mother said to her assistant who wrote letters for her, "Just write to him, 'You have become a monk and it is your duty to call on God. God will come to you when it pleases Him. It is your duty to call on Him.'" So one who takes up religion must have that kind of attitude. That determination he must have: I shall go on calling on God, and may it please God to reveal Himself to me, of course, according to His own will,

according to His own time and convenience. According to His convenience and according to His own sweet will, He will come to me. But my duty is to go on calling on Him for ever. This is the meaning of Diksha for ordinary cases. Of course, some sort of a new light does come to the disciple. He had wanted God, but he had not been put on the right track by an experienced man. There are desultory thoughts within his mind and unless he takes up a course of training well chalked out by a man who is adept in the matter, he falters at every step and may go astray. Thus some people adopt mantras according to their whims. Their mantra can be anything whatsoever, it may be even meaningless, but they go on like that and after sometime they again run to some other man and say, "Give me a mantra"; then again they run to some other man and say, "Give me a mantra"! That is not steadfastness in life. Steadfastness comes when one formally accepts somebody as his teacher. We go to the school, certain teachers are fixed for teaching in our classes, we follow their teachings and we progress. There should be something well determined on either side, on the side of the teacher and also of the student. So this is the meaning of Diksha in brief.

Now, somebody has put the question, "What is God-realisation and what is God?" Well, that you have to find out for yourself, by consulting or reading books and all that. I read once in one of Aldous Huxley's books that every man, whether he knows or not, has his own metaphysics. He has certain ideas about himself, about others and about the world, etc. Some sort of theory about all these is working in his mind, may be unconsciously, but there it is. So that kind of metaphysics or philosophy has to be clarified in one's mind: "My mind is in this state. I am thinking like this on who God is? What should I

think of God? Who is the guru? Who is the taught?" All these sorts of thoughts have got jumbled up in the mind now. They should be clarified. Then only you can know what God is. Unless your own mind becomes steady, thorough and competent to understand higher thoughts, how can you know of God? God is described in various ways. He is described according to the philosophical bent of one's mind. One may be an Advaitin (monist). To him God means Reality-Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, to him there is nothing but that God. But when he is in the phenomenal world or the empirical world, then he thinks of God as somebody working in some way. Hanuman (Mahavira) was once asked by Shri Ramachandra, "How do you think of me?". Hanuman replied, "When I think of myself as the body, I am your servant. When I think of myself as an individual being, then I am a part of you. And when I think of myself as the Self, then I am one with you." So that is the relationship. Once he thinks of himself as a servant of Shri Ramachandra, another time he thinks of himself as a part of Shri Ramachandra, and another time he thinks of himself as identified with Shri Ramachandara. Now these three strands of thoughts are technically called dualism, qualified-monism, and monism. So we have concepts of God of different types. For ordinary people God is taught as somebody with form and having some activity also like the creation of the world, its preservation, its destruction, and giving the fruits of works to respective people. God is engaged in these kinds of action. He may have form and also be formless. Formless to those who are Advaitins, and He has form also to the qualified monists and the dualists. And even to the monist, He has form so long as he is in the phenomenal world. For instance, Shankaracharya says, "Even when all the differences between you and me go away, still I belong to you and not you to me,

because the waves of the sea belong to the sea and not the sea to the waves." So even Shankaracharya who was the greatest promulgator of non-dualism, who really brought the Advaitic philosophy to us, says that he belongs to God, that he is a part of God, a slave of God. Some relationship was established between him and God, and so he says: I belong to you and I am yours. Again, when you think of God as having forms, then this God may appear differently. He may appear as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Durga, Kali and so on and so forth. Again He may be thought of a God having qualities but not form—some Existing Being without form, who acts for me, who gives the results of my works for me and who listens to my prayer. God is formless to the Brahmos, the Muslims, and the Christians. According to them, though He has no form He is Saguna, i.e. possessed of qualities. He can work, He has Shakti, He has power. So, that concept is also there. But we Hindus think of God as having form also. Thus there may be different kinds of ideas about God. All these are true, corresponding to the competence or eligibility of the person concerned. We need not confine God within a particular set of ideas. He has so many forms and multifarious states. So we need not quarrel about that. Somebody may think of God as with form, somebody may again think that He has neither qualities nor any form and He is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss only. People's thoughts about God may differ in various ways and their realisation of God will also be according to the ideas they entertain. To somebody God may have form and He may appear to him as Kali, Durga, Vishnu, Shiva, and so on. Again somebody may think of Him as pure Existence with qualities, i.e. He is Existence with qualities, but without form. Again one can think of God as somebody or some sort of Existence within his heart, who is not with form but who guides him at every

point, at every step. This also is a kind of God-realisation. God realisation may be seeing God as Shri Ramakrishna saw Kali, the Mother with form. That is one form of realisation. Shri Ramakrishna also saw Mother Kali as mere Existence without any form. That also he realised. So all these are the different forms of realisation of God according to the competence of the man or woman concerned. There is no end to that.

Question: Shri Ramakrishna says that Karma-yoga is very difficult for the Kali Yuga, and so Bhakti-yoga is the Yuga-dharma. But Swamiji seems to say the opposite.

Answer: Swamiji seems to say the opposite—that is all right. And Shri Ramakrishna says that Karma-yoga is difficult. Now, I do not question either Shri Ramakrishna or Swamiji but I am stating facts before you: Is any yoga easy? Take for instance Karma-yoga. Karma-yoga is difficult, Shri Ramakrishna says. True, it is difficult. He then explains that Karma-yoga has to be done without any desire for the fruit and without any egotism that I am the *Karta*, doer. That idea, "I am the doer", should not be there and one should not hanker after the results. Now, these are very difficult. He told Shambhu Babu, "You can do this work in the true spirit of Karma-yoga, but Karma-yoga is difficult. One does not know when and how some sort of vanity comes in. Egotism somehow creeps in." That is quite true, we cannot deny it; it is a fact. On the other hand, take the case of a Bhakta. The Bhakta also can become proud. He may become Showy that he is a Bhakta, putting some marks on his body and talking big things, while internally he may be a mere cheat. It may happen like that. Then some devotee may be outwardly professing some religion but cheating others in business and telling falsehood. That sort of thing everybody comes across in life everyday. That is not

religion. So Bhakti too is difficult. Jnana also is difficult. It depends on the person concerned. But Bhakti is easy in the sense that it is natural to us, because we love people, we want to love others. If we transfer that love we have for human beings to God, it becomes an easy way of approaching God. That is what Shri Ramakrishna meant. But as I told you, the path of Bhakti also is fraught with difficulties. Pure Bhakti does not come so easily, you have to work hard. You have to devote much time to the thought of God, to japa, dhyana, the reading or hearing of good literature, mixing with good people and all that. Then only Bhakti comes. Now, Karma-yoga. What does it actually mean? The other day I was reading Madhusudana Saraswati. He says that Karma-yoga means *Ishta-purta-datta*: performance of sacrifice, building *dharmashalas* etc., digging wells and giving money in charity, etc. These constitute Karma-yoga. These things are prescribed in the scriptures. If I do that, it becomes Karma-yoga according to some. God is not brought into this scheme. The old, ancient Mimamsakas said that if you perform these sacrifices, if you utter these mantras as given in the scriptures, then that will lead you to your goal. And what is the goal according to them? Going to heaven. This Karma-yoga leads to that much (heaven), only to the world of Pitris, to the world of manes. But that Karma-yoga can again be turned into a sort of Karma mixed with Bhakti. For example, I may work for the pleasure of God, so that my mind may become purified for the realisation of God. If with some such motive you do work and offer the results to God, and eliminate your egotism as much as you can, then that also becomes Karma-yoga mixed with Bhakti. That leads to the world of the deities you might be worshipping. It may lead you to Vaikuntha-loka, Vishnu-loka, Shiva-loka, and so on, or it may even lead to Brahma-loka, the world

of Brahma, technically called "Hiranyagarbha". And from there you may become ultimately free. Your deity becomes pleased with you and frees you for all time. That is also possible through Karma-yoga if it is associated with Bhakti and Jnana. Now, Shankaracharya says that in Karma-yoga when the ego is knocked out and when the desire for result is absent, then that Karma amounts to Jnana itself. It is not different from Jnana. So, we must really understand what we mean by Karma-yoga. If we mean *Ishta-purta-datta*, then it has one meaning and its goal is something as I have already told you. Then again if it is mixed up with Bhakti, it leads to some other result. Again, it can be turned into Jnana when there is no egotism in me and there is no desire for result. The highest instance we have of this kind of Karma-yoga is Rajarshi Janaka. He said, "I have everything that people desire; all things are there in full in my palace. But even if Mithila, my kingdom, is burnt away it harms me in no way whatsoever." That kind of detachment must be there in the true Karma-yogin. And that true Karma-yoga which Janaka had is not different from Jnana as Shankaracharya defines it. So this is how we have to understand. Only using a term and being carried away by it, won't do. You must go thoroughly into it and understand what that term really means, and then you can get the philosophy behind it. What Swamiji taught was the last kind of Karma-yoga which he termed Seva or service to God in human beings. This has for its basis the non-dualistic philosophy of Shankara, who said that all beings are but Brahman itself. Swamiji taught and worked with this idea. Shri Ramakrishna also worked for the good of others and actually imparted this message of Seva to Swamiji and others. Thus there is no conflict between what they taught.

Question: How do we know that we are progressing in the path of God?

Answer: Peace of mind. If you have peace of mind and if you are at peace with your environment, you can know that you are progressing. This can be the only simple answer. Of course, if we have visions of God, that is also an indication that we are progressing, we are coming to God. If you have thoughts of God always in your mind, or even in dream if you have visions of the deity, of your guru or of similar great spiri-

tual personalities, or if high thoughts are ever in your mind, you are progressing. If your mind expands and embraces the universe in a bond of love, that, too, is an indication of spiritual progress.

* These answers to questions from devotees, were given by Revered Swami Gambhiranandaji Maharaj at the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, on 18.3.87.

VIVEKANANDA TODAY

SWAMI BHAVA HARANANDA

A study of the present-day situation prevailing all over the country in the context of Swami Vivekananda's ideas, is pertinent and interesting.

To begin with, 'PEOPLE' in India have some time been neglected though the idea of 'MAN' as an individual has occupied some importance in its spiritual heritage and culture. Swami Vivekananda noted this lacunae in a very significant manner and focussed this point very clearly. Even today, without the proverbial pinch of salt we have to accept that the generality of the population have always been kept in the rear without any developmental opportunities for centuries. Whatever divine glories were attached to man, mostly they were just a concept or a theory and rarely put into practise, although scriptures are full of such ideas of "togetherness" and a collective sense of approach as when it states: Thousands of its heads and feet in togetherness (*Sahasra Shirsham... Sahasra Pani Padam* etc.). This famous proclamation comes nearest to the modern communist saying "Let thousand petals bloom". The statement from the Upanishads regarding the "Atman" has grappled the real idea of an universalistic and dynamic collectivity in

India throughout its history. But all through its tradition, the emphasis was more and more on an Atman-centric development in a narrow sense of the term, and was never turned into a vigorously effective, and socio-centric approach.

India is still in some sense a feudalistic land. During the Vedic period there were some concrete historical programmes and an aspiration for social equalities in day to day life. However, the over-emphasis of a world-negating spirituality due to later Buddhism led to a general contraction in the process of growth which can be easily marked in Indian history. The great and universal meaning of a Brahman Philosophy and its deeper significance in life failed to expand itself in both the social and practical life. The Indian society gradually couched itself in an unnatural concentration of Brahminical or narrow caste-bound culture thus stifling any chance for the growth and development of its people. Swami Vivekananda not only understood this problem very clearly even at that time, but warned strongly again and again to guard against the predominance of such a caste or communal culture whenever possible. His was the most powerful voice in

this regard at that time, and it is the most powerful voice even now in our contemporary socio-political atmosphere.

The tragedy is that the general outlook of our people was never allowed to grow beyond their so-called religious and social identity which incidentally included the political outlook also. This is true even today after four decades of the country's political independence. According to Swami Vivekananda this is but a clear sign of contraction and deviation from the true spirit of Vedanta and its Upanishadic Universalism.

Obviously because of such unnatural views that have somehow gone into our national veins and tradition, we have, in many ways, failed to grow to a full "stature" of a "state" or be successful at any time during the last thousand years of our long period of history. Our Indian wisdom however Sattvic it was, could only go round and round a Tamasic level of life in the name of spirituality. In fact, the condition prevailing is more due to a pseudo-spirituality rather than real spiritual awakening or spiritual renaissance. Swami Vivekananda called this a kind of tyranny of priest-craft or privileged classes in the name of religion. And at one time he even scathingly condemned this huge waste of the potential power of the society just for the spiritual realisation of the "few" individuals and privileged souls only. He simply could not understand why so many people had to suffer so much distress and retardation, and sacrifice all their progress and future here in this world, at the altar of a other-worldly religion for a vague here-after life.

It is a lesson in history at all times that "man"—the individual man—is no longer an effective factor until and unless "he" is fully equipped with and transformed into a full stature of "people". There may be a few great people of realisation and faith in his-

tory. But what of that! What is needed is that there must be strength and growth and manifestation of their freedom in an effective and historical manner. There must be some strength and character amongst them to cover at least their journey on this earth otherwise all the assurances of heavenly spirituality is meaningless and empty.

It is for this reason mainly that Swami Vivekananda wanted to see India rise... "out of the cottages, grasping the plough, out of the huts of the fishermen, the cobbler and the sweeper". He further said: "Let her (India) spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts and from the markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains." Today, unfortunately, the forest is fast disappearing, and our hill stations are becoming more disturbed than before. This is what we see around us now. But are these all rumblings of a new India, a temporary chaos for her fight for an identity as a people, although slightly misled by regionalism and communal passion at the moment due to the long spell of ignorance and suppression? Should not this awakening lead to the realisation of one common system for all the people and religious groups and the emergence of real equality amongst all under one and the same constitution?

In this context we can very well remember what Swami Vivekananda said long before and called for the worship of the country alone, forgetting all other gods and goddesses for the next fifty years at least. Many freedom-fighters had done that and we got our freedom. In post-independent India this call was ignored and naturally we are being paid back in our own coin. Swamiji also suggested an open and liberal society advocating inter-caste marriage for greater integrity and for promoting mutual relationship between various

castes and creeds, especially for offering better opportunities to the backward classes.

Secularisation never means complete negation or absence of religions. Swami Vivekananda at least never meant it like that; on the other hand, he remarked that if the spiritual India dies, "then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury, the male and female deities as its priests, fraud, force and competition its ceremonies, and human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be. The power of suffering is infinitely greater than the power of doing, the power of love is infinitely of greater potency than the power of hatred."

In this regard he wanted education to play a vital role—a much more important role than the so-called traditional dogmatic doctrine-oriented fanaticism of the theology. Only a progressive and liberal education alone can bring in a real cultural change and free oneself from any type of hegemony. In Swami Vivekananda's language:—"My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let them know what our fore-fathers as well as other nations have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now and then decide. We are to put chemicals together, the crystallisation will be done by nature according to her laws. Work hard, be steady and have faith in Lord. Set to work, I am coming sooner or later. Keep the motto before you 'Elevation of the masses without injuring their religion'."

"Remember that the nation lives in the cottage. But alas! Nobody ever did anything for them. Our modern reformers are very busy about widow re-marriage. Of course, I am a sympathiser in every reform but the fate of a nation does not depend

upon the number of husbands their widows get, but upon the condition of the masses. Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work and energy and at the same time be a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts? This is to be done and we will do it."

Therefore it is possible to bring about a really scientific, technological and cultural advancement in place of the so-called simplistic economism and consumeristic growth by not mixing religion and politics and by giving up the old outlook of division—separatism and antagonistic relationship between the ecclesiastic and the secular.

How true it is when it is stated that traditional theology ignores largely the modern physical, human and social sciences. Its questions and answers tend to remain at a transcendental level, academic and abstract, rarely translated in terms of the needs of modern, secular life.

Most of the traditional religions, writes a modern scholar, "have not effectively met the challenge of today's socio-economic, political and cultural realities. It also tends to remain absolute and exclusive with no place for pluralism and dialogue."¹

The much talked-about and modern theory of "Liberation Theology" was already understood and anticipated by Swami Vivekananda. With this theory in mind he sought to change the traditional views of religion and society even at that time. There occur the mantras such as "Pitri Devo Bhava", "Matri Devo Bhava" and "Atithi Devo Bhava", in the Upanishads. But Swamiji have gone a step fur-

1. M. Amaldoss in the article *Rethinking Theology* in the journal "Seminar", Bombay, November, 1987

ther and added "Daridra Devo Bhava". This idea of "man" being the medium of religious worship was also there in the early Christianity, and in the New Testament. It is there in Islam and Buddhism, too.

Swami Vivekananda, a man of rare intuitive quality and an exceptional model of the epoch-making genera, did not seem to bother about the "heavy thunder cloud of opposition that might burst upon him and wrap him in its cloak", as he was fully committed to a great cause of history and so he himself thundered, "I do not believe in reforms but I believe in growth. I do not care to put myself in the position of God and dictate to our society—'this way thou shouldst move and not that'—I simply want to be like the squirrel in the building of Rama's bridge, who was quite content to put on the bridge his quota of sand. That is my position. ... Feed the national life with the fuel it wants but the growth is its own—none can dictate its growth."

In this respect Swami Vivekananda was never a believer of any deterministic philosophy, rather he preferred to live with the intuition of "sub-altern groups" as Antonio Gramsci would have liked to put it. Vivekananda was clear, direct and practical in his approach to any subject and never a mere visionary pedantic.

Swami Vivekananda's views on education were liberal. He said, "We must have a hold on the spiritual and secular education of the nation. You must dream it, you must talk it, you must think it and you must work it out. Till then there is no salvation for the race. We must have the whole education of our country—spiritual and secular—in our hands and it must be on national lines." The emphasis of such an education must be on "national" and not just religious or sectarian. He further advocated the idea of "practicability", and said, "Take the man where he stands and

from there give him a lift."² Since "all men and women in any society are not of the same mind, capacity or the same power to do things, they must have different ideals and we have no right to sneer at any ideal"³. Swamiji further declared, "Our duty is to encourage everyone in his struggle to live up to his own highest ideal and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the truth."⁴

To Swami Vivekananda spirituality was not merely a religious practice or a narrow belief, superstition, etc. It was faith, courage, convictions, growth and the whole of our cultural dynamism. It was not merely an economic, political or social system but a meaningful system of universal character. To him spirituality did not mean a set of principles but a very creative and generative principle which holds different political and social structures in an unitive notion of life. This is clearly brought out when he said, "In India social reform has to be preached by showing how much more spiritual a life the new system will bring, and politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants—its spirituality. Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries forever, any other knowledge satisfies wants only for a time."

Swami Vivekananda's spirituality had both depth and expanse and was not just the common sense of the people bundled together. The Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce who, influenced by the hermeneutic tradition in Italy, considered "common sense" as a set of views expressed by the "ordinary" folk and treated it as the source of as well as the content of each and every philosophical system. Antonio Gramsci was the first to point out against Croce. He

2. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition), Vol. II, p. 382.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 39.

4. *Ibid.*

said that "in Croce the proposition that all men are philosophers has an excessive influence on his judgement about common sense."

Swami Vivekananda on the other hand wanted to brush off intellectual pedantism and desired to make high philosophy available to the common people and never tried to make philosophy abstract: "Advaita must become living—poetic in everyday life: out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology and all this must be put in a form so that even a child may grasp it. That is my life's work. The Lord only knows how far I shall succeed. 'To work we have the right and not to the fruits thereof.'"⁵

Swami Vivekananda warned all against intellectual tyranny and cultural domination. When the narrow, parochial straight-jacket of any religion tries to hinder the growth of a society and starts dictating terms, it becomes a sign of death itself for the particular religion. One remembers Bourdieu's theory of "economic capital which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights, and cultural capital which is convertible under certain conditions to economic capital and may be institutionalised". Even for Bourdieu the economic field is the fundamental condition but "not the conditioner of cultural or social activity".

He wanted "to generate a theory of practice that will not fall into the trap of either subjectivism or objectivism". A matured Vedantin, Swami Vivekananda, too, knew that subjectivism and objectivism are also of convertible outlook and of almost the same values merging into the same goal.

With Bourdieu, however, it is not quite

clear whether or not the dominant culture is constituted by the dominant class alone. But to Swami Vivekananda history is not exactly a class struggle in the economic sense hundred per cent, but a struggle for "privilege". To him "privilege" is synonymous with "rights". Man must assert whenever he is deprived of certain privileges that are very fundamental to him and this fight gains significance when it is converted into a joint collective effort of "people".

India, no doubt, is passing through a cultural reproduction and we will have to be very careful about it. It is but natural that in this process of cultural reproduction there will be some unnecessary misgivings and occasionally a wrong alignment, since everybody will be eager to fill his, his community's or faith's cup to the full. The underlying stress of the new liberation theologies is that religion can no longer be considered as a private affair. It should be public, political and concerned less with interpreting the world than changing it⁶. To Vivekananda true government was always for the greatest good of the greatest number—*Bahujana Sukhaya, Bahujana Hitaya*. Today all over the world, different religions are beginning to appreciate each other. Swami Vivekananda's voice is heard clearly in all these as he was the first to set the tune in favour of "acceptance" of different religions in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago and his was the lone voice then reaching out for Universalism and Harmony.

A great national awakening came in India when Vivekananda gave his clarion call to Indians: "Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of God and of sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today and millions are starving for

5. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, 1970, No. 121, p. 284.

6. Article by J. Felix Raj, "Seminar", Bombay, November, 1987.

ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood coursing through your veins becoming consonant with your heart beats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin and have forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property and even your own body? Have you done that? ... Who cared about this Parliament of Religions? Here was my own flesh and blood sinking everyday and who cared for them? This was my first step."

Then should we not join this "first step" when the masses are clamouring for share in the privileges and rights that have just been created in the name of the "people"? If we fail to do so we will be only betraying the words of the prophet. If we are truly inspired by Vivekananda, our national prophet, our feelings, our percepts, and even common sense must come out of the narrow hegemony processes, and should help us both in head and heart. We must help others grow up with their innate potentialities for their own good as also for the good of others in society. *PERESTROIKA* or Re-structuring which is now considered as the manna for all kinds of social as well as political problems by the Soviets was given by Swamiji long ago in his ideas of practical and humanistic Vedanta. Report by the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee observes: "Perestroika implies not only eliminating the stagnation and conservatism of the preceding period and correcting the mistakes committed but also overcoming historically limited, outdated features of social organisation and work methods. It implies imparting to socialism the most contemporary forms, corresponding to the conditions and needs of the scientific and technological

revolution and to the intellectual progress of Soviet society. This is a relatively lengthy process of the revolutionary renewal of society, a process that has its own logic and stages."

The staunch followers of Perestroika are nothing but reflecting the thoughts of Swamiji when they say, "We have to impart to socialism a new quality or as they say, a second wind, and this requires a profound renewal of all aspects of society's life, both material and *spiritual* and the development of the humanitarian character of our system to the fullest possible extent."

The purpose of Perestroika is the full theoretical and practical re-establishment of the indisputable priority of the working man with his ideals and interests, of humanitarian values in the economy, in social and political relations, and in culture. Swamiji also had the same vision when he foresaw the rise of the working class from "the cottages, grasping the plough, out of the huts of the fishermen, the cobbler and the sweeper". And he asked us to give back to the masses their lost individuality without injuring their religion.

Perestroika-hope in Russia for achieving revolutionary purification and renewal requires tapping the enormous social potentialities of socialism by invigorating the individual and the human factor. Socialism can and must make full use of its potentialities as a truly humanitarian system serving and elevating man. This is a society of people, for the flourishing of their creative work, well-being, health, physical and spiritual development, a society where man feels he is the full fledged master and is indeed that. And this requires intensive dissemination of broad spiritual and humanitarian ideas of the holistic philosophy, the Vedanta, where man's individual greatness has been yoked to over-all social welfare. That's why Swamiji said: "Let

the people hear first and whoever helps in making the people hear about the great truth in their own scriptures cannot make for himself a better Karma today. In the Kali-yuga there is one Karma left. Sacrifices and tremendous tapasyas are of no avail now. Of Karma, one remains and that is the Karma of giving. And of these gifts, the gift of spirituality and spiritual knowledge is the highest; the next gift is the gift of secular knowledge; the next is

the gift of life; and the fourth is the gift of food."

If Vivekananda's ideas are preached and propagated, then we will have collectivism instead of egoism, freedom and equality instead of exploitation and oppression, genuine power of the people instead of the tyranny of the few, and humankind's unity and peace, instead of discord, strife and war.

THE EYE OF GOD

MARGARET BEDROSIAN

An image of Kali hangs in my shrine, a piece of Indian folk art which my teacher gave me many years ago. With time, as such images do, Kali has slowly unburdened Her secrets as the need arose. Hence about three weeks ago I noticed that the devotee who translated Her form into this image had captured the paradox at the center of divinity: seated calmly on Her cushion, the Mother seems wrapped in activity. Each of Her arms is busy—with one She holds the head of a slain human being, with another a sword, with others a rosary, a conch shell, and an openhanded gesture to be without fear. The final hand is coyly poised at Her mouth, one finger propping up Her chin. In every way, Her external form is the model of a dynamo that runs the cosmic show with finesse and efficiency. But to stop contemplation here limits the perfection of what this image communicates; for while the Goddess whirls the imagination about with a display of Her numberless functions, Her core speaks another message. As if to distract one, Her mouth is grinning. But finally making one's way up, into Her eyes, one falls into another dimension. Quite simply, the eyes do not move; not one

flickering lash diverts attention from the huge blackness and roundness that gapes beneath. As if mirroring themselves, these eyes look straight ahead into an abyss as the end of time. From this place, even the image of the beheaded seems comforting, being after all something one can hold onto.

Now, unable to avoid these eyes anymore, knowing that what they see is certainly not what I am able to see, I feel as if I've discovered a crack in the secure illusion that keeps life running so effortlessly and routinely. Or perhaps it is the plug that keeps the water in the sink; with a wink She can pull the stop and with another fill it back up. The discovery is not intellectual, which makes it so much more difficult to ignore: rather, the realization hits one in the stomach and all those lower organs where real food must be digested and converted into energy: the deity's eyes are not moving. They are not weeping and wailing at the sight of a corrupted world; they are not scrunched up with anger at hunger and volcanic eruptions and deforested lands. More to the point, they are not rolling with every mistake I make, nor are

they crinkling at every triumph. And like an undertow—a little voice whispers—why should they, since they are orchestrating the roller coaster ride that keeps the carnival in business. To which my ego responds, do they even see me? And if so, what in the world do they see? Asking such questions is itself a test, for I suspect that receiving a genuine answer will exact a high price, as high as delivering one's head up to the sword of the Goddess.

What this sacrifice means in practical terms is the substance of the spiritual path: the image of the Goddess contains both sides of the paradox which any devotee must confront; in coming closer to our own union with the Self, we too will have to embody it. This imperative is recognized in many mythic traditions and some of the most poignant representations of the Absolute point toward it. In Christianity, for example, as Christ enters Jerusalem on His donkey, aware that in a few days time He will be dismembered by a world ignorance that is relentless, His eyes are lit by an awareness that passes understanding: like Kali, the Christ depicted in these icons knows the nothingness at the center of matter and offers Himself as the fuel that releases new light. Elsewhere, in Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattva ideal also turns on this paradox: repeatedly in this literature, it is suggested that the fuller realization belongs to one who is able to renounce final liberation and act in a world where Kali is perpetually moving Her arms, able to carry the deeper awareness of the basic 'emptiness' of all things. The universality of the paradox in the great world religions reinforces the need to work with it in our daily experience. What follows then are some thoughts on what this ultimate discipline means in a contemporary world where so many of us grieve at what is happening to the planet and sobered by our sense that billions and trillions of planets as beautiful

as the Earth have come and gone out of the galactic pageant.

Whether the metaphor used to describe the tension between stillness and movement is that of walking the razor's edge in Buddhism, the image of the cross in Christianity, or what has been described as Kali's simultaneous activity and inner "void", these archetypes all suggest that both sides of this duality must be present in order for things to "work". Often we face a danger of derailing or of falling through the crack, so to speak, when we indulge one at the expense of the other. Thus, a person who thinks he has touched the core silence at the heart of creation may decide that there is nothing left to do and withdraw, precipitously, from involvement. In a more contemporary mode, many who witness the diverse sufferings around them and the calamities—many of them man-made—that now threaten the natural world are tempted to numb the pain of this awareness and accompanying feelings of helplessness by turning to addictions and escapes of various types. It is no accident that ours is so frequently described as the Age of Addictions in the popular media, a label that rises proportionately to the complexities of our social and economic existence. The problems seem so knotted up and our collective will to solve them so puerile that despair drives many to avoidance. Since avoidance se'dom solves a dilemma, the secondary problems thus engendered only add to the common mush.

At the other extreme, persons may respond to the Good News or the Bad News by what is aptly described as a "feverish" plunge into activity. In one form, this is exemplified by the new religious convert who cannot wait to get his or her hands on any unsuspecting pagan and throw the mantle of salvation over him. What is the good, after all, of falling heir to the truth unless one activates it in the world? Such

persons are usually willing to take their concrete image of the truth and smash others' notions with it. Another variation on this extreme is the figure of the activist—whether devoted to peace, the environment, women's rights, children's rights, or animal rights, the list is long—whose major avenue to effectiveness is to take up every cause and work himself to the bone doing the "right thing". And when with time the right thing sometimes bears rotten fruit, there are no eyes to see it because by this time, this person has compulsively taken up other urgent causes.

Indulging either extreme does not seem to take us far and in a way each is a form of weakness. Lapsing into the void, we lose our ability to choose; disappearing into action, we lose our vision. Neither path alone will serve the needs of the world. As spiritual masters have always recognized, both have to be cultivated simultaneously. Thus Ramakrishna taught, hold the knowledge of the Advaita close and then do what you must *in* the world. Or as Swami Vivekananda writes so forcefully in his essay on "Self-Realization Through Selfless Work": "He who in good action sees that there is something evil in it, and in the midst of evil sees that there is something good in it somewhere, has known the secret of work."¹ And this secret consists of the awareness that perfection—for the world or for ourselves—does not come from the work we do *per se*, but from the effect of that work on our character and on our relation to the Self.

We sometimes see such workers in the most ordinary situations: a gardener carefully spending hours pulling up weeds which she knows will sprout back; a teacher concentrating on correcting papers which seem

to have no end; a citizen choosing to contribute time working for a "lost cause" just because it is in line with his highest ideals; an artist who is inspired to create a story or a picture even though few may appreciate it in her lifetime. The list is endless and instructive; for such examples remind us of those moments in our own lives when we too are at one with the paradox of stillness and movement. Though these moments may not seem to last long, the feeling they give us is unlike any other: for once, we seem to be at total peace with our fate. We feel a sense of power unlike any other, for we are not trying to make things happen, but rather participating in the greater flow of universal activity, much like one of Kali's arms. What we are actually doing at such a time is irrelevant, secondary to the oneness experienced between actor and action. The usual motive for activity no longer rules, i.e. the need to get ahead or make progress or create a desirable end; instead, we enter into that divine realm of self-fulfilling joy.

The scriptures teach that everything we do has the potential of giving us this delight—not only what we call play or art or leisure, but *everything*. Taking this notion seriously, of course, is where the fun literally begins, for the practice will spur us to re-evaluate and shift each attitude and attachment. What might it be like to approach the chores we like least with the same expectation that we bring to more favoured activity? How might our lives change on a daily basis if we got up every morning looking forward to every turn the day would take, and went to sleep at night content with the day's patterning? Surely, our psyche would shiver and shake to the changes. Complaints, fears, angers, jealousies, obsessions, intense cravings—they would still arise no doubt, as the Buddha observed, but they would have lost their edge. I had a small experience of this

1. Swami Vivekananda, *Self-Realization Through Selfless Work*, in "What Religion Is", ed. John Yale (New York: The Julian Press, 1962), p. 148.

several months ago when I missed a train home and found myself stranded in the library of a large university, far from home, with nowhere to go at night. The only thing I had to do to pass the time was the perennial work of planning tomorrow's class; after many years of teaching, I am not always taken with the chore because it involves skimming and rereading "old" material. But there was nothing else to do in the undergraduate library of Berkeley except to take out my copy of *Faust* and try to forget what a fool I had been to miss my train. For the meantime, the play was my destined focus and anchor and meaning. As I began to concentrate on the work, I noticed that all the pleasure that usually eludes me when I skim over texts with half my attention was emerging in an unexpected way. Perhaps it was the knowledge that outside there was nothing but darkness, the "emptiness" most of us try to avoid through frenetic motion; or perhaps it was the chance discovery of what is always possible for us, the satisfaction of using our best faculties in concentrated work. Whatever it was, I completed my work having gone deeper into this riddle-like play than I ever had in the comfort of my own home and routine.

What I gained from my experience wasn't just the confidence that I was well prepared for class next day, but a rare taste of what sages refer to when they speak of "resting" in the activity. This by-product of rest may be the greatest value of concentration; it is also an unexpected boon, for normally we tend to go rigid at the mention of the word. But meditation manuals and scriptures never associate stiffness and rigidity with the ability to concentrate; rather, it is a function of relaxation and collectedness, skill in riding the waves of the world illusion. Or as the *Tao Te Ching* teaches: "Practise non-action./ Work without doing" and then goes on:

In the universe the difficult things are
done as if they are easy.

In the universe great acts are made up
of small deeds.

The sage does not attempt anything
very big,

And thus achieves greatness.²

Concentration is also another way to describe the look in Kali's eyes which at first seemed so vacant to me; what one might mistake as Her void—and even be terrified by, because the look is so different from the normal one of distinguishing parts of the whole—is more likely Her concentrated awareness of the totality, which in the language of the Vedanta is also the experience of *samadhi*, non-differentiation. Caught by this glance, one might well feel a certain discomposure at first, since the gaze passes through the parts and hits the bulls-eye of one's identity. Yet this *mode* of seeing is what it means for the eye of God to be open—whether in an image that is worshipped or in the heart of the devotee. If Kali's eyes do not seem to move, it is because like the Taoist sage, She achieves everything by attempting nothing.

Practically speaking the ramifications of this mystery are huge for a contemporary world that is committed to doing, where the eyes of so many seem to see—or project—nothing but problems. Is it possible that by seeing more, or better yet, by seeing *All*, and doing *less*, we might come to a place where everything happens as it should? Given the enormity of the crises facing our world at every level, this is one of the most radical pieces of advice that might be offered. Yet even contemporary thinkers and writers have recognized the inevitability of just such an adjustment in attitude and being. T. S. Eliot in "Ash Wednesday"

2. *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Gia-Fu Fend Jane English (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), verse sixty-three.

completes his beautiful supplication to the Goddess with these lines:

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with
falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated
And let my cry come unto Thee.³

As Eliot's lines imply, only when the individual and divine Will are unified can we learn how "to care and not to care", to sit still like the Goddess while the universe completes its cycle. This is not a recipe for turning one's back on suffering, nor at the other extreme for a gung-ho plunge into mindless doing-goodism. Every human being who has made any real difference in

3. T. S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*, "The Complete Poems And Plays", 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971), p. 67.

the welfare of the world, beginning with the spiritual teachers of all ages, has mastered this lesson of the Goddess. And it is because their own eyes have not moved from their focus on the Truth, that their disciples have had any chance of having their own eyes cleared.

Now as I think of Kali's form one more time, noticing the completeness of the image, I'm struck by how elusive the mystery of Her nature is to the mind. As I look at Her sitting with finger propped under chin, I wonder if even She could explain Her feats of cleverness and tell us how it all works. Is She as intrigued by the mystery as those who worship Her? Perhaps. But the underlying power of this depiction of the Absolute has less to do with explaining the Unexplainable than in offering a challenge to become one with it. Only from that "vantage point" of union can we know that Her eyes that seem so dark and void are instruments of simultaneous creativity and contemplation, receiving and emitting light without end.

BACKWARD CLASSES: VIVEKANANDA AND GANDHI

SWAMI DEVENDRANANDA

The suffering of the weaker sections of Indian society was the national problem which inspired passion in the heart of Swami Vivekananda. Trudging through the entire sub-continent he saw with his own eyes how the backward classes were treated by the so-called upper classes in the entire country. Don't-touchism, combined with unsympathetic treatment of the masses, became an almost established privilege with the upper classes. As the apostle of Advaita Vedanta, Vivekananda not only felt pain, but stood out with the ringing voice of Vedanta to put a permanent end to this "national sin". "The duty of Advaita is to destroy all privilege," he would say. In the South, especially in 19th century Kerala, he saw the nature of this exploitation, and called 'Malabar a lunatic asylum'. In Madras he declared like a socialist revolutionary, "The days of exclusive privileges and exclusive claims are gone, gone for ever from the soil of India." Breaking the chain of petrified custom, he, the high-class monk, took food from the hand of a Pariah in the station of Khetri, and apolo-

gised to and blessed the nautch girl whose song he had earlier refused to listen.

Tales of the woes of so-called lower classes date back to the age of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Buddha, with his towering personality, silenced the so-called "Upper-class" people, by opening the door of the highest spiritual life to the "lowest" of Indians.

Once Buddha had gone to beg in a Brahmin's house. Seeing his tonsured head, the Brahmin bawled out, "You unfortunate Shramana—stand outside, and wait at a distance, you are out-classed."

Buddha smiled and answered, "Myself or yourself, who is the real out-caste? You call yourself a Brahmin, but behave as a non-Brahmin. Listen, being simply born in a Brahmin's house does not make one a Brahmin, neither does one born in a low class become necessarily an out-caste."

Buddha continued: "I call that man to be an outcaste who is a slave to anger and malice, one who is mean and evil-minded. The greedy, the jealous, the cruel, the conscienceless people are the true outcaste."

Buddha's preachings went against the privileges of Priesthood, while it provided strength and moral courage to the people of the depressed classes. They began to be converted in hundreds and thousands. It is therefore no wonder that the Mahayani Buddhists made the maximum number of converts from non-Brahmin and the lower classes. This "Buddhist reformation" had done twofold good to India: "On the religious side, it represented freedom from ceremonial; on the political side, overthrow of the priesthood by the Kshatriyas."¹ The Kshatriyas declared the masses to be "their legal food"; and the spiritual tyranny of the priesthood with their "ever-increasing

chain of ceremonials," were "forging to bind the people," said Vivekananda.²

The first effective protest against the huge conversion of the depressed classes to Buddhism, came from Shankaracharya.

During the middle ages, the foreign invaders spread the gospel of equality which immediately attracted the lower-class people. In order to attain a higher social status they began to be converted to other religions en masse. This was undoubtedly a signal for social decline. It was Ruidas, Kabir, Dadu, Namdev and some other religious masters who tried to stem the rot. The anti-conversion move gained special momentum in Eastern India where Shri Chaitanya tried his level best to attract the ignored classes towards Vaishnavism. In order to elevate their social status, he had a book '*Haribhakti Vilasa*' written on this subject under his direction by his disciple Sanatana Goswami.

But the problem concerning the weaker classes attained serious dimensions in the post-Chaitanya era. On the one hand their number increased steadily. Bereft of education and culture, the poor people suffered miserably mainly due to the gross neglect of the upper classes. The result was obvious. A mass conversion to other religions happened for a pretty long time in Indian history. It was Swami Vivekananda, the great religious stalwart of the nineteenth century, who could clearly envisage the way out for a total regeneration of the weaker sections. And the solution according to him, would be to open all opportunities of education, culture, and even spiritual excellence for the weaker sections.

The superiority of the Aryans, according to Vivekananda, was not justified. There were Western thinkers, according to Vivekananda, "Who think that the Aryans were all red-haired. Others, according to their

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Mayavati Memorial Edition), Vol. IV, p. 325

2. Ibid

idea, think that they were all black-haired." Vivekananda further said, "If the writer happens to be a black-haired man, the Aryans were all black-haired. Of late, there was an attempt made to prove that the Aryans lived on the Swiss Lakes. I should not be sorry if they had been all drowned there, theory and all. Some say now that they lived at the North Pole. Lord bless the Aryans and their habitations! ... The only explanation is to be found in the Mahabharata, which says that in the beginning of the Satya Yuga there was one caste, the Brahmins, and then by difference of occupations they went on dividing themselves into different castes, and that is the only true and rational explanation that has been given. And in the coming Satya Yuga all the other castes will have to go back to the same condition."³ It is in the Mahabharata, that Vivekananda found the true idea of the equality of castes. And again he said, "Whatever caste has the power of the sword, becomes Kshatriya; whatever learning, Brahmin, whatever wealth, Vaishya."⁴ A man's caste is his "Jati", according to Vivekananda, which means his position in Society due to his natural inclination and excellence in a particular kind of job, intellectual, administrative, business-work, or physical work.

It is Vivekananda who coined the word, "Daridra-narayana" and clearly said that unless the Shudras are given education, respect and social equality, "a time will come when there will be the rising of the Shudra class, with their Shudra-hood."⁵

These words of Swamiji were based on a vision which was not very unlikely from a prophet like Swamiji. And he had come to construct the new social order, not by destroying the old but developing on the

old system. Hence he assured the upper classes that a Shudra upheaval was not their cause for worry. The question however was would then the Brahmins required to become Shudras? To this Swamiji's answer bore firm conviction: "The solution is not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher. ... The ideal at one end is the Brahmin and the ideal at the other end is the Chandala, and the whole work is to raise the Chandala up to the Brahmin."⁶

As against the tyranny of the masses by the exploitation of the ruling classes and the Priest classes, Vivekananda advocated the life-long sacrifices of spiritual aristocracy for raising the masses up. His solution was the rise of true Brahmins, the band of spiritual militia who make all sacrifices in order to bring the highest education, social advantages, and even spiritual superiority to these masses neglected for centuries. Vivekananda's historic warning to the upper classes cannot be expected even from the most radical and iconoclastic reformer of today: "Beware, Brahmins, this is the sign of death! Arise and show your manhood, your Brahminhood, by raising the non-Brahmins around you—not in the spirit of a master ... but in the spirit of a servant. For verily he who knows how to serve, knows how to rule"⁷

In the notes of his unfinished writing *India's Message to the World*, he wrote down: "The great ideal of India—Brahminhood, property-less, selfless, subject to no laws, no king except the moral,"⁸ This is what he saw in his own Master Shri Ramakrishna. And this Brahminhood will not come by heredity or descent, but accumulation of spiritual excellences by any individual belonging to any strata of society, as we have seen in the lives of Kabir, Sant Ravi-

3. Ibid., pp. 292-293

4. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 298

5. Ibid., p. 468

6. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 295

7. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 300

8. Ibid., p. 309

das, and others. "The super-arrogated excellence of birth of any caste in India is only pure myth ...," said Vivekananda.⁹ Shankaracharya, the born Brahmin, himself admitted in his *Manisha-panchakam* that even if a Chandala acquires spiritual excellence, he would be glad to bow down at the Chandala's feet. The petrified customs of villages had taken the place of life-giving, liberal ideas of the Upanishads and the Gita. In 19th-century India, religion had entered into cooking-pot. All holiness was centred on the priestly denunciations of, "Touch-me-not". Some of the exploiters showed and even show today that their actions were based on the social injunction of Smritis. "The Smritis must change with time. This is the admitted law," said Vivekananda.¹⁰

On the basis of the old Smritis and petrified customs, opportunities and comforts of life were open to one born in an upper class. This inherent monopoly in the entire social system had been the cause for the backwardness of the lower classes. That is why, Swamiji formed the Ramakrishna Mission to bring a new philosophy based on the equality of all souls, and a new social order. To Nivedita he categorically said that, his two main concerns were the women and the masses. The Ramakrishna movement aimed at dissolving the discrepancies between the classes and removing the shameful untouchability. He set the lines, "This is the secret of reforming men. Suggest to them higher things; believe in man first. ... Have faith in man, whether he appears to you to be a very learned one or a most ignorant one. ... You give him the truth and there your work is done."

Vivekananda conceived of a "new India, new Master, Shri Ramakrishna, new Religion, new Vedas". To Alasinga he wrote, "I believe that the Satya Yuga (Golden

Age) will come when there will be one caste, one Veda, Peace and Harmony." And to his brother disciples he proclaimed Shri Ramakrishna as the harbinger of this new social order:

"From the very date that he was born has sprung the Satya Yuga (Golden Age). Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinction, and everyone down to the Chandala will be sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, Brahmins and Chandalas—he lived to root out all."

After Swamiji, another noble son of Mother India dedicated himself into the movement. He was Mahatma Gandhi, who coined the word "Harijan" for the poor and depressed classes of the country. He was so much moved at their pitiable conditions that he used to wish very often to be re-born as one of them. In order to make an end to their unbearable age-long sufferings he called for an all-out movement and appealed particularly to the intelligentsia of the country. "I fully accept that brain work is of a higher standard than manual work," he said, "but mental work alone cannot bring the total good. Hence, manual labour, as well as the manual labourers, must be given their due respect."

Gandhiji echoed the sayings of Lord Buddha: "It is not just enough to be born in a Brahmin's house to become a Brahmin. Brahminism should be acquired in one's life. On the other hand, we should not blindly condemn one who is born in a Shudra house. If he leads a pure and ideal life, then he too should be venerated as a Brahmin."

Gandhiji formed the Sabarmati Ashrama, the Bhangi Colony and the like and thereby gave a real picture to the Harijan movement. In these places, he encouraged the growth of cottage industries in order to better the economic conditions of the Harijans. He

9. Ibid., p. 299

10. Ibid., p. 311

installed a new pattern of education called "Nai Talim" for them. This system did not go deep into academics. Its focus was mainly on the dignity of manual labour and on achieving the means for giving the barest necessities of life to the starved, skeletal masses of the country. In the sphere of cottage industries, he laid particular stress on the spinning of yarn in the "Charkha" (wheel). The Harijans and backward classes of today have got lot of social and governmental opportunities in all spheres of life including education and employment. But it is due to the lack of the spirit of service that we listen even today to tales of Harijan murder, bonded labour, and exploitation of women everywhere.

The administration is bound hands and feet. It is to such people who are in the field-work that Jawaharlal Nehru gave specific conditions in this regard, "We ought to be careful about appointing officers anywhere, but we must be doubly so when we appoint them in tribal areas. An officer in the tribal areas ... must be a man with enthusiasm, whose mind, and even more so whose heart understands the problem; it is his duty to deal with. He must not go there just to sit in an office for a few hours a day and for the rest work his fate at being sent to an out-of-the-way place. That type of man is completely useless. ... He must be prepared to enter their huts, talk to them, eat and smoke with them, live

their lives and not consider himself superior or apart. Then only can he gain confidence and respect and thus be in a position to advise them."¹¹ We remember Vivekananda's imperative to Indians, "The National ideals of India are *Renunciation* and *Service*. Intensify her in those channels and the rest will take care of itself."¹²

We remember the unforgettable incident from the life of Shri Ramakrishna when he swept in secret at night the privy of the sweeper, in order to free himself from the caste pride. Swamiji, during his wandering years, not only mixed with the Harijans and masses, but also ate from their hands and smoked from their hookka, with the same-sightedness and profound sympathy of a prophet. When will there be a solution to the problem? The answer lies entirely upon ourselves. It depends on the present and the future generations to carry on the work in the light of what was proposed by Swamiji. The results will come out themselves. A more human understanding of the problem, a more compassionate involvement of the members of the different social strata and above all renunciation and sacrifice of lives by upper class people for a total regeneration of the masses, could be the panacea for the fuller development of the masses.

¹¹. *Adivasis*, published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, in 1955, p. 7

¹². *The Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 228

THE WAY TUKARAM REALISED GOD

SWAMI VIPASHANANDA

Shri Tukaram, a well-known saint of Maharashtra was born in 16th century at Dehu, a village on the banks of the Indrayani river, in the district Pune of Maharashtra. This place is ten miles from Alandi, the place of 'Samadhi' of the saint Jnaneshwar, and nearly eight miles away from Chinchavad on the Central Railway, and nearly forty miles off Pune.

The life of Shri Tukaram apparently seems to be the life of an ordinary householder saint. A seeker of God does not find in the early life of Tukaram, the burning renunciation for the realisation of God as he finds in the life of Shri Ramadas. But when a householder goes through this life, he cannot escape the greatness of Tukaram. The reader slowly discovers that Shri Tukaram is not an ordinary householder, but an extraordinary saint. The spiritual practices of Shri Tukaram remain beyond the reach of any householder. Such a depth of thought combined with an all-conquering will-power for materialising the ideals of religion in life, is rarely seen.

Shri Tukaram was born in the family of devotees of Shri Vitthal-Rukhamani (Krishna-Rukmani). His previous seven generations were devoted to this form of Shri Krishna manifested before the devotee Pundalik of Maharashtra in 5th century A.D. at Pandharpur. Tukaram's father was known as Boloji and mother as Smt Kanakai. They led a life of devotion and purity till the end of their life. Twice a year, they used to go on pilgrimage to Pandharpur on foot, covering a distance of 150 miles. Besides this, they never took food without a service to Sadhus, guests, the poor, and the down-trodden. Along with these they also continued the worship of their family deity, Shri Vitthal-Rukhamani with devotion.

Boloji was known to the people of Dehu, as a man of truth, right understanding, and right action.

Before the birth of Shri Tukaram his mother Shrimati Kanakai became so much averse to the wordly life, that hours together she passed in meditation on her family deity, listening to devotional songs, and glories of Lord Hari. Her husband had given full freedom to her from the day-to-day life of house-keeping.

In such a stage of her life Shri Tukaram was born in the year 1609 at Dehu, as the second son of his parents.

Nothing in detail is known about the childhood of Shri Tukaram. But it can be inferred from his *Abhanga*, a poetic metre in which his immortal, divine feelings are described, that he had learnt to read and write in his vernacular, mastered elementary mathematics and accounts. He passed his boyhood in absolute freedom like any other wayward boy. Born in a Vaishya trader's family, he was taught the same profession of business management by his father. Tukaram had picked it up nicely, and started to help his father from his age of eleven years.

As he grew up to his marriageable age, his parents married him off to a suitable girl by name Rukhamai, when he was just twelve, according to the contemporary customs. Within a short period, Rukhamai was found suffering from chronic asthma. So the parents married him a second time to the daughter of a money-lender at the age of thirteen or so. Jijai, the second wife of Shri Tukaram, was extremely talkative to all. But she was pure in heart, devoted to Tukaram, and very much industrious.

The elder brother of Shri Tukaram was

not interested in the house-hold life, though he was married to a beautiful girl. He did not take the burden of his joint family, but left for pilgrimages. So Boloji decided to pass on the burden of the family on the shoulders of Shri Tukaram, the second son, who quietly accepted it. Thus he freed his father from the weight of worldly life and helped him engage completely in spiritual matters.

Tukaram started to look after all the activities of the family, shop-keeping, trade, accountancy, farming, tending the cattle and so on. His parents became pleased to see the skills of the son in all the various activities of the family. Tukaram was devoted to his father. But his devotion to mother was deeper. He gave love and affection to his mother. That is why we see him addressing his Ishta as Shri Vitthamai—Mother Vitthal. He served both his father and mother up to the end of their life with utmost devotion.

Tukaram was happy in the service of his parents. But how long could this happiness remain? How long could the worldly objects remain with a mortal man in this mortal world? Father, mother, wife, son and even this most dear body, are perishable. Man attached to worldly objects, rarely knows this truth. The time had come for Tukaram to know this truth.

Soon his parents passed away. The elder brother's wife also died, and the elder brother who always had dispassion for worldly enjoyments of life, left home for ever for godly aspirations. Tukaram began to understand the divine play in his life. He accepted the separation of his parents and elder brother as the grace of God Vitthal, his Ishta Devata, whom he was worshipping since his boyhood. He became more attached to Vitthal and his worship. He now began to spend his time in reading the Bhagavatam, and in the service of the Sadhus and the devotees,

More and more he became dispassionate towards worldly affairs, though he continued his normal duties. He was truthful and honest to all. Growing increasingly unworldly, he started to lose his business, because he did not care much for business intricacies. He went on giving things on credit when someone cried and prayed him for things; and he cared not for money. He became a debtor within a short period. The days were passing in this way. His two wives and he himself had now to work in a field. His business had run into loss and never came up. He had to sell everything in order to pay the debts. In the meantime, his two bullocks also died. Miseries, when they come, come not from one side only but from all directions. Tukaram had to experience all these. He remained quiet in all his difficulties and faced all problems of life with a cheerful heart, always keeping the sweet name of his Ishta, God Vitthal, on his lips.

The worldly-minded persons now began to tease him with the words, "Take the name of Vitthal; see this is the result of devoting one's life to God. In the name of God you have lost everything. Yet you are not awakened", and so on. Though teased by the worldly people, he did not deviate from his path of devotion to God.

Ordinary religious persons give up their spiritual and moral practices when they are caught in the trap of misery, financial failure, and loss, and when they are criticised by the worldly-minded persons. But a true devotee who seeks the knowledge of God, discriminates between the real and unreal, with deep love for God, and a dispassion for worldly things. Thus their spiritual and religious practices get reinforced, as it were.

The same things happened in the life of Shri Tukaram. Even after the death of his parents, the loss in his business, the death of two bullock, his first and most dear wife's death in the terrible drought of 1629-30

due to non-availability of food, the death of his first son, and his own failures to continue the business for want of finance, he did not lose the firm and balanced state of his mind. His devotion to Vitthal only got intensified, the dispassions now grew manifold, and he took leave from his home, leaving the whole burden of the second wife and the son on God. The second wife could earn her livelihood through her hard work. Though she was quarrelsome and grumbled against her husband, she had a wonderful devotion towards him.

Now began a true *Longing for God*. "It is good," he said in his autobiography, "that the parents left this world and the wife died. She is freed from body. The son died. That is also good. God saved me. He wiped off my worries."

Again he says: "It is good that I lost business. The drought came. That is also good. I could remember God out of repentance. I am suffering financially and mentally. This is also good. It is good that I am dishonoured. And I have lost the cow, the bullocks, the wealth, the means of farming. Now I am freed from the botheration of people, and I take refuge at the feet of God."

"Oh Lord! I am burnt by the fire of miseries of this world and by the treatments of worldly men. By serving this family, the place of worldliness, I am broken into pieces. Oh mother Panduranga-Vitthal. Through miseries, I remember you more. I have been carrying the burden of worldliness from birth to birth, and am finding no way to make myself free out of it. I am trapped by the thieves. In this condition nobody feels pity for me. I have wandered enough and have been looted also enough. Now I am burning within and without. Oh, Dinanatha, come soon and pacify me through your blessed touch and pacifying words. Keep your promise, 'I am the uplifter of the devotees from the ocean of

death.'"

Tukaram pacified himself again "O, my mind, everything is perishing. If you remember Gopala more and more, it is good for you. See how much is the pleasure. It is like a grain of barley. And pain! It is like the Mount Meru."

Tukaram straight away left home for solitude on the mountain Bhamanath, without any prior notice to any one, and stayed there for 15 days, passing the whole time in chanting the name of God and meditating on Him. Jijai sent his younger brother to search for him. Kanhaji brought Tukaram home with reverence.

Tukaram returned and continued his household duties, but with complete detachment. One day he threw all the books of dues from his customers, and the documents of his partnership, in the river. He realised that money was the main obstacle in remembering God.

He began a new life of spiritual practice. He changed his daily routine, concentrating more on his spiritual practices. After his morning worship, he went in solitude on the mountains of either Bhamanath, Bhandara or Goradas. There he used to read the *Jnaneshwari* and the *Bhagavata* and chant the name of God aloud, and sometime be absorbed in meditation. In the evenings he used to return home and again pass his time in hearing God's glories and sometimes doing it till the midnight. He slept only for a few hours. Thus he conquered sleep, laziness, and took measured ways of living, as per the teachings of the Gita.

He took pilgrimages to Alandi, Pandharpur, Trayambakeshwar, Nasik, Paithan, the place of Eknatha, Varanasi, Gaya, and Dwaraka. Doing pilgrimages, he realised, was also a part of spiritual practices, in order to concentrate on God and cleanse the mind.

Tukaram himself left accounts of his

spiritual practices. His own words are good enough to inspire any genuine seeker of God: "While calling on God, I kept Ekadashi-Vrata and used to chant the name of God loudly without fear or shame. In the beginning I could not get interest in them. Then I memorised some saying of saints. I had complete trust in them and contemplated on them. I brought out their meaning into my own practices."

"In the Hari Kirtan (Chanting the names of Lord Hari), I started to sing along with the leading singer standing behind him as his assistant. In this way making the mind pure with devotion I tried to keep my mind in itself, and fill it with the love of Shri Hari."

"Whomever saints I met, I took the water touched by the toes of their feet, after bowing down to them. I did not feel any shame in doing so."

"I used to do good to others, by whatever way I could. Physically I liked to tire the body for the good of others."

"In this way I started the spiritual practices. I used to get joy in divine discourses and chantings and to remain in the company of holy men, Sadhus and devotees, and I liked to serve them."

"The relatives and friends could not appreciate this condition of my mind. They advised me not to do so and tried to divert me towards the worldly life (Samsara). But I made my mind resolute and did not give any ear to their talks. My mind was uprooted from the Samsara and I had no desire even to look at it. People started advising me to go on the path of 'Pravritti' (worldly enjoyments) and my mind was going towards 'Nivritti' (cessation of worldly pleasures)."

"In this dualistic state of mind I followed Shri Hari, keeping Him the witness of my mind. I gave up the unreal world, did not accept the majority of its thoughts, but discriminated and picked up only the real."

"In this way when I resolved to see God

face to face, I was graced by mantra, 'Ramakrishna-Hari' in a dream by Sadguru Baba-Chaitanya. I trusted in the mantra and believed that only the name of Hari is able to show me Hari, face to face. I decided to hold fast to the mantra as the way to God."

"My mind began to merge in the constant repetition of the name of God. Then verses came to me in fits of inspiration. While chanting the name of Shri Hari, the *Abhangas* (the rhythmic verses) came out of my mouth. I knew it was not a play of my intellect, but it was the *prasad* (Sacramental food) of God. Knowing this I used to toss myself into the love of God and hold fast to the lotus feet of Shri Hari. As a result, devotees came to hear from me these songs which were like nectar of God."

"Days passed like this. I was asked by a pandit Rameshwar Bhatta, the leader of the Pandits, not to write further any more *Abhangas*, the eternal truths in poetry. I felt sorry for the prohibition of the Pandit and his followers. Then I threw the writings into the river Indrayani as they advised. Thirteen days and nights, I knocked at the doors of the temple of Shri Vitthal with prayers and meditation on Him, asking for the justice to this torture. Then Narayana became compassionate to me and pacified me by manifesting Himself before me in the form of Gopala and gave me back my manuscript from the waters of Indrayani."

The devotees indeed saw the *Abhangas* floating on the water of Indrayani near Dehu. Now a flood of devotion to God came from his heart. After this vision he wrote, "O Lord, Thou art my compassionate mother, refuge of the poor, parentless children. Thou hast manifested Thyself in the form of a boy so quickly and pacified me by showing thy most handsome, pure and blessed boy-form. I have troubled you, O Mother, forgive me; henceforth I will not trouble you. Thou hast saved my manuscript

in water, saved me from the people condemning them and made Thy words true."

Tukaram expresses his feelings: "Now where will you run, my mind? I have seen God. Lord, I have seen Thy Lotus Feet. All the worries and rigours of austerities have gone forever. And the infinite Bliss has taken the place of pain. The mind has become blissful."

Again he says: "The formless has taken the form. And I see the lotus feet of God. I cannot forget Thy lotus feet. Thy blissful boy-form has filled up my eyes and heart.

As a result, all the limbs of my body are full of Thee. Infinite Bliss has come to me. It is not I but Thou. Thou hast taken my place. It is Thou! and not I."

He passed the remaining part of his life in and through God's presence, absorbed in the discourses of Vitthal, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of devotees. And one day while doing Kirtana, in the presence of numerous devotees, he gave up the mortal body. The devotees present, it is said, saw his departure in subtle body sitting in a celestial chariot which moved towards the heavenly abode.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

PROFILES IN GREATNESS: BY SWAMI SASTRANANDA. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras-600 004, 1987. Pp. xiii + 153. Rs. 15.00

'Watch a man do his most common actions; those are indeed the things which will tell you the real character of a great man. ... He alone is the real great man whose character is great always, the same wherever he be', said Swami Vivekananda. The book, *Profiles in Greatness* provides us with vignettes of the character of such great people.

This small book contains character sketches of the Holy Mother, Sri Ramakrishna and a couple of his disciples, a few historical and a few mythological personalities. The selection is assorted because the book is actually an anthology of the author's articles published in the *Prabuddha Bharata* and *Vedanta Kesari*, over a period of nearly two decades. This assortment helps the reader understand, as Swami Tapasyananda points out in his appreciative foreword, that the 'aspiration for the same spiritual values links the India of the past and the present.'

Each portrayal is refreshingly illuminating and none can be singled out for special

mention. However the author has the reviewer's gratitude for including among the women characters, Draupadi, the princess with a 'mother's heart and a hero's will', to whose proud, brave and magnanimous character Indian scholars have not done ample justice.

The masterpiece comes at the end—a brilliant analysis of Krishna as he appears in the Srimad Bhagavatam and in the Mahabharata. The author attempts to explain the true significance behind the actions of the much loved legendary figure, who is also equally maligned by critics for his seemingly amorous pursuits in one epic and seemingly *adharmic* actions in the other. The two criticisms naturally warrant a discussion on what true love is and what the upholding of Dharma really entails, and the Swami has delineated these.

The language of the book is simple and lucid. Source material for reference and further reading is helpfully provided at the end of each article. The book is a valuable gift from the author, a senior monk and an erudite scholar of the Ramakrishna Order.

DR. KAMALA JAYA RAO
Hyderabad

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

PRAYERS

1. If we cannot get on altogether without help, then why not ask the Lord himself. Why go to others?

—*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

2. Whenever we pray to God in right earnest he is sure to come to us. The trouble is, we pray to so many others besides God. We pray to the doctor to give us health, to the shopkeeper to give us food or dress, and in among the rest we pray to God to give us spiritual light and knowledge. When we look to him alone and pray to him and to no one else, he never fails to answer our prayers, if we make them really intense.

—*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

3. Pray to God with tears in your eyes whenever you want illumination or find yourself faced with any doubt or difficulty. The Lord will remove all your impurities, assuage your mental anguish, and give you enlightenment.

—*Holy Mother*

4. Q: Now, Mother, what is best for me (to pray for)?

A: How little intelligence does a man possess! He may require one thing but he asks for another. He starts to mould an image of Shiva but he ends by making that of a monkey.

It is best therefore to surrender all desires at the feet of God. He will do whatever is best for us. But one may pray for devotion and detachment. These cannot be classified as desires.

—*Holy Mother*

5. Pray constantly with a pure, sincere heart: "O Lord! I don't know what is good and what is bad for me. I am entirely dependent on you. Grant me everything I need for spiritual life. Take me along the path that will bring me the greatest good. Give me the faith and strength to remember you and meditate on you constantly."

—*Swami Brahmananda*

6. To pray to Him also is a form of work. You should do that with all heart and soul. Rob Him of His peace, as it were, by your constant and incessant prayers. When the child weeps only a little, the mother does not think of coming: But when the child cries itself hoarse and knows no stopping, then the mother comes and takes it in her arms.

—*Swami Turiyananda*

7. Be ever prayerful, then evil thoughts, even if they come to the mind, cannot linger long. A prayerful man is ever peaceful.

—*Swami Shivananda*

Arise! awake! and stop not till the goal is reached! Katha Upa. I. iii. 14

Vol. III

December 1898

No. 5

INTERVIEW WITH SWAMI VIVEKANANDA:
ON INDIAN WOMEN—THEIR PAST,
PRESENT, AND FUTURE

It was early one Sunday morning, (writes our representative) in a beautiful Himalayan valley, that I was at last able to carry out the order of the Editor, and call on the Swami Vivekananda, to ascertain something of his views on the position and prospects of Indian Women.

At last my companion broke the silence. "The Aryan and Semitic ideals of woman," he said, "have always been diametrically opposed. Amongst the Semites the presence of woman is considered dangerous to devotion, and she may not perform any religious function, even such as killing of a bird for food; according to the Aryan, a man cannot perform a religious action without a wife."

Again, could anything be more complete than the equality of boys and girls in our old forest universities? Read our Sanskrit drama—read the story of Shakuntala, and see if Tennyson's "Princess" has anything to teach us!"

"You have a wonderful way of revealing the glories of our past, Swamiji!"

"Perhaps, because I have seen both sides of the world," said the Swami gently, "and I know that the race that produced Sita—even if it only dreamt of her—has a reverence for woman that is unmatched on the earth.

"Then have our women any problems at all, Swamiji?"

"Of course, they have many and grave problems, but none that are not to be solved by that magic word "Education." The true education, however, is not yet conceived of amongst us."

"And how would you define that?"

"I never define anything," said the Swami smiling, "still, it may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently. So shall we bring to the need of India great fearless women—women, worthy to continue the traditions of Sangamitra, Lila, Ahalya Bai, and Mira Bai. Women fit to be mothers of heroes, because they are pure and selfless and strong, with the strength that comes of touching the feet of God."