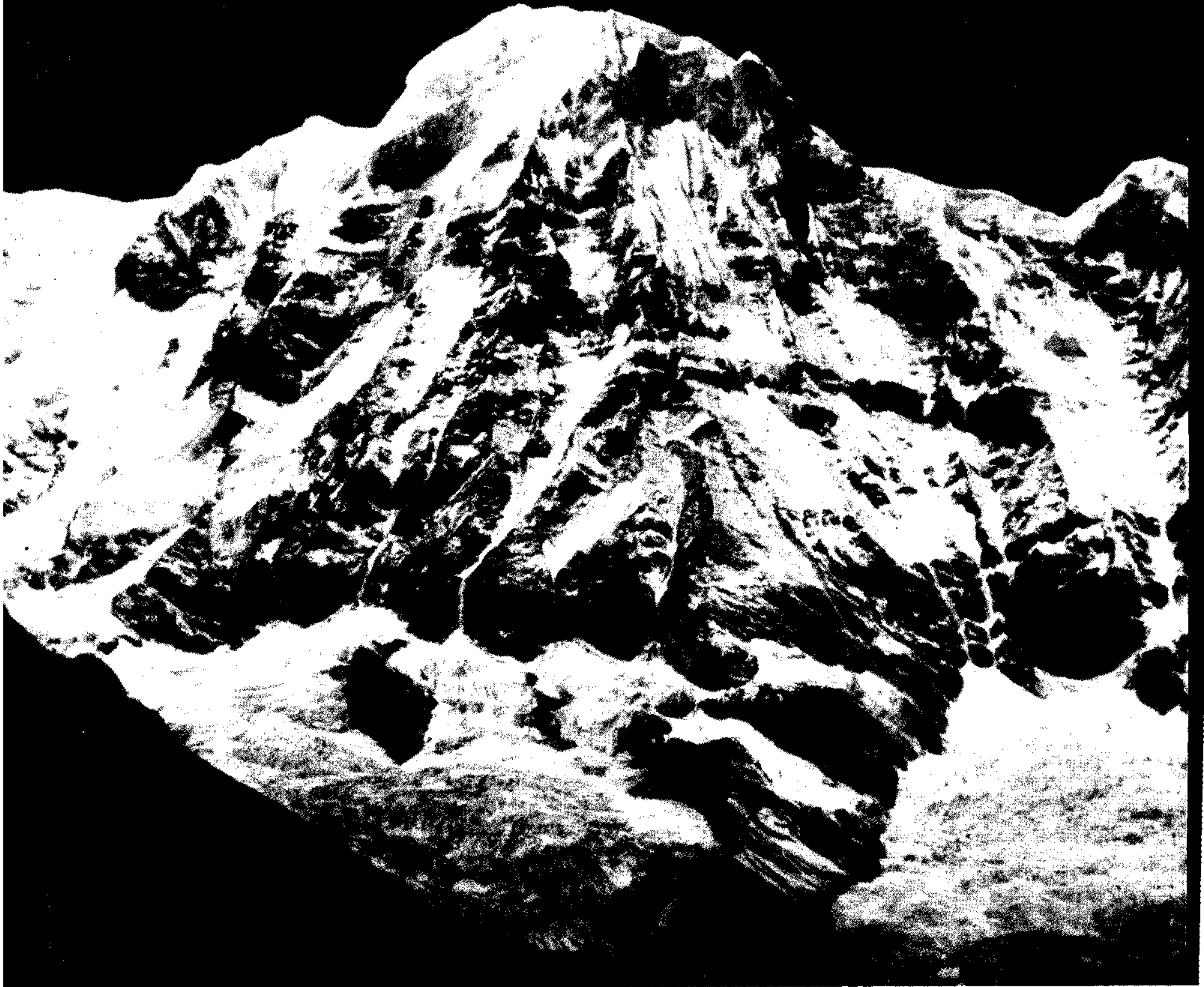


Prabuddha Bharata

or Awakened India



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Prabuddha Bharata

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CONTENTS

Divine Wisdom	281
Freedom from Sorrow-II —(Editorial)	282
Memories of Swami Prabhavananda — <i>Pravrajika Varadaprana</i>	288
Memoirs of Swami Brahmananda — <i>Swami Saradeshnananda</i>	...	...	...	293
The Veena Resonates — <i>Swami Shradhdhananda</i>	...	...	...	296
A Friend in The Gita — <i>Swami Shivaprasadananda</i>	...	...	...	299
The Spirit and Substance of the Upanishads — <i>Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao</i>	...	...	...	305
Adventure in Russia — <i>Swami Bhavyananda</i>	...	...	...	311
Reviews and Notices	...	...	...	319
For Seekers of Spirituality	...	...	...	320



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

Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 97

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No. 7

Divine Wisdom

यो योनिं योनिं अधितिष्ठत्येको यस्मिन्निदं सञ्च
विचैति सर्वम् ।
तमीशानं वरदं देवमीड्यं नियात्येनां शान्तिमत्यमेति ॥

The One who rules every single source, in whom all this dissolves (at the end) and comes together (at the beginning of creation), who is the lord, the bestower of Blessing, the adorable God, by discerning Him one goes for ever to this peace.

यो देवानाम अधिपो यस्मिन्लोका अधिश्रिताः ।
य ईशेऽस्य द्विपदश्चतुष्पदः कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥

He who is the overlord of the gods, in whom the worlds rest, he who is the lord of two-footed and four-footed beings, to that God we shall offer our oblations.

सूक्ष्मातिसूक्ष्मं कलिलस्य मध्ये विश्वस्य

स्रष्टारमनेकरूपम् ।

विश्वसैकं परिवेष्टितारं ज्ञात्वा शिवं
शान्तिमत्यन्तमेति ॥

More minute than the minute, in the midst of confusion, the creator of all, of manifold forms, the one embracer of everything, by knowing Him as the auspicious, one attains peace for ever.

स एव काले भुवनस्य गोप्ता विश्वाधिपः

सर्वभूतेषु गूढः ।

यस्मिन् युक्ता ब्रह्मर्णयो देवताश्च तमेवं ज्ञात्वा

मृत्युपाशांरिवनत्ति ॥

He indeed is the protector of the world in time, the Lord of all, hidden in all things, in whom the seers of *Brahman* and the deities are united; by knowing Him thus one cuts the cords of death.

from *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*

Freedom from Sorrow—II

It is difficult to define in exact terms what really are pleasure and grief. Because they vary, unlike physical pains, with each person. What is pleasure to one may be distressful to another. The event that may bring happiness to one may cause sorrow to another. Again, an event that was the cause of happiness to an individual in the past may become a source of annoyance in the future. In every individual's life, the experiences of happiness and unhappiness keep on changing according to his thinking. One's thought is fitting and vagrant. If a person reflects on his sorrows of the past, he realizes that they ultimately did him some good. On the other hand, he sees his so-called great emotional experiences of life often paved the way to agonies in the end.

The feeling of pain comes when one's needs or wants are not satisfied at the particular expected moment, when he so badly desires their fulfilment. Then is experienced deep depression and the agony of disappointment. After a lapse of time, however, having gained some maturity, one comes to understand that unnecessary tears were shed in the past. Universal experience shows that there is no such thing as permanent misery, as there is no such thing as lasting happiness. They come, stay for a time and go. Life hangs between pessimism and optimism. The world is neither a rose garden nor a bed of thorns. It all depends on one's state of mind. When a man's desires are fulfilled without much struggle the world appears like a heaven. Everything looks bright and smiling. When desire after desire goes to pieces the world looks dark and not fit for habitation. The self-centred mind creates its own heaven and hell.

King Yayati went to heaven on account of the numerous acts of self-sacrifice and virtue which he performed while on earth. He saw in heaven many wonderful rare things. The divine damsels vied with one another to please him. Sages like Narada praised him on his newly acquired happiness. Seeing all this the King was overcome by conceit thinking that he acquired heaven by means of his great virtues and merit and there was none equal to him. He became arrogant. No sooner had ego swelled the head of Yayati than he found himself in hell amidst a multitude of tormented souls.

King Videha was being led to heaven by the servants of Yama—the god of death. On his way he saw innumerable souls suffering in hell, crying for help. The sad spectacle moved his tender heart. He said to the servants, "I shall stay here rather than go to heaven while so many souls are being tortured here. Leave me with these souls and go." The matter was reported to Yama. The god of death himself came, and accosting the king, said, "Thy virtues, O King, are innumerable, this place is not for you. I have come personally to take you to heaven." King Videha replied, "It is selfish to seek my happiness while so many brethren are suffering. If my virtues avail anything, let them go to these tortured lot, and let me suffer in their place." Hardly did he speak thus, Yama disappeared and hell stood transformed into heaven and all its denizens transfigured into gods.

However rational may be the explanation of sorrow and grief, the recurring thought of God's partiality vexes human beings. We see partiality in the world. One person

is born in wealth and luxury and another in penury; one is blessed with happiness and another has to endure abject misery. One is sought by fortune, and another is pursued by disaster. Then there are cruel exploitation and ruthlessness. The rich and powerful can lay their hands on everything. They suck the blood of the hapless poor, as it were. This lamentable plight of beings often raises doubts in the minds of people that this creation is the handiwork of the worst devil, and not of a merciful God. Answering to this doubt Vivekananda said:

Ay! says the Vedanta, it is not the fault of God that this partiality exists, that this competition exists. Who makes it? We ourselves. There is a cloud shedding its rain on all fields alike. But it is only the field that is well cultivated, which gets the advantage of the shower; another field, which has not been tilled or taken care of cannot get that advantage. It is not the fault of the cloud. The mercy of God is eternal and unchangeable; it is we that make the differentiation. But how can this difference of some being born happy and some unhappy be explained? They do nothing to make out that difference! Not in this life, but they did in their last birth and the difference is explained by this action in the previous life.¹

The mind of a child ushered into the world is not *tabula rasa* as some have claimed it to be. The child is the inheritor of all its past innumerable impressions, it has the burden of the infinite past. It comes to this world to work out the effects of its past deeds, good or evil. This is the Doctrine of Karma. Without the help of this Law, it is difficult to explain the injustices and

anomalies that exist in the world. The differentiation we see is due to operation of the Law of Karma. When it is properly understood then the whole burden of responsibility shifts on the shoulders of every human being. Instead of blaming God, destiny, and adverse circumstances, man takes in his own hand his destiny and shapes it. "Each one of us," remarked Swamiji—

is the maker of his own fate. This law knocks on the head at once all doctrines of predestination and fate and gives us the only means of reconciliation between God and man. We, we, and none else, are responsible for what we suffer. We are the effects, and we are the causes. We are free therefore. If I am unhappy, it has been of my own making, and that very thing shows that I can be happy if I will. If I am impure, that is also of my making, and that very thing shows that I can be pure if I will. The human will stands beyond all circumstance. Before it—the strong, gigantic, infinite will and freedom in man—all the powers, even of nature, must bow down, succumb, and become its servants. This is the result of the law of Karma.²

As long as we are in the habit of thinking that we are separate egos with distinct personalities, doubts do not disappear so easily. Still, we argue that God could have created a just and happy world minus all troubles and sufferings; He could have imbued all beings with good sense, and righteous mind from the very inception. Had it been so, the world would have become a paradise and life a blessing. Again and again our deeply entrenched mind meditates only on the little joys and agonies of the world, and never goes beyond. The

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol, 3, p. 124.

2. *Ibid.* p. 125.

monotonous refrain of our thoughts is: God is the strict ruler and we are the helpless victims of His creation. We depend entirely on His mercy or sweet will; it is the relationship between a master and his slave. Such thoughts, distortions of truth, have their roots in the delusion that we are distinct entities apart from God. Do we have any separate existence apart from the Supreme Spirit? Are we not the same cosmic consciousness, minus this pseudo 'I' sense?

The illuminating words of Sri Ramakrishna open our eyes to the truth of reality. He was asked by a devotee:

HARI: "Why is there so much suffering in the world?"

MASTER: "This world is the *līlā* of God. It is like a game. In this game there are joy and sorrow, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil. The game cannot continue if sin and suffering are altogether eliminated from the creation.

"In the game of hide-and-peek one must touch the 'granny' in order to be free. But the 'granny' is never pleased if she is touched at the very outset. It is God's wish that the play should continue for some time....

HARI: "But this play of God is our death."

MASTER (smiling): "Please tell me who you are. God alone has become all this—*māyā*, the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. 'As the snake I bite, and as the charmer I cure.' It is God Himself who has become both *vidyā* and *avidyā*"³

We have to get out of the prison of our own making the same way in which we entered it. We have to unlearn all that we have learned in a perverted way. Our false values and imaginary ideas should be supplanted by the following truths. Truths and fantasy have the same relationship as that of light and darkness. Light and darkness are eternal enemies, but they have not seen each other. The presence of one is the absence of the other. The presence of truth is the absence of the false.

1. *Life is temporary.* Our life on earth is limited to some years only. Days and years quickly slip from our awareness. People witness the sad scene of their near and dear ones passing away. Yet unmindful of these tragedies they go on with their strife-torn imprudent life—as if they are immortal. Though they live in the midst of so many deaths, none thinks of his own final departure, leaving everything behind. The very thought of death strikes terror into all hearts. Children are not permitted to see a dead body and are hushed up when they ask awkward questions about it. In the twentieth century, all-out war has been waged against death by modern medical technology. How to conquer death and how to postpone its strangle-hold on life for a few more years is the consuming concern of modern civilization.

Man hopefully longs for medical miracles that will come to his rescue, to keep him in perennial youth and forestall the aging and death of the body indefinitely. Thomas Browne, a seventeenth century physician and author, poignantly remarked, "The long habit of living indisposeth us to dying." People have as much abhorrence for talking about death as for thinking about it. In European countries dead bodies are removed from hospitals at dead of night carefully, so that nobody can see them. "These days," writes a famous biologist, Lewis Thomas—

3. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 436.

The habit has become addiction; we are hooked on living; the tenacity of its grip on us, and ours on it grows in intensity. We cannot think of giving it up, even when living loses its zest—even when we have lost the zest for zest—...If we ever do achieve freedom from most of today's diseases, or even complete freedom from |all| disease, we will perhaps terminate by drying out and blowing away on a light breeze but we will still die.⁴

Many therapists' and doctors' sage counsel to terror-stricken patients is: "Don't take your life too seriously—it is temporary." When the temporariness of life is deeply impressed in one's brain cells, it works miracles. We look at our own fortunes and misfortunes and events of the world in a more non-attached way. In a temporary life, nothing belongs to us—including the body so dear to all. Knowing the truth of life's impermanency burns off all sufferings, wipes out all heart-burnings and there springs a mysterious exhilaration. Unfolding a great secret of life, Swamiji said,

Work as if you were a stranger in this land, a sojourner; work incessantly, but do not bind yourselves; bondage is terrible. This world is not our habitation, it is only one of the many stages through which we are passing.⁵

2. *Pleasures are transient.* It is common experience that pleasures do not last long. A pleasurable experience gives a momentary joy. In that joy man forgets everything and daydreams that such state will continue forever. Even if it continues he soon gets tired of it and craves for something else. Pleasure

in itself is not bad. Experiencing pleasures as they come is natural and spontaneous, but exclusive pursuit of pleasure, epicurianism, is dangerous. The chasing makes one restless and heaps on him endless misery. A wise man never loses his equipoise when pleasures come to him, because he knows that pleasures are fleeting and life has deeper roots and loftier meaning than these passing rainbows.

3. *Troubles and sorrows are impermanent.* When misery comes, even though for a short duration, it hangs over life like a threatening dark cloud. As long as it lasts it usurps all our power to reason it away, disturbs our inner stability and seems to shake the very foundations of life. Sometimes its intensity and acuteness, even for a short run, is irresistible. Under its dark spell many commit suicide, some become insane, some lose interest in life and many others succumb to drugs and alcohol as an escape. But griefs, like the joys of this world, are fleeting. None spends the whole of life with bleeding heart. Sorrow appears formidable because it catches us unawares. Our attention is always focused towards the sweet things of life and our expectations are morbidly fastened on the favourable turn of events. During such unwatchfulness, grief strikes us heavily, without prior intimation. If one is alert and remembers that good or bad things may happen at any moment, he saves himself from unnecessary turmoil and distress. Sorrow does not stay forever. On the contrary, if one waits with a little patience it disappears of itself.

4. *Practice of detachment.* Wisdom shows that in our day-to-day life a little detachment brings great peace of mind. In this evanescent life, inordinate attachment is a curse. One must gradually cultivate a healthy spirit of objectivity in regard to all things and persons if one wants to retain

4. Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984) p. 56.

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 56.

sanity. It is a willingness to face life as it is, to allow things to freely come and go, to a certain extent. It is wisdom based on the fact that life is not permanent. Death is waiting for all. It wipes out violently all attachments, so why wait for death to teach us by hard knocks? Instead we might adjust ourselves to the facts of existence and the inevitability of separation from everything in the world. Resting in the thought of the immortality of the Soul, it is possible to face all eventualities of life and death with peaceful heart. But the spirit of non-attachment should be remembered and cultivated throughout one's life.

5. *Do not trust the whimsical mind.* Mind is a great magician. Due to its conjuring tricks we see a palace in a desert, sweetness in poison, pleasure in hatred, peace in chaos, permanency in ephemeral things, truth in falsehood. The deluded mind, in fact, is capable of reversing all values and morals. Most people, having more attachment to this world of matter than to God, are led on through life by the deceiving mind, yet few have any suspicion of this. Even for short periods if we can watch objectively over the workings of our own mind, we can get some idea of its powers and trickery. Then the desire will arise in us to check it when it would lead us wrongly. The mind is like a chameleon, appearing at times in different colours. Sometimes it is angelic and sometimes devilish. Surprisingly, hardly anyone devotes sufficient time to study it and try to get control over its vagaries. To trust the unconquered whimsical childish mind, and not to control it and educate it, is to invite tragedy into one's life.

Maitri Upaniṣad describes the mind thus:

"The mind has been described as of two kinds, pure and impure. The impure is that

which is tainted by desires, the pure is that which is free from desires.

*"The mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation. Attachments to objects leads to bondage, and freedom from attachment to them leads to release."*⁶

6. *Disentangle oneself from the world.* The centre of our thoughts, desires and actions is the world of material objects, places and persons. We are always dwelling in the "go-round" of *Samsāra*, the states of waking, dream and sleep. Thinking incessantly about something is the same as attachment to it. We are awfully attached. Unless we try to keep our independence from the world in all its sordidness, we go down—becoming distressed by worry, anxiety and fear. Worldliness becomes a disease. So Wordsworth said in one of his poems, "the world is too much with us". For our tranquillity it is imperative to extract oneself from the work-a-day world from time to time. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna used often to advise the householder devotees to retire to solitary places now and then and for a few days forget all about family and worldly affairs to meditate on God. For it is in japa and meditation that the intrusion of the thousands of frivolous thoughts, images and words that crowd into the brain can be checked. There, only the name and form and thought of God are allowed to enter. In addition to medicine, medical practitioners are nowadays prescribing meditation to their patients for speedy recovery.

6. *Maitri Upaniṣad*, VI, 34-verses 6 & 11.

मनो हि द्विविधं प्रोक्तं शुद्धं चाशुद्धमेव च ।

अशुद्धं कामसम्पर्कच्छुद्धं कामविवर्जितम् ॥

मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः ।

बन्धाय विषयासक्तं मुक्तये निर्विषयं स्मृतम् ॥

7. *God never punishes.* It is our folly to blame God for everything. He has given us enough wisdom to discriminate between good and bad, virtue and vice. What happens is for our good. Even hard blows and suffering awaken us to examine again our blindly held beliefs, foolishly harboured myths and hallucinations. God wakes us up and shows us what we really are—Limitless pure consciousness and eternally free and blissful. Any price we pay to gain the knowledge of immortality is little.

8. *Prayer.* Prayer is a potent instrument. The Lord does not listen to all our prayers, fortunately. Most of our prayers are selfish and childish. When we pray to God to destroy or punish our enemies—He does not. When our enemies pray for our destruction—He does not. Had God granted all prayers of human beings be answered, the world would have been reduced to ashes in no time. He is the indwelling Spirit. He knows what is good for us. The power of unselfish prayer is great. A skeptic once came to Sri Ramakrishna and said, "Sir, I do not believe in God." Sri Ramakrishna replied, "That does not matter. Only pray to Him earnestly in this manner: 'O God, if you are there, show me the way':" The

skeptic came after a few months a completely transformed person. In difficulties one can pray to the Lord to show one the right path. We should pray not only for ourselves, but for the well-being of others too. Such prayers expand our heart and broaden our mind. Gandhiji had unshakable faith in the potency of prayer. "God, Thy will be done," and not "my will be done," is the right attitude of prayer. Our goal is not how to live happily in this world, without troubles, but to manifest our divinity and realize our oneness with God. Truth alone is real, everything else is a play. Christ said, "You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free."

One of the great churches in Italy has a triple-door entrance. All three are crowned by splendid arches carved with thought-provoking inscriptions.

Over one, etched in stone, is a wreath of roses with the words, "All which pleases is but for a moment." Over another is a cross with the following message, "All which troubles is but for a moment." On the great central entrance to the main sanctuary is cut the most profound thought of all: "That only is important which is eternal."

Memories of Swami Prabhavananda

PRAVRAJIKA VARADAPRANA

Some of the outstanding young second generation monks were chosen by the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna to carry on the spiritual work started by Swami Vivekananda in the West. Of them Swami Prabhavananda is still remembered with devotion and reverence by many. The author, who gives an intimate glimpse into the Swami's unique personality, is a nun of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, U.S.A.

"God can be realized in this very life." "God is like a fruit in the palm of your hand." These words came as a revelation to me when I first attended a lecture of Swami Prabhavananda in the Hollywood temple in January of 1943. Previously I had thought that only a handful of people who were born as holy saints could have such an experience.

After that I attended all of the lectures and classes at the temple. The message was universal, which was a very refreshing change from the more sectarian churches. Swami Prabhavananda nearly always quoted passages from Christ, Buddha, or the Sufi mystics. Often the lecture title would be from the Bible, such as "Ye Shall Know the Truth", "Be Still and Know That I am God", or the series of lectures on "The Sermon on the Mount". This served as a bridge for those who came from a Christian background. I found that I understood for the first time the meaning of some of the familiar sayings of Jesus.

The Swami spoke with a deep, sonorous voice, and with the authority of one who had experienced that of which he spoke. He had the ability to lift our minds, and we hung on to every word. His message was always simple and practical. In his scripture classes, the Swami used the text like a spring board for speaking about

spiritual practices. Then again, he could make the most abstruse philosophy understandable. As the Swami himself said, "I have been given the ability, if I understand something myself, to express it in a way that others can understand."

One of the beauties of his lectures was that he preached the highest truths. He never lowered the ideal, or tried to accommodate his audience. He would say, "We may not always be able to live up to the highest ideal, but never lower the ideal." Surprisingly, this did not keep people away, but rather he gained respect for his uncompromising position.

I now realize, after Swami Prabhavananda has been gone for many years, how much he shaped my thinking and ideals, without apparently trying to do so. Most of the principles that I cling to in life, are the principles and values that he taught and exemplified.

The second generation of Ramakrishna Mission monks who were sent for the work in America were hand-picked by the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. They were all well chosen for the difficult pioneering work of establishing, or developing existing Vedanta Centres, at a time when Hinduism was still virtually unknown, and the word 'Swami' was associated with crystal balls.

Each of these young monks had his own unique and distinctive personality, but had in common the unmistakable stamp of a Ramakrishna monk. Their lives had been transformed by the touch of the Holy Mother and the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. I had the privilege of meeting most of the Swamis of that era, and the blessings of close association with my guru, Swami Prabhavananda, after I joined the convent.

When Swami Prabhavananda was about to be sent to America in 1923, he said to Swami Saradananda, "I feel nervous. What do I know that I can preach or teach?" Swami Saradananda responded gravely, "This is none of your business! We shall see to that!" They did indeed 'see to that'.

Swami Prabhavananda opened the Vedanta Centre in Hollywood in late 1929, with the blessings of Swami Shivananda. For years the Centre was very poor, and the Swami spoke to only a handful of people. Gradually the work grew into what is now a thriving Centre with several branch Centres, convents and monasteries.

The Swami was especially concerned to see that convents were established and recognized, both here and in India. He championed the cause of the nuns in India, and helped to financially support them in their early years.

Although the Swami himself was a mystic by temperament, he always told us that it is character and not spiritual experiences that is most important in spiritual life. He said that though a spiritual aspirant may not have spiritual experiences, he is growing none the less, as long as he is struggling. The highest experience often comes at the very end.

He stressed regularity in meditation, and he was the most regular amongst us, even in his later years. It was a privilege to meditate in his presence, for you could feel the intensity of his meditation.

He equally stressed constant remembrance of God during the day, and making japam as we worked. Often he would come upon one of his monastics as they were performing some mechanical task and ask, "Are you making japam?" One nun in the early days was listening to music on the radio as she worked. Because of this, all radios were banned for some years.

Swami spoke frequently to the monastics about keeping a balance between work and meditation, and moderation in all our habits. He often said, "Work well, meditate well, eat well and sleep well." He never let us forget that the purpose of life is to realize God.

Swami's instructions about spiritual life always seemed simple, easy, and direct. He would say, "Religion is simple, and God is simple. If you are simple you will find God." He once defined spiritual life in this way, "Spiritual life is to forget yourself and to make God the centre of your heart."

The Swami used to define renunciation as renunciation of the ego, not merely detachment from possessions. It is easy to give up externals, but very difficult to overcome the sense of 'I' and 'mine'. He stressed the positive side of spiritual discipline, saying that real renunciation comes when there is an intense love for God, and everything else falls away.

The Swami enjoyed having food and clothing of good quality, but never made an effort to acquire anything for himself. He accepted what came to him. Swami wouldn't

allow special dishes of food to be prepared just for him. He was especially fond of Shad (*ilís*) fish roe which was rather expensive for the whole group. But when we bought a smaller amount just for him, he insisted that everyone at the table should take some also. It is in these small things that a man's character is known.

Some people used to give him money on his birthday and at Christmas time. He never spent any of it on himself, but it would be used for charity. He was extremely generous, and always said that one should keep an open hand where money is concerned. Money should flow in and out of the hand, with no tightening of the fist.

In the 1940s there was a member of the household who had an inordinate need for money. Whenever she needed it she would go without asking to Swami's wallet and take some money from it. Swami was aware of this, but he never said anything, because he never felt that the money was 'his'.

He had the same attitude towards the work of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. He did not consider it his work, but the Lord's work—or Maharaj's (Swami Brahmananda's) work. He said that when he first began the work in this country, he thought of it as 'his' work, and it did not grow. As soon as he adopted the attitude that it was the Lord's work, or Maharaj's work, then it began to grow.

His devotion to his guru, Swami Brahmananda, whom he called Maharaj, was paramount in his life. He used to say, "I have seen Maharaj, I have seen God." Another favourite saying of his was, "We are nobodies. I am a speck of dust of Maharaj's feet." His love for Maharaj was so strong that those around him could not help but be affected by it.

Although basically shy and serious, the Swami's personality sparkled with humour and a sense of fun. His boyish smile, even in older years, and his hearty, infectious laugh were memorable. He did not always have an original sense of humour but he had a keen appreciation for the ironies of life, and other people's humour. One time however, he came off with a good one, which I have never forgotten. We were sitting around the table, and bowls of jam were being passed around in all directions. He finally said, "It's a traffic jam!" We all roared with laughter.

Swami was completely natural; he did not seem to care what people thought about him. There was no show about him, or 'playing the holy man'. He was mischievous at times, and loved to tease and shock. The latter sometimes embarrassed the nuns, especially when new people came, for fear they wouldn't understand. We wanted everything to 'look nice'.

Swami Prabhavananda, in training his monastic disciples, did not seem to be teaching. He gave freedom to his disciples, for he believed in self-discipline. As he said, "I teach with love." That is what he had learned from his guru who had said, "What we need is not more rules, but more love." However, he watched. When he found one of us going too far off the track, he would correct us. He often warned us that "spiritual life is like the razor's edge."

Swami seemed to feel that we each had to work out our own karma. If we asked for permission to do something or go somewhere, the Swami would often answer in a wry tone, "if you wish." We came to know that this really meant "no", but he sometimes left it up to our own discrimination.

One teaching tool that we all experienced to a greater or lesser degree, was the use of

a formidable temper, which preferably took place in front of other people. This made a very deep impression on everyone present, and no doubt burned a lot of karma for the recipient of the scolding!

One thing that the Swami used to insist upon among the nuns, was modesty in dress and behaviour. If one of the nuns talked or laughed too loudly, she was sure to receive a rebuke. Swami would cite the example of the Holy Mother who was the personification of modesty.

Swami often said to his young monastic disciples that the past is dead. One should never think about the pre-monastic days. When we went to Swami with major troubles and problems, he was most sympathetic and supportive. He was always our best friend. It was the little things that usually prompted a scolding. He would sometimes say, "If you are having problems, it is because your mind is not in God."

Swami would frequently urge us to just 'stay on the train'. He would say, "You have taken up spiritual life, and as long as you stay on the train, you are sure to reach your destination." This is a very encouraging thought when progress seems slow.

In the evenings or at meals, the Swami would often talk about his experiences with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, or about the Holy Mother with whom he also had association. These informal reminiscences make the teachings of Vedanta come alive for us. At other times he would answer personal or group questions about spiritual life. It was a comfort to know that we could always go to Swami with a spiritual question and receive the answer we needed to hear.

Swami loved both his monastic and lay disciples very much and was always available

for them. In his younger days he would sit in the living room during the day, and people could come at any time, unannounced, to see him.

Swami Prabhavananda was most hospitable, and when people stopped by to see him during the morning, he would invariably invite them to the midday meal, regardless of the number. In the early years we (the cooks) would panic when this happened. However, experience taught us that there was usually enough food to go around, and we learned to be more flexible.

It was the Swami's habit to give scope to experienced lay devotees who offered their services to help in the Vedanta work. He would take the advice of the businessmen on our board of trustees about business matters. When it came time to build the Santa Barbara temple, he told the architect, Lulah Riggs, "I give you carte blanche to build a temple you like." He knew that she was a real artist, and his faith in her has been well re-paid.

Swami Prabhavananda was the first one in America to establish a daily ten-item Puja (worship) and vesper service in the temple, open to the public. Invoking the presence of the Lord in this way, creates a lasting spiritual atmosphere that people feel when they visit the temple. Many people in Santa Barbara come to our temple throughout the day for meditation, as well as for the evening vesper service.

Maharaj had asked Swami Prabhavananda to do Puja for one year in the monastery at Bhuvaneshwar, and the Swami had felt great benefit from this. Therefore he wanted each one of his monastic members to learn and perform Puja. He used to say to us, "You are not worshipping a picture, you are worshipping the living Ramakrishna." Once

Swami had the experience while doing Puja, that the picture actually became living. Swami would tell us, "Our worship is non-dual. You are seeing God in the flowers, the worship vessels, and in everything. It is God who is worshipping God."

Swami was very one-pointed in his devotion to spiritual life and the work of the Centre. He had few other interests, with the exception of gardening (Maharaj loved gardening) and politics.

Maharaj was always in Swami Prabhavananda's thoughts. He daily relived some of his special experiences with Maharaj and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, both in his meditations and spare moments. Swami often said, "Thakur, Mother, Swamiji and Maharaj—they are not different. They are one and the same."

Swami used to encourage us to read the writings of Swami Vivekananda, saying that we would know everything we needed to know about religion and philosophy by reading the works of Swamiji. We saw in Swami Prabhavananda's lectures and teachings, how much he followed the words of

Swamiji and the teachings of Maharaj. He had absorbed it all and made it his own.

Swami Prabhavananda would not allow any of us to call him Swamiji or Maharaj. He would say, "There is only one Swamiji and one Maharaj." For Swami, it was too close to the advent of the direct disciples for him to be addressed with the titles associated with them, and he did not want a guru cult to develop around himself. However, he always addressed his seniors with the traditional terms of respect.

We were impressed by the Swami's devotion to his brother monks, and he encouraged us to have love and respect for all the Swamis who came to visit. It was always a grand occasion when one or more of our 'uncle' Swamis visited our centre. They were all powerful personalities, and each one made an indelible impression on our mind.

Every new generation looks up to their preceding generations for guidance and inspiration. We feel fortunate and blessed to have had the association and example of all the great men and women who have come before us.

Memoirs of Swami Brahmananda

SWAMI SARADESHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Swami Brahmananda was foresighted in every matter. Because of his extraordinary intelligence, we have seen, many devotees took his counsel in their domestic affairs. One young devotee after passing the medical course was undecided as to whether he should go into service or follow an independent private practice. He went to Maharaj and submitted his problem very humbly after offering pranams and praying for his guidance. At first, Maharaj hesitated to give any opinion in the matter, but the young man would not desist from his importunities. Rather, he requested again and again Maharaj's advice. As I had to leave the place very soon for some work, I could not have any opportunity to hear the advice of Maharaj myself. Later on I came to know that the young man had acquired a lot of wealth and position after launching into private practice according to the instructions of Maharaj. Also he became absorbed in the thought of Thakur and remained under the shelter of the Math. He was unstinting in his service of the sadhus and the devotees.

Swami Brahmananda was very keen about knowing the details in every kind of subject. Once a devotee living in a far-off place sent a big Rohu (carp) fish to the Math, covering it with ice and sending it by rail. The monks were joyous to see it when it arrived about nine or ten one morning. According with the order of Maharaj it was immediately cleaned and sent to the kitchen to be cooked for the offering (*bhoga*) to Thakur. When he started to fry a few pieces, however, the cook noticed a peculiar smell and

suspected the fish was not good. He at once informed the kitchen-in-charge. On closer examination the suspicious of the cook were confirmed and without delay it was reported to Maharaj. Maharaj asked for a few pieces of the fried fish and observed them himself. He came to the conclusion also that it was really spoiled and should not be offered to Thakur or eaten. He asked them to throw it out. As the fish had spoiled from the inside its condition had not at first been noticed.

Another incident comes to my mind. Once I had to do the marketing for the Math for a few days. Marketing was done for very small quantities in those days—sweets for Thakur's offering, fresh greens, vegetables and fish. Eight annas worth of fish would have to be purchased every Tuesday and Saturday. As per the instructions of Maharaj, I was told not to buy Koi or Magur fish that live in muddy water. Because it was the end of winter (the dry season in Bengal), the level of the water in canals and ponds was low. There might be bacteria growing in those fish that could sometimes cause people to fall ill. I saw later on that the fish which live in closed vessels or small pools in muddy water really are unhealthy. Many were the incidents to be heard from the elders about Maharaj's keen discretion in every matter. The behaviour of those who lived under his influence also indicated their good training.

Some of the letters written by Maharaj have been published. They show the executive ability he had as well during the early days of the Math and Order. He was stay-

ing mostly outside the Math when we used to see him. Still, we had the privilege of seeing his efforts to improve the lives of the sadhus and brahmacharins in all aspects. We came to know about his thoughts and plans and endeavours in regard to getting waterpipe connections to remove the drinking water problem at the Math, rennovating the kitchen to make it bigger, providing living accommodations for the sadhus and brahmacharins, purchasing land for the Math, relief work, establishing and managing the ashramas, and so on.

With a view to establishing a few ashramas in places of pilgrimage, Maharaj gave special attention to the founding of a few of them. That is why in order to facilitate the stay and devotional practices of the sadhus and devotees at those spiritually sanctified places, he wanted to build up maths and ashramas. In this, one well-known event is memorable.

In Ayodhya, Maharaj became blessed with a vision of the Master and wished an ashrama to be established there. Hearing this, Swami Jagadananda and Swami Sampurananda came there from Kashi Advaita Ashrama with the object of establishing it. In Ayodhya Swami Sampurnananda fell seriously ill with an attack of dysentery. Even after several days he did not recover. Swami Jagadananda brought him back to Kashi after a week. If there were any further attempts, we were not aware of them.

Swami Purushottamananda, an attendant-disciple and companion of Maharaj during his travels in Malabar, told us, "Maharaj was so deeply moved by his visit to Kanyakumari and her beautiful surrounding areas that he did not like to leave that place. After a great deal of effort we could persuade him to return. Maharaj used to say, 'A cottage should be built in these peaceful

surroundings. I shall come here at the last stage of my life and live with pleasure in this secluded area.' Later on, one monk from Kerala who was a favourite of Swami Purushottamananda established an ashrama there and named it, according to the last wishes of Maharaj, '*Sānti Kutir*'."

It was learnt from the devotees of South India about the high state of realization and ecstasy of Maharaj during his pilgrimage. Only a few things I will mention to you. I went to visit Tirupati in the early part of 1924. At the end of my visit I was proceeding to purchase a postcard from the post office after taking prasad from the temple of Laksmi Narayan which was situated on the plain at the foot of the hill. Seeing a middle-aged man in the street I asked, "Where is the post office?" He showed much interest in me, asked my name and showed me his house. He said to me, "Please come along with me, I shall give you a postcard." Because it was very urgent I accompanied him to his house and there with great care he bade me sit in his drawing room. Handing me the postcard he said, "I was fortunate enough to see your last President, Swami Brahmanandaji. I was a doctor when he visited Tirupati. When he felt indisposed I examined him and prescribed some medicine for him. He recovered completely and was able to complete his visits with great pleasure within a few days. Every day I used to go to see him and he showed much affection towards me. When he saw the Deity in the Tirupati temple he lost all outward consciousness. I was charmed to look on his face and expression at that time. Since then there has dawned a special transformation in my life. I have progressed in my spiritual practices, and have heard some things in divine revelations. I feel that all this has been due to Maharaj's grace and affection for me. It is also very strange that although we are orthodox Vaiṣṇavas, and have never

had faith or devotion in any of the deities excepting that of Nārāyaṇa, I now feel inclined towards *Śakti* (the Divine Mother). I am reading the books of Sir Woodroff and feel an increase of devotion within myself.”

I heard from an old devotee of Madras about the visit of Swami Brahmanandaji to Mīnakṣī temple at Madurai: “Just on reaching the hall of the temple Maharaj was immersed in a transcendental mood and ran towards the Deity just like a child would run to its mother. Sashi Maharaj (Swami Ramakrishnananda) who was his companion was alert in case such a thing should happen. Sashi Maharaj checked Maharaj’s advancing further by embracing him. In deep ecstasy Maharaj stood still. As a result of that transcendental mood his bright facial expression became even more beautiful and attractive. With wonder and a feeling of delight the visitors crowded around him”.

Experiencing the beauty, splendour and spiritual current prevailing in the temple of Melkote in the hills near Mysore, Maharaj became so much attracted that it was very hard for him to leave the place. I heard of one important incident from the old devotees of Bangalore. During the consecration of the foundation of the Bangalore Ashrama, Maharaj was present. Swami Abhedananda who had just come back from America for the first time was also there. As desired by Maharaj, Abhedanandaji Maharaj laid the foundation stone. It was a big meeting and many important people of the city were present. Swami Brahmananda delivered a speech introducing Swami Abhedananda. We had not so far heard any oration of Maharaj anywhere, so being inquisitive about it we came to know that Maharaj had spoken for about twenty minutes in English. His speech had been heart-warming and appealed very much to the people. They were highly pleased and formed a clear idea

about the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji’s preaching of Vedanta in America and also the success of Swami Abhedananda there, from this beautiful and simple speech in English by Maharaj.

Citing the visit to Kanyakumari by Maharaj, Swami Turiyananda told us, “It becomes possible to understand the grandness of making a pilgrimage if one accompanies a great soul while visiting a temple deity in a place of pilgrimage. When we visited Kanyakumari with Maharaj, it appeared to us that the Deity in the form of a lovely girl was standing with smiling face filling the hearts and souls of the devotees. But without the company of Maharaj, whenever we visited other places by ourselves, we never experienced that divine influence and appeal in our heart and soul.”

We heard from the elderly monks of Madras that Maharaj, being very much amazed and delighted seeing the image of Naṭarāja, had said, “When Sri Sri Thakur used to dance, his feet would take the same position as those you see in the Naṭarāj.” (The standing posture of Sri Thakur at the house of Keshab Sen with uplifted hands giving assurance, also resembles exactly the *Mṛga-mudra* shown by Śiva’s hand [*Mṛgavarabhīti-hastam*—Meditation Hymn to Śiva]). One devotee showed us a spot near the Kapaleśwar temple adjacent to the Madras Math and said, “Once Maharaj, after visiting the Deities in the Kapaleśwar and Candreśwar temples, had circumambulated them and stood under the Bel tree doing *japa*. He expressed regret that the place was dirty and said that it was essential to gird the place with a cement structure and canopy to keep it clean so that the devotees might comfortably sit for *japa* and meditation. Later on the authorities did actually clean up the site and build a structure around the Bel tree.

to be continued

The Veena Resonates*

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

The Atman Consciousness is sometimes portrayed as the Cosmic Musician, the Player of the Veena. When the Cosmic Veena vibrates the diverse manifestations of the universe come into existence. Behind this multiplicity there is ineffable Unity. Very poetic imagery of the Upanisad mixed with deep Philosophy is expounded clearly by the scholar monk, who is spiritual leader of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento in the United States.

The sage, Yājñavalkya, has given several illustrations in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* to elucidate the two subjects—manifestations of the many from the one and the experience of the one in the many. One of these illustrations is very beautiful. When the vīṇa is played by an expert musician the ceaseless pull of the several strings produces different notes in different ways. *Tāna* (elaboration of the Rāga by free combination of the notes from three octaves, keeping the tāla intact), *Laya* (the speed of the music), *Murchhanā* (a graduated rise and fall of the notes in music), *Mīrha* (smooth jumping of two distant notes), *Gamak* (to start with a lower note and reach a distant note without playing the intermediate notes), and other musical skills combined with the notes produces the composite music of the vīṇa. When we listen to the vīṇa with rapt attention we generally do not pay heed to the different musical parts. We hear the music as a whole and that brings joy to our heart. Yet we know that in the total music there are hundreds of different sections. The fingers of the player are moving and dancing, how dexterously!, and with each movement a part of the music is created. The music of the vīṇa is a condensed expression of numerous interconnected segments. Just in

the same way the various objects and occurrences of this world are, as it were, a united expression of consciousness, the ultimate reality. When a person attains Self-knowledge, all that is known through the senses and mind can be experienced as a combined, undivided, consciousness-bliss, like the music of the vīṇa. Sound, touch, form, taste, smell, thought, emotion, desire, small, large, near, far, pleasure, pain, space, time—all these separate experiences the illumined person feels as one spiritual reality. The deepest truth of man is his innermost Self, which is of the nature of pure consciousness. This truth has no birth or death, nor limitation nor bondage. When a person is under *Māyā* (ignorance) he cannot know this. He identifies himself with his ego and feels himself as little and limited. He sees before him the extensive universe, with endless forms, names and actions, producing in his mind different attractions and repulsions. The vast universe tied in space, time and causation overwhelms man with wonder, sometimes with fear.

In the beginning of this century we believed that the Milky Way we saw through telescopes in the far away sky was the agglomeration of millions of stars in remote space, each like the sun, and the number of the stars, according to the astronomers, was about one hundred billion. But within fifty years of that time unthought of new dis-

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coveries had been made. Now we are told that our familiar Milky Way is one of the spirals of a galaxy, and this our own galaxy is only one of one hundred billion similar galaxies each with an agglomeration of about one billion stars. Like the blades of grass in a vast meadow these one hundred billion galaxies are spread all over the boundless sky. Not merely that. These galaxies are steadily receding from one another. The immensity of this universe filled with galaxies is really beyond human comprehension. It is only natural that man shall consider himself totally insignificant before the measureless immensity of the universe where he lives.

But the sages of the Upaniṣads declare that the vastness which is indicated by the totality of time-space existence should not be counted as the only vast. By turning away from our natural sense impulses and educating our mind and intelligence with the subtle, unbiased Vedāntic inquiries¹ we can rise above the realm of the apparently interminable phenomenal universe, which everyone accepts without any question, and have glimpses of the truly vast Pure Consciousness. The vastness of the material universe, bound by time-space-causality is tiny, very tiny, compared to the greatness of the Spirit. Jesus Christ was voicing the findings of the Āryan Ṛṣis when he said, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his own soul?" (Mat. 16.26).

The Vedāntic seer in the course of his inner experience becomes convinced that the external universe we perceive through our senses is really stationed in his own soul.

1. Vedāntic enquiry is based on all the experiences of man in the three states: waking, dream and sleep.

The world experience with its endless multiplicity is true but our soul is 'satyasya satyam', truer than the true. (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.1.20) Man's real identity is in his soul, the changeless, immortal Being which is never born. It is eternally existing. My soul is also your soul and his or her soul. The Sāṅkhya Philosophy speaks of many souls, but Vedānta denies this idea with sound reasoning. There is only one soul, which is the indivisible Self of all beings and things. Like the innumerable waves of musical notes emerging from the vīṇa, every object and event of the universe is the creation of the Self. From the One shoot up many, and in the many is revealed the One.

* * *

The Veena resonates.

Who is the player of the vīṇa? The Self-existent, Self-enlightening Ātman Consciousness, the deepest core of our personality. The first twang of the strings is *Ākāśa* (space)—endless space! After that first twang others follow. *Vāyu* (air), *Agnī* (fire), *Ap* (water), *Prthivī* (earth), in other words, the five constituent subtle elements of creation and their numerous intermixtures. Whatever we perceive through our senses and mind is the Vīṇa-sound of the cosmic player. The enormous vastness of millions of galaxies as also the unimaginable subtlety of the atomic world are the Vīṇa play of the Self. The Upaniṣads repeatedly declare that this is not poetical fancy. When Self-knowledge comes it can be verified by the seer's direct experience. *Ātmaivedam sarvam*, whatever you perceive is Ātman. (*Chandogya Upaniṣad* 7.25.2)² "Ātman is below,

2. आत्मैवाधस्तादात्मो परिष्ठादात्मा पश्चादात्मा
पुरस्तादात्मा दक्षिणत आत्मोत्तरत ।

Ātman is above, Atman is behind, Atman is in front, Ātman is in the south and in the north." (*Ibid.*)

How to know the Ātman? Bhagavan Sri Krishna says in the Gītā: "Some by meditation behold the Self in their own intelligence by the purified heart, others by the path of Knowledge, others again by Karma Yoga." (*Gītā* 13.24).

"To some these paths may be too difficult. So they follow the path of devotional worship. They too go beyond death (ignorance)". (*Gītā*, 13.25)³

* * *

The Veeṇa resonates.

It resonates inside the body, inside the Prāṇa (vital energy), in the heart-beat, in the expansion and contraction of the lungs, in the circulation of the blood, in the electric impulses in the nerves, in the complex movements in millions of cells in every part of our body—all these biological activities are experienced by the person of Self-knowledge as the music of the vīṇa. To remember a vedic mantra: "Sitting in the nest of the heart, like a bird with bewitching plumage, the Self as pure Consciousness is delighting all the senses with its sweet music."⁴

3. ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।

अन्ये सांख्येन योगेन कर्मयोगेन चापरे ॥

अन्ये त्वेवमजानन्तः श्रुत्वान्येभ्य उपासते ।

तेऽपि चातितरन्त्येव मृत्युं श्रुतिपरायणाः ॥

4. तस्मिन् सुपर्णे मधुकृत् कुलार्या भजन्नास्ते

मधु देवताभ्यः ।

—*Mahānārāyan Upaniṣad* 40.5.

Declares the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*: "That which is known as the Self-creator is verily the source of joy, for one becomes happy by coming in contact with that source. Who indeed can inhale and who can exhale if this Bliss be not there in the Supreme space (within the heart). It is He who is spread through and through in creation as unbroken joy."⁵ (Ch. 2.7).

* * *

The Veeṇa resonates.

In every thought of the mind, in every disposition of the buddhi (determinative faculty of the mind) and uprising of the ego the vīṇa is reverberating, but we do not know. The *mind*, the *buddhi* and the *ahaṅkāra*, comprising the *manomaya* and *vijñānamaya kośa*-s, hide the truth of the Self. Sri Ramakrishna called them the unripe *mana*, the unripe *buddhi* and the unripe *ahaṅkāra*. But these can be 'ripened'. Then they become the pure *mana*, pure *buddhi*, pure *ahaṅkāra*, which can join the vīṇa play of the great Music-maker. All mental modifications, and all sense of agency and enjoyment become filled with Divine music. Knowledge, subjective or objective, at all stages and at all times becomes an unbroken resonance of the Vīṇa.

The sage, Yājñavalkya, in the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, used to hear this Vīṇa-music continuously. When he found that his wife, Maitreyī, was ready for this experience he eagerly began to teach her:

(Continued on page 314)

5. रसो वै सः । रसं ह्येवायं लब्ध्वानन्दी भवति ।

को ह्येवान्यात्कः प्राण्यात् । यदेव आकाश

आनन्दो न स्यात् । एष ह्येवानन्दयति ।

A Friend in The Gita

SWAMI SHIVAPRASADANANDA

The Lord Himself assuming the role of a loving and compassionate friend, not only of Arjuna but of humanity as a whole, instils faith and strength in every heart to break the bonds of matter and attain liberation. The author, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, discusses this aspect of the Gita's teachings.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* the Lord urges man to have faith in himself and in his power to act: "Let a man lift himself by his own self, let him not lower himself, for he himself is his friend and he himself is his own enemy." (Ch. 6.5) A man is his own friend when he has controlled his mind and lower brutish nature. On the other hand, he himself is his own worst enemy when he has not controlled himself, when he allows his animal desires and instincts to run amuck.

Why should a man or woman be moral, ethical and restrained? Why should one follow the path of good and not evil? Because through practising the good, man attains peace, but by becoming immoral, uncontrolled and harmful to others he causes general disturbance. Good thoughts and good works cause less differentiation in the world around us and therefore lead to peace and well-being. They bring us closer to realizing our spiritual unity with all living beings, which is man's highest aim and blessedness. Therefore the *Bhagavad Gītā*, giving wise counsel, is a friend. The Lord Himself says: '*Sarvaloka mahēśvaram su-hṛdam sarvabhūtānām...jñātvā mām śāntimṛcchati*—He who knows Me as the Great Lord of All and the Friend of all beings attains peace." (Ch. 5.29).

Surely, anyone may agree, "We accept that; we agree that the Lord Krishna, Christ and Buddha were friends of mankind, but

accepting something and knowing it in our heart of hearts are two different things, are they not? We want to know; how to do it?"

Common sense tells us if we want to know somebody we have to come close to him. This is likewise true for getting to know the friendship of a great book like the Gita. One way is to memorize it—get it by heart! Not in the Lord's original words necessarily, if one cannot read or understand Sanskrit, but in one's mother tongue in a beautiful translation.

Memorizing a thing brings a wonderful awakening in oneself. Verses and thoughts expressed by the Lord Himself, meant for our help, pop into our mind unexpectedly sometimes, just when they are needed. They appear at times even in dreams. True, the high spiritual ideas are not meant to be fully grasped by us after one reading only, or even after memorizing, but there is value in these exercises nonetheless. Sri Ramakrishna himself said, "It is not possible to acquire renunciation all at once. The time factor must be taken into account. But it is also true that a person must hear about it. When the right time comes, he will say to himself, 'Ah yes, I heard about this!'"¹

Another facet of the problem is that by merely reading alone, one gradually becomes

1. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 502 (Aug. 3, 1884).

tired, even though the ideas are very great. So memorizing provides relaxation and some freshness to our life. When this too becomes tiring then it will be found that it is not difficult to learn the Sanskrit alphabet in one of the ancient scripts and read the Sanskrit slokas. Chanting them, even without knowing the meaning of every word, is useful. Swami Pavitrananda, in his *Preface* to the small book *Siva-Mahimnah Stotram*² said, "The very recital...raises one to a higher plane of existence. There are many persons who repeat it daily though not fully understanding it. Yet they derive immense benefit." Such is the greatness and the power in the sound of Sanskrit words when one utters them by one's own effort.

Now what about the Gita?—about which H. David Thoreau in *Walden*³ says: "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*...", and R. W. Emerson in high praise wrote: "...I owed—my friend and I owed—a magnificent day to the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.—It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us..."⁴

It can be said that the outlook of the Gita, or 'Song of the Lord', is one of hope and compassion for humanity. Its aim is the liberation of the human soul from the bonds of matter. For the reason of its being a treatise on the science of God and Self-realization, and the human psyche, it is called 'the Bestower of Liberation', a

Mokṣa-śāstra. The Gita is a compendium of the great and universally applicable spiritual teachings of the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*, and is recognized as one of the world's great religious books. The Gita treats a wide range of human problems—on the social level, on the spiritual and intellectual levels, and even on the biological level. In the final analysis, however, the Gita holds that the Soul of Man is one with the infinite Soul of the Universe, and that to learn of this great Identity by direct experience (Self-knowledge) is the birthright of all beings. Besides declaring this ultimate truth of the Divine Nature lying within, the Gita points the way to its full and complete realization by us in this very life-experience.

The problems discussed in the Gita are mostly for removing the obstacles to God-realization, and they seem as urgent to us now a days as they probably were to people living 5000 years ago when the Gita came into existence. Mercifully, showing the way to the removal of obstacles, the aim of the Gita is to open the way for human attainment of a higher spiritual life by psychological unfoldment. Implicit in the teaching of the Gita is the understanding that one proceeds a step at a time, from truth to higher truth, to the goal of experiencing the Bliss of the Divine within.

The Lord always makes allowances for the differences in human beings—in their mental propensities, stages of life, occupations, and desires. Some may attain earlier, and some later, but the Gita firmly holds that realizing God is attainable by everyone. One should follow the duty determined by one's own inner nature, perform it with devotion, and surrender the results of one's effort to the Lord. The Lord maintains, on his part, that He is our Friend, ever-watchful, all-knowing and compassionate. Besides, He is infinite and omni-

2. p. i.

3. Quoted in *The Orient in American Transcendentalism*, by Arthur Christy (New York, Octagon Books, 1978) p. 23.

4. *Ibid.*

present. He is revealed everywhere in the universe through all living beings: "His hands and feet are everywhere, His eyes, heads, and faces are everywhere; His ears are everywhere; His existence envelopes all. He who sees Him abiding alike in all beings attains the highest." (Ch. 13-13,14,15).

Regarding one's everyday practice and spiritual-discipline, the Lord is to be remembered and looked for at all times, in all things, and in the high and the low. There is nothing, in fact, insignificant, futile, or lowly in the whole universe. "One should know Me to be the Eternal Seed of all things that exist," says the Lord in the Gita. (Ch. 7.10) "...There is nothing in the whole universe that can exist without Me, all is strung on Me as a row of gems on a thread. (7.7) ...I am seated in the hearts of all. From Me comes all memory and knowledge (15.15), and all work without exception leads to knowledge. (4.33) ...Purified by the fire of knowledge, their sins consumed, (4.10 & 19) they come to Me. The wise know this and worship Me with all their heart. (15.19).

One would have to search for a long time to find a more generous and liberal teaching for religious life than is found in the Gita. One does not have even to embrace a particular creed or Deity, spurning others. On the contrary, it is the principles that count more in spiritual life, not the creed or the personal God or Goddess. "A man attains high perfection," the Lord says, "through devotion to his own duty performed as worship of the ONE from whom all beings proceed, and by Whom the entire universe is pervaded. ...He who does the duty ordained by his own nature—even if he be a soldier like Arjuna, or a Commander unfortunately fighting for an unrighteous king, like Bhishma—incur no sin. (Ch. 18-43,46,47).

So the Gita shows the harmony that is possible in all the paths to God and in all the stations of life and diversities found in human nature. No pathway or man is ever condemned if he is following the principles of right conduct leading to strength and spiritual elevation. *Bhakti*, the way of worship, *Jnāna*, the way of knowledge, *Dhyāna*, the way of meditation, and *Karma*, the way of work and activity—all the *Yogas* are harmonized, and the Lord indicates that one can take the help of them all in one's life. Doing the duties one has to do in a detached spirit, surrendering the results to God, is always uppermost in importance. In pleasure and pain, in sorrow or happiness, in success and defeat, this always leads to attaining both knowledge and love of the Lord. "Each soul is potentially divine," Vivekananda said, "the goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. "This," he declared in the spirit of the Gita "is the whole of religion. Books and temples, doctrines or dogmas are but secondary details."⁵

In the Lord's own words in the Gita, full of solace for suffering humanity: "In whatsoever way men approach Me, even so do I reward them; for it is My path, O Partha, that men follow in all things." (Ch. 4.11). Far from being remote and chastising, the God of the Gita is infinitely solicitous to show humanity the way to Himself and peace. In all things and in all ways, souls are wending their way towards the discovery of the Divine hidden behind all manifested forms, and within one's own heart. Those

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. 1, p. 257.

who have the eyes and ears, they will see and hear (Mat. 13.16; *Gita*, 13.33). If we cannot, we shall have to prepare ourselves.

The most important message of the *Gita* therefore is the need for developing the strength and fitness to practise, aspire for, and perceive the indwelling spirit residing in every particle of the universe and in one's heart. Speaking about this strength, Swami Vivekananda showed his great esteem for the *Gita* when he quoted (Ch. 2.3) and commented: "Do not yield to unmanliness, O son of Pritha, it does not become you. Shake off this base faint-heartedness and arise, O scorcher of enemies." "Whoever reads that one sloka," he said, "attains the merit of reading the whole *Gita*. For in that verse is embodied the message of the whole *Gita*. ...Do your work, but give up the fruits to God."⁶

Without strength man cannot succeed in anything. Even the reading of the holy text itself requires certain purity and mental strength. As the habit of reading develops, it may become easier. Therefore, strength is essential. Purity and strength are synonyms when human character-development and fitness are mentioned. It will be recalled that one of the Knights of King Arthur confessed that he had the strength of twenty because his heart was pure, and the Lord said in the sermon on the mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." There is no gainsaying that for the attainment of life's highest goal, strength will be required.

There are outstanding reasons why the cultivation of strength imparted by the *Gita* is important. First, mankind in the modern age is suffering due to its deep-rooted infatuation with the physical body and all its recreations, pleasures and comforts.

6. *Ibid.* Vol. IV, p. 110; Vol. I, p. 42, and in his lecture on the *Gita*—II, p. 459-466.

Due to this infatuation, which is basically the intense desire to live at the level of the senses like all the animal kingdom, people feel frustrated. Frustration arises when desires are thwarted. Frustrated desire turns to anger. From anger arise indiscriminate motivations and activity, and from these a man is led inextricably into the labyrinth of aggressions, transgressions, and the subsequent suffering of guilt and fear. At last he is ruined.⁷ A human being requires not just ordinary strength of limb and brain to shake off such fear and weakness once he has gone down. He needs the strength derived from contacting the Divine Source within himself to regain his lost dignity as a child of God.

Furthermore, humanity is still labouring in the modern world under the unspiritual belief in the so-called 'natural depravity' of man, a designation ramified with the doctrine of *original sin* and nourished as much by repeated human failures of the past as by our clinging to old-fashioned, outmoded and primitive religious fundamentalism. Moreover, the pessimistic materialistic philosophers: Hobbes, Hegel and Marx still exert their influence in our modern institutions of social organization, politics, and government. Till now, the old ideas of the predominant evil in human nature have always been emphasized and have not been supplanted by more enlightened spiritual persuasions. To think that an end of godlessness and the materialistic outlook has been brought about by the

7. *Gita*, Ch. 2-62,63.

*Dyāyato viṣayānpumsah
sangasteṣupajāyate*

sangat samjāyate kāmah, kāmāt krodho'

bhijāyate.

Krodhāt bhavati samohah, samohāt

smṛtīvibhramah,

smṛti bhramasat buddhi nāso, buddhi

nāsāt praṇasyati.

collapse of communism in eastern Europe would be indulging in daydreams. It is probable that nothing in the world has the power to stop the decline of humanity further into materialism except the spiritual message of sacred books like the Gita which aim at the fundamental regeneration of the human spirit. The Gita, given life and light by the spiritual examples of modern Saints like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother, are the best hope for humanity in the future.

At last it should be said, the message of strength in the Gita is particularly needed to curb the unleashed egoism of modern man living in this age of widespread affluence and enjoyment of scientific tools and technology. Egoism owing to false pride in material power and wealth has warped people's thinking about themselves. Nowadays people are erratic and rush to extremes. They have an overblown estimation of themselves and often claim more knowledge and ability than they really have. For example, there are many who have shouted that capitalism and communism are the great sources of evil in the world. These people would like to take all the decision-making for 'running the world' in their own hands. Then there are others who absolutely refuse to have any share whatever in the work of making the world a better place to live in. Emotional people talk big and rush to perform rash and audacious acts, causing more confusion and harm in the world than good. Only strength-giving, compassionate, Divinely inspired teachings like those of the Gita's can bring the wandering mind back to reality. Man is mortal, but he is the humble child of God. Arjuna's tendency to split-personality (whether to fight or give up the battle of life) typifies the condition of modern man also.

Above all the world's holy scriptures

there is a very special need for the *Bhagavad Gītā* since the Gita represents the quintessence of Vedānta in an easy-to-read small compass. It is universal in its appeal and all-round in its treatment of the human situation. Besides, the Gita never castigates or condemns a sinner, a man or woman who has made mistakes and regrets them. The ears of modern people cannot bear more harsh criticism from stormy prophets as of old. They require compassion and peace. Thus the Lord of the Gita, like a compassionate Mother, cajoling, exhorting and humouring the restless child, suffering humanity, urges everyone to understand the mechanism and traps of Māyā, and not be caught in them to sink in hopeless worldliness. From every verse of the Gita's sacred fount flows a positive message. Predominate, absurdly, is the appeal to renounce the unreal for the Real.

Sri Ramakrishna used often to say to the devotees who came to Dakshineswar that the essence of the Gita is what you have when you say 'Gita' over and over a few times. It becomes 'tagi' which refers to renunciation. For by renouncing man attains to peace and bliss. A camel, Sri Ramakrishna said, goes on eating thorny plants even when its mouth bleeds, it will not stop eating. Renunciation of the painful cactus seems beyond the reach of its mind. But man is different. Much above all the animals, he alone can think of the Infinite and can think of God.⁸

8. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Ibid.*

Sri Ramakrishna said on 24 May 1884 (p. 432): "God no doubt dwells in all, but He manifests Himself more through man than through other beings. Is man an insignificant thing? He can think of God, he can think of the Infinite, while other living beings cannot. God exists in other living beings—animals, plants, nay, in all beings—, but He manifests Himself more through man than through these others."

Surely, Vivekananda addressed not just Western society of the nineteenth century obsessed with the idea of 'original sin' in the third session at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, but he was talking to crestfallen men and women of our contemporary world as well. It was the compassion of the Lord of the Gita that flowed with his utterance: "Children of immortal bliss"—what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss—yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the Children of

God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings...Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal."⁹

The blessed Gita has for long found familiar readership in all parts of the world among thoughtful people. Its power for good is certain to continue growing.

9. Swami Vivekananda's "Paper On Hinduism", read at the Parliament of Religions on 19th Sept. 1893. (C.W. Vol. I, p. 11).

THE VEENA RESONATES

(Continued from page 308)

"As when a vīṇa is played one cannot distinguish its various particular notes, but they are included in the general note of the vīṇa or in the general sound produced by different kinds of playing, so during the continuance of the universe we may know all things to be unified in Brahman."⁶

In India, through the ages many spiritual seekers, both men and women, by taking recourse to worship, Self-enquiry, medita-

tion and selfless Karma Yoga, have heard this Divine Music, and thereby enriched their spiritual life. Somehow, if the innermost truth of man can be touched directly by experience, either by the yoga of concentration or by Jñāna Yoga, Karma Yoga or Bhakti Yoga, that touch will bring to our personality superb calmness, strength and love. These qualities will be transmitted to others. A glow of spiritual knowledge and peace will benefit the lives of many, dispelling their doubts and fears. The search for unity among mankind will not be a political or intellectual affair, but a direct and effective experience of everyday life.

6. स यथा वीणायै बाह्यमानायै न बाह्येन शब्दान् शकनुयाद् ग्रहणाय, वीणायैतु ग्रहणेन वीणा-वादस्य वा शब्दो गृहीतः ।

—Bṛhadaranyaka 2.4.9.

The Veena resonates.

The Spirit and Substance of The Upanisads

DR. P. NAGARAJA RAO

Despite the great pride of modern's in our progress in science and technology this century, the sublime influence of the ancient Upanisads still exerts its powerful attraction. The learned author explains the relevance and essence of their timeless teachings.

The Upanisads constitute the concluding portion of the Vedas, hence are described as *Vedānta*. They represent the quintessence of the Vedas and embody the metaphysical doctrines and spiritual visions of the ancient seers and sages of India. They also outline the path to spiritual realisation.

The Upanisads are called *Śruti* i.e. 'revelation'. The *Rṣi*-s who are also called Muni-s and Kavi-s, saw the truth and heard its many expressions. The *Śruti*-s are revealed truths and not composed ones. There are ethical scriptures composed by Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara on the basis of the *Śruti*. The authority of the *Śruti* is primary. When *Smṛti* (composed scriptures) conflict with *Śruti*, *Smṛti* is set aside.

The term '*Upanisad*' is interpreted in different ways:

1. To sit close by, devotedly (*Upanisad*, i.e. *sad*, *upani*):
2. Secret doctrine (*Guhya-ādeśh*):
3. Referring to the Knowledge of key passages in the *Upanisad* itself, according to Sankara, the root *sad* means that which destroys ignorance and leads to Brahman.

The Spanish writer Mascaró described the *Upanisads* as the 'Himalayas of the soul'. "Just as that great mountain determines the climate, the rainfall and the physical features of the Peninsula, so do these heights of wisdom determine the

quality of the spiritual wisdom of the race that inhabits it..."

Sankara regards his *Vedānta* a garland of the truths of the *Upanisads*. They are taught by illumined teachers to spiritual aspirants who have given evidence of their earnestness. It is not a free broadcasting of truth to one and all.

In point of popularity, the *Upanisads* are second only to the *Gītā*. It is said that Schopenhauer kept the Latin text of the *Upanisads* on his table and was in the habit, before going to bed, of performing his devotions by reading from its pages. He named his dog ATMAN. He wrote:

From every sentence (of the Upanisads) deep original and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high, holy and earnest spirit. In the whole world... there is no study...so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. They are the products of the highest wisdom. They are destined, sooner or later, to become the faith of the people.

Max Muller compares the philosophy of the *Upanisads* to the light of the morning and to the pure air of the mountains—so simple, and so true, if once understood.

In Dr. Deussen's words, the *Upanisads* have tackled every fundamental problem of life. They have given us intimate account of Reality. W. B. Yeats observed: "Nothing that has disturbed the schools to controversy escaped their [the Upanisad's] notice."

Swami Vivekananda got all inspiration for his teaching from the *Upaniṣads*. He once declared:

Let me tell you, we want strength...and the Upanishads are a great mine of strength...Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world; the whole world can be vivified, made strong, energised through them. They will call with trumpet voices upon the weak, the miserable, the downtrodden of all races, all creeds and sects to stand on their feet and be free. Freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom, and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upanishads.

John Eglinton, in his memoir "AE" of George William Russell, wrote a passage which describes the influence of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā* (p. 20):

Goethe, Wordsworth, Emerson and Thoreau among moderns have something of this...vitality and wisdom, but we can find all they have said and much more in the grand sacred books of the East. The Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads contain such godlike fullness of wisdom on all things that I feel the authors must have looked with calm remembrance back through a thousand passionate lives, full of feverish strife for and with shadows' are they could have written with such certainty of things which the soul feels to be true.

There are as many as two hundred *Upaniṣads*. But not all of them are authentic, nor are all of them of equal importance and significance. Ten of them are accepted as most authoritative. They are commented on by the founders of the schools of *Vedānta*. They are *Īśa*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Prasna*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Taittirīya*, *Aitareya*, *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. Most of these *Upaniṣads* are pre-Buddhist. They roughly belong to the sixth century B.C.

The *Upaniṣads* are not all alike. They differ in their length and methods of exposition. Some are only a few verses and others are very long. Some are in verse and some are in prose. Yet others combine both prose and verse.

In style and manner of composition they differ widely. Sometimes we find simple, concrete narrative, sometimes abstract metaphysical speculation, and again we find long argumentative dialogue. The tone of the *Upaniṣads* also fluctuates. There is in some passages high seriousness, and in others homely humour, and in some, extensive use of analogy.

The devout Hindus believe that all the *Upaniṣads* are spiritual and embody a definite outlook. Mahatma Gandhi writes, commenting on the first verse of the *Īśa Upaniṣad*:

"I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the Upanishads and all other scriptures happened, all of a sudden, to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse of the Ishopanishad were left intact in the memory of the Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever."

The quest of the *Upaniṣadic* seers is deep and earnest. They feel the urgency of the task as the most important in life. The quest is the result of the reflective consciousness of man and his sense of personal freedom. The unique nature of man is his eligibility for knowledge and action (*jñāna karma adhikārāt*). Man is more than what he knows himself to be. He rises to the essential human life when he acts on his choice, guided by ends which he conceives as worthy of attainment. So long as he is governed by his reflexes or conditioned by them, or motivated by his instincts, he is still at the animal level. When he rises to the level of rational thinking he sees different ends or values and seeks to achieve

them by determination of will. He overcomes obstacles that arise from his unregenerate instincts and emotions.

Most of the values are not actually realised and are not easy to attain. Even at the rational level man is guided by utility and seeks to live a life of enlightened self-interest. He calls this the ethical theory of utilitarianism. The reflective consciousness of man plunges him into an earnest investigation of the different ends of life, e.g., wealth, sense enjoyment, fame, a life of ease, valour and honour. Right discrimination then leads him to discern the Real from the unreal. It is expressed in the celebrated prayer of the Upaniṣad:

*From the unreal lead me to the Real ;
from darkness lead me to Light ;
and from death, lead me to Immortality.*

Bṛhadāranyaka I. 3.28.

The knowledge of the Real is declared to be all-comprehensive. It is called *Parā-vidyā*, Supreme Knowledge. The quest is for THAT by knowing which all other things become known. (*Muṇḍaka I.1.3*). *It is that Knowledge, by knowing which, what is unheard becomes heard ; what is not perceived becomes perceived ; and what is unknown becomes known. (Chāndogya VI. 1.3.)*

This divine ancient wisdom of the *Upaniṣads* is further described as the Infinite. In the Infinite is happiness. There is no real happiness in the finite, so one must desire to obtain the Infinite. (*Chāndogya VII. 23.1*) Pursuing the Real is not of small import. Its knowledge and realisation dispels all our doubts and disbeliefs, and ends our tensions and strife. (*Muṇḍaka II. 2.9*) It vouchsafes ineffable bliss from which there is no return to the world of change and sorrow.

In the *Īśa Upaniṣad* it is observed: *'What delusion, what sorrow can there be for him who has the vision of unity?'* Narada

approaches Sanatkumara for instruction which puts an end to all sorrow saying, *"Venerable Sir, I know only the texts. It has been heard by me from those like you that he who knows the Self overcomes sorrow."* (*Chāndogya VII. 1.3*)

The knowledge of the Real frees us from all fear and secures for us bliss. (*Taittirīya II. 4.1*) The spiritual realisation of the Real results in the transformation of our consciousness. (*Muṇḍaka II. 2.9*) The *Upaniṣads* declare that the quest for the Infinite is the supreme end of life. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* describes the Infinite in a condensed statement:

It is the Soul of truth, the anchor of life, the delight of the mind and the fullness of peace and eternity. (I.6.)

The quest of the Infinite is relentlessly and perseveringly carried out by the aspirant as a result of his conscious choice. Seek he does, by virtue of his discriminative sense, *Viveka*. It enables him to assess the evanescent nature of finite values and their drawbacks. The aspirant gets his discriminative sense through the instruction and initiation of the Guru, who has himself realised the Infinite. The Guru represents the living voice that transmutes the aspirant. Commenting on a particular passage in the *Upaniṣads*, Sankara observes *"that even one well versed in the scriptures should not set about seeking the knowledge of the Infinite by himself."* Going to the Guru is no mere formality, nor an evasion of one's responsibility. It is a necessity. He who has a Guru knows, declares the *Chāndogya*. The quest of the *Upaniṣads* is for that Infinite, which is one, without a second, eternal, and is the Absolute Reality.

The Absolute Reality is also unconditioned Existence (*Sat*), and supreme Bliss (*Ānanda*), and Perfection (*Ananta*). It cannot be known directly like any finite object through the

methods of discursive reasoning. It is beyond the reach of words and the comprehension of the mind. Though it cannot be known by reason. It can be realised by spiritual experience (*Sakṣātkāra*). It vivifies all that is there in the world, but the discriminating students of spiritual life find that no finite pleasure can give us knowledge of the Infinite.

Naciketas turns down the glittering offers of Yama of wealth, enjoyment and long life because he sees they are transient and trifling, and sticks to his boon promising the knowledge of the Infinite.

Maitreyi exclaims that she has no use for that wealth which cannot secure her immortality. The knowledge of the Infinite is sought for its excellence and for its power of ending all sorrows.

The *Upaniṣads* look at knowledge (*Jñāna*) as the chief means to the Brahman realisation. They regard ritual and performance of ceremonies as not safe methods for the attainment of *Mokṣa*, liberation. The *Muṇḍaka* declares:

Unsafe are the boats of sacrifice to go to the farthest shore; unsafe are the eighteen books where the lower actions are explained...Imagining that ritual and charity as the final good, the unwise see not the path supreme. Indeed they have in high heaven the reward for their pious actions; but thence they fall and come to earth or even down to lower regions....Abiding in the midst of ignorance, but thinking themselves wise and learned, fools, afflicted with troubles, aimlessly go hither and thither, like the blind led by the blind. (I. 1.7-10)

The *Upaniṣads* declare that there is no way, other than the realisation of the Infinite, to end our sorrows. (*Śvetāśvatara* III. 8)

Equally emphatic is the *Upaniṣad* on the need for ethical excellence for the spiritual

aspirant. In every one of the *Upaniṣads* the need for self-control and integration of human personality is stressed. That is the first step which can never be bypassed. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* asks the aspirant to direct the senses to look inwardly, and divert them from their natural way of looking outward. There is the plea to yoke the senses to the spiritual aim. The need for ethical life is imperative.

Those who have not refrained from wickedness, the unrestrained, the unmeditative, or one who has no peace of mind, cannot attain the Infinite, even by knowledge.

(*Kaṭha* II. 24)

Taking the *Upaniṣads* as a whole, we find that there are at least two different ways of looking at the Infinite. One of the perspectives describes Brahman as a homogenous non-composite Consciousness—Perfect, One-without-a-second. The world of matter and the plurality of souls is described as an appearance only. Brahman is unlike all that we know. It can only be indicated by *Neti-neti*, (*Not-this, not-this*), being THAT which remains when all the known is negated. The finite has no place in It. But even this appearance is traced to Brahman, without affecting Its purity. There is no other reality than Brahman. Hence everything is traced to It. The relation between Brahman and the appearance of 'other' is one-sided. The appearance is dependent on Brahman, but Brahman is in no way touched by the impurities of appearance. So the *Upaniṣads* teach throughout the unity of all existence. (See *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VI.)

Sankara develops this line of thought, regarding the world as an appearance—i.e. dependent for its existence on Brahman. Viewed independently of Brahman, it has no status. That is all the meaning of *Māyā*. The *Upaniṣadic* Seers employ the objective

method, and reason also, to trace all that exists to Brahman. They do not admit that the existence of the world of things or human experience is an inexplicable datum. Nor do they admit that the universe is self-substantiating. They examined in turn several proposed phenomena as 'root causes' of the world—e.g. Time, Nature, Necessity, Chance, the Elements, etc., and find all of them unsatisfactory. In the end they posit the Infinite Spirit as the cosmic principle accounting for the universe.

They then examine the psychic principles and submit them to intense analysis. This is undertaken in the dialogues between Prajapati and Indra and Virochana (*Chāndogya* VIII. 3-12); and between Bhrigu and Varuni (*Taittirīya*, III). The essence of the individual is neither the body, nor a bundle of qualities; nor is it a mere state of mind. It is of the same essence as Brahman. The *Upaniṣads*, according to Sankara, establish through reason and logic, by the synthetic method, the identity of the individual Soul with Brahman. The principle underlying the world as a whole and that which forms the essence of man is ultimately one and the same. This explicit identification is declared in the celebrated words of Uddalaka to his son nine times. "*All that is, is of the nature of the Self. That is the Truth, That thou art.*"

This identification of the Self and Brahman, according to some *Upaniṣads*, is not attained elsewhere. Such an experience is possible here and now. This is the famous doctrine of *Jīvanmukti* referred to by Sankara. In the *Upaniṣads* we also find support for Sankara's doctrine of renunciation. *Vairāgya* is praised and advocated as the sovereign means to spiritual realisation. The triad suggested by Sankara is VICHARA (inquiry), VIVEKA, (discrimination), and VAIRĀGYA (renunciation).

Among European scholars Dr. Deussen holds the view that the prevailing doctrine of the *Upaniṣads* is illusionism and pantheism. Some of the modern scholars also claim to differ from Sankara in their interpretation of the *Upaniṣads*, though not going to the extremity of classical Pantheism. Their differences appear to be based on a wrong notion of Sankara's teachings when they say they *hold to monism, but are not reconciled to the view that the world is an illusion* (which of course Sankara did not hold either, except for the case of the man of highest realisation in *jada-samādhi*). But begging to differ, they declare that the Infinite does not exclude the finite, that the universe is rooted in It. The Infinite is the *real* of the real; It is All, and all this is Brahman. The world is the moving image of Eternity. The moving image does not hide the Eternity behind it. It gives us glimpses of the Eternal. Theirs is a difference only of emphasis.

Poet Tagore goes further and declares that the world is a manifestation of the Infinite. It is *Līlā-vada* and not *Māyā-vada*. The Infinite is not a bare abstraction. It is a rich harmonious system which contains all. The Infinite of the *Upaniṣads* is looked upon as the 'Absolute' of the German philosopher Hegel. It reconciles all opposites. It is in one phase, dynamic and in another, static. The logical difficulties of synthesising contradictions made Sankara describe the Infinite as devoid of any determination or action. Modern commentators declare that there is a special logic of the Infinite. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "The logic of the Infinite is the magic of the finite." The SAPRAPANCHA VIEW establishes an organic connection between the Infinite and the world. There are several passages in the *Upaniṣads* that declare that Brahman transforms Itself into the world

of things, and He is also the material cause of the world—

*As the spider spins and withdraws
the web, as herbs sprout out on
earth, and as hair grows on the head
and body of man—so from the eternal
Infinite springs this universe.*

(*Muṇḍaka* I. 1.7)

The Infinite is immanent as well as transcendent. In the *Bṛhadarānyaka Upaniṣad*, this concept of the Lord as the Inner Ruler (*Antaryāmin*) is developed and described. Activity is attributed to the Infinite when It enters the souls and things of the world. The spirit seeps into all that is there in the universe. But for the presence of the Spirit, the emergence of life from inorganic matter, of human consciousness from animal life, of the Divine from the human is not possible. It is the presence of the Spirit that makes evolution possible.

The individual soul is represented as a friend to the Infinite. He is to dedicate himself to the Lord. The doctrine of self-surrender or *Bhakti* as found in the *Gīta* is not so prominent in the *Upaniṣads*. We have mention of several contemplative disciplines (*Upāsana-s*) to attain the fellowship of the Lord. The Infinite is also described as a supreme, auspicious personality. There are passages that declare that the Lord's grace is the only means for spiritual realisation. We have a passage in the *Kāṭha* (I. 2.23):

*The Atman cannot be attained by the
study of the Vedas, nor by intellect,
nor even by much learning, etc...*

This passage is so interpreted as to yield the Advaitic sense. In the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* we have the *Bhakti* element prominently. Ramanuja finds support for his doctrine in the nature of the Infinite as

dynamic and as transforming Itself into the things of the world. It is difficult to be dogmatic and say that the *Upaniṣads* all speak of one view only.

Dr. Radhakrishnan has done a great deal in establishing the positive interpretation of the nature of the Infinite in the *Upaniṣads*. In his profound introduction to the text and English translation and notes of the *Upaniṣads*, and in his articles—(*The Indian Philosophical Review*, Vol. III, No. 3), he describes the Infinite not as an abstract formal principle but as an active universal consciousness. It is the unity of the finite and infinite. "It exists both in Itself," as Hegel puts it. "The Absolute (i.e. Brahman) is the fullest concrete and most real Being." It is the living dynamic spirit, the source and the container of the infinitely varied forms of Reality. It is the spiritual spring which breaks, blossoms and differentiates Itself into a number of finite centres. It is not mere knowledge or power or action. It is living unity of essence and existence.

The positive view of the Infinite and the view that the world is not an illusion is supported by scholars like Dr. Bhandarkar who writes: "...that the opinion expressed by some eminent scholars that the burden of the Upanishadic teaching is the illusive character of the world and the reality of one soul [is] not only manifestly wrong [but] I may even say, is indicative of an uncritical judgement."

Prof. Hopkins puts a question and answers it: "If there is anything in the objective world being an illusion? The answer is: 'Nothing at all.'"

The *Upaniṣads* have influenced Indian philosophical thought not only in ancient India, but also in our day. They represent the spiritual treasure of India.

Adventure in Russia

SWAMI BHAVYANANDA

A fresh breeze of freedom is blowing all over the politically shaken Soviet Union. Seventy years of repression and tyranny have ended, and though shortages of food and commodities cause anxiety, the innate spiritual strength of people is evident. There is a longing for spiritual freedom. This was part of the experience of the author who visited Moscow and Leningrad at the earnest invitation of friends. The Swami is the spiritual head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in the United Kingdom.

I came to England on 10th August, 1969. By 1975 I had acquainted myself with the way the Ramakrishna movement had taken shape in Europe and America. Out of sheer curiosity, at the invitation of a friend, I agreed to take a holiday in Russia behind the Iron Curtain. We had booked by Aeroflot to Moscow, which is about four and a half hours flying time. Tourists get a very special treatment in Russia. Without much fuss we went through customs and immigration and were taken to a five-star hotel in Red Square. It had 2,200 double rooms. The hotel overlooked the Kremlin, St. Basil's Basilica, the Lenin Mausoleum, the Natural History Museum, and so on. The hotel was a very self-contained unit, with a tourist office, taxi service, tickets for entertainment, big shops, etc.

During the trip, we saw all the important landmarks in Moscow. The walled Kremlin is the seat of the USSR government. The private church of the Czars is still in a state of good repair. There is a huge bell weighing 1,100 tons. At one time it fell down, due to a fire, and a bit broke off, which lies on the lawns. The broken bit itself weighs 11 tons. The Lenin Mausoleum in Red Square is a place of pilgrimage for the communists. Such large numbers queue up there every day. It would take hours to get into the building. Red Square itself

is "holy ground". After marriage, bride and bridegroom parade in their wedding attire, going round the Mausoleum thrice, and take photographs there before they go for their wedding dinner.

In this trip we also went to Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan. Tashkent had been part of the Czarist empire for several centuries. It has remained backward and neglected. Tashkent was a city on the caravan route between China and Europe. It was known as the silk route, and was once a prosperous city. Uzbekistan is rich in crops of cotton and silk; gold and oil. Then we went to Samarkand, which is mainly a city of Muslim culture. Central Asia was the cradle of civilization, full of old cities and mud forts. Until the eighth century, Zoroastrianism was the religion of the area. After that, Islam. We also visited Dushumbe. Here, we were next door to Kashmir and Afghanistan. We were in the Pamir Desert and mountain ranges, a very sparsely populated area. All these backwaters of the empire were benefited by the October Revolution in 1917.

The last couple of days we spent in Leningrad. It is a beautiful city with fifty canals and thirty-nine bridges. There are many impressive cathedrals all over the city, but now used only as museums. The

city has very wide roads and beautiful architecture. The great works of art are enshrined in the Hermitage Museum, which also used to be a part of the Czar's palace. We also visited the summer palace, thirty miles to the north of the city. The city of Leningrad was under siege during the second world war for nine hundred days. Much of the city has been rebuilt.

All this was a two-week trip. A wonderful experience to travel in Russia. We saw a new system at work, social, economic and political ; a system much different from what we have known. It seems to work all right. It has minimised the gap between the high and the low ; the society is built up on the equal distribution of wealth. Everyone seemed to be well-fed and cared for, but no place for idlers. Those who accept Communist ideology are protected by the State. It may be even right to say that Communists are the elite and privileged. The average man, irrespective of the Party, seemed to be contented and happy. But he has got to be subordinate to the ideology of the State. What is said above are the observations of my first visit.

For the last ten years, increasing requests for books have been coming to us from various parts of the USSR. Often, we do not know if the books sent have ever reached their destination. I have no doubt somebody will read them somewhere. Books are like time-bombs ; they are bound to explode the human mind to new visions of human destiny. The teachings of the spiritual leaders of the world are very potent. The Russians are not totally unaware of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Tolstoy knew about them. He had read some of the literature available at that time, as some of the works of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had been translated into Russian by 1910. Since then,

Romain Rolland's book on Sri Ramakrishna has been popular. In recent decades, Russia and India had good political alliances. Average Russians consider India as their good friend. Many tourists from Russia have been going to India. Some of them, highly placed, came into contact with the Ramakrishna Order. They often stayed as guests in the Institute of Culture, Calcutta, and established friendship with Swami Lokeswaranandaji, which resulted in his several visits to USSR. In the past, visits of Swami Ranganathanandaji had made a deep impression upon some of the important modern thinkers. Later on, some other monks also visited Russia. All this resulted in a request to send a Swami to be stationed in Moscow.

It is well known that a change in the political climate has taken place in the USSR. Winds from both East and West are freely blowing across the country. There is a lot of liberalisation in the social, economic and religious fields. With the loosening of the iron grip of the State, many have been travelling to the West, and going back with new ideas and thought. A slow process of cross-fertilization has set in. The recent coup and its failure has hastened the pace of the change. The breeze of freedom has assumed cyclonic proportions, sweeping everything away. The grand edifice of the Communist mansion has collapsed. People are confused. They do not know where to look for stability. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new, lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

Change is part of life. From the extremely atheistic and materialistic ideology that was taught, people, as a reaction, have been looking for solace from religion. As the Church has not been able to meet all the demands, people are looking for sources of

new inspiration. Various religious movements from both East and West had been coming in to fill the gap. At this critical period, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have caught the imagination of the people. That is how a Swami has come to be stationed in Moscow.

In September, 1991, I made my second visit to Russia. I was invited privately through the Vedic Culture Society, by my friend cultivated over the years. It is not easy for an individual to invite friends to visit him in Russia. Authentic registered bodies alone can invite. I understand, though there are a large number of registered societies, all are not entitled to invite visitors to their organisations. A very small number of well-known societies can do this. Hence, there was a long delay in organising the invitation and visa. Thank God, it came through when I had nearly decided to cancel my visit. To go as a tourist is one thing, but to go on private invitation is altogether different. Tourists see places and things which the organisers want them to see. A tourist has no chance to meet and converse with the common people. The citizens were also afraid in the past to meet and communicate with the visitors. In the eyes of the KGB, every tourist was a suspected spy, who might corrupt the citizens of Russia. People from the West were capitalist scum, out to exploit the egalitarian Russian society. Communists worked for the good of the common people all over the world, so any communication between tourists and Russians should not be allowed.

Now things have changed. They seem to think fresh air will flow into Russia from that "capitalist West". In their enthusiasm to invite the West to come into Russia, they have dropped their Iron Curtain, which was standing there for seventy-five years. Now they feel the Iron Curtain had only

caused stagnation and stench. They are in desperate need of fresh thoughts and fresh air to rejuvenate them.

Ever since perestroika was declared, my pen-friends have been wanting to invite me to Leningrad, unsuccessfully. At last, the visit materialised in September, 1991. The dates of my visit were fixed from 15th to 19th. Leningrad is a three and a half hour flight from London; the time difference is about two hours. I had to take care to pack my food and medical requirements. I was warned by everyone that food can be a problem. God-sent help came to carry my baggage when I landed there. Swami Jyotirupananda, Michael Mamet and Michel Tchiratiev, the secretary of the Ramakrishna Society and the President of the Vedic Culture Society received me. The airport is in the North of the city, and our accommodation had been fixed in the South. Somebody had kindly lent us his flat for a week. Swami Jyotirupananda had arrived the previous day, to be with me during this visit. Some people came to meet us in the evening. We chalked out a programme of public lectures and parlour meetings. During our stay the secretary of the Ramakrishna Society had arranged our food, with the help of some ladies, to meet my dietary requirements.

People in Russia generally eat boiled buckwheat, meat and some salads. I saw cabbage, parsnips, carrots, pumpkins, beetroot (beets) potatoes and onions were available. They always have some tea. Soup is also a common dish at every meal. As Swami Jyotirupananda and myself were together in Shillong, more than thirty years back, we had a lot of talking to catch up with this big gap in our life. With the efforts of the Vivekananda Society and close friends, he got his visa to come and stay in Russia. His visa is given only for

a short period of three months, which has been extended for a further three months. Local influential friends told me that it will not be difficult to extend his visa as long as he wants to stay. The President of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, has been taking keen interest in the Swami, and has provided him with a flat and other amenities. Kind friends look after his material needs. He is conducting weekly lectures at the Oriental Institute, and accepting invitations from various other organisations. He is soon starting to teach Sanskrit regularly in the State University of Moscow, to students who enrolled themselves. Some of the members of the Indian Embassy, also, have been very helpful to him.

During the 1990 visit of Swami Lokeswaranandaji, a Ramakrishna Society was formed at a meeting held under his chairmanship. Two gentlemen had already gone to India and had taken initiation from the President of our Order. These two are the real friends responsible for organising the Society in Leningrad. These friends and the Society are a great support to Swami Jyotirupananda. This Society is actively trying to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. They have plans to bring out some books. In the middle of August, the General Secretary of the Mission spent four days in Russia, and visited Leningrad, which has given them a great moral boost. They had arranged a public reception and a meeting.

During my stay in Leningrad, we were taken to see a children's art centre, a successful private enterprise. We had two public meetings each attended by about seventy-five people. There were a lot of questions at the end, which shows the keen interest of the people in such ideas. We also had two parlour meetings in two different houses. About fifteen to twenty people

attended. Also quite a few people came to meet us throughout the day. One day we showed the documentary film of Sri Ramakrishna, which was very much appreciated. When no one was around, we went for walks. One evening, we were taken round and shown important places of interest. The city has magnificent buildings and institutions. The roads are wide and full of potholes, and most of the buildings are in a state of disrepair. Leningrad is a very well-planned city. The monasteries and churches, which vanished at the time of the Revolution, are slowly being brought back to life. Though only 5% of the churches have been given back, it will take time to restore them to the original condition. A couple of churches I entered to attend services were full of pious people, who are grateful for the change that has come over their country.

A word about the conditions of living at present: The October Revolution of 1917 broke up the old pattern of life. There was a euphoria of equality; the rich were all reduced to the level of the poor. The rich and affluent must have found it very difficult to make this adjustment. Those who could get out, did so. The rest were stuck in the new order. Properties, commerce and industry; farming and agriculture; everything was controlled by the government. Private ownership and enterprise was abolished. Also individual initiative. Afterward, there was no unemployment, everybody was employed by the government and got 200 roubles. I understand it is a little more these days. And every citizen is provided with a flat—unfortunately, pitifully small. Most of the flats have only one room, which is their bedroom, sitting room, dining room, and study. There will be a small kitchen and bath. Even families with grown-up children have to accommodate themselves in this space and live. People are naturally

embarrassed to invite any visitors or friends to their houses. Remarkably all the places I visited had a television and piped-in radio, with no switch to turn it off. But everything is not as negative as it looks. They paid only twenty roubles rent per month, which included gas, central heating and hot and cold water supply. But people have to pay for their electricity and telephone separately, though costing very little, perhaps only five roubles for both. Most of the houses have lifts, though not in good repair. Public transport is very cheap. For fifteen kopecks one could travel from one end of the city to the other. Underground journey is smooth, but bus and tram journeys a bit jolting.

The blocks of flats always have a quadrangle, full of trees and a certain amount of playground for the children, but most of them are not tidy. When questioned about it, my host told me it is the State's responsibility. "They are slack," he said. I was also told before perestroika things were much better and cleaner. The fear of punishment was there. They were all frightened of the all-pervading eye of the KGB. But now things are different. When I asked my landlady why the window-sills had not been repaired, "Oh, the State is careless these days," was her answer. All this shows the State ownership has taken away the identity of people with their own houses and surroundings.

Government-owned shops are, by and large, empty. Large food stores had only meat, potatoes, onions, vegetables and some kind of jam, all in short supply. To enter the store, they have got to queue up, after collecting the item of purchase they queue up again to pay the money and queue up in a third place to receive the article. Patience, patience and patience. I noticed a lot of melons piled up at tube stations

and also some piles of pumpkins and apples. Flowers, also, were being sold at the wayside. All this, I suppose, is private enterprise. Sometimes, one could see a car full of apples at the roadside being sold, again a part of private enterprise. The apples were not of good quality, and not ready for consumption, because once the winter sets in they do not ripen. My food consisted mostly of buckwheat and some soup, boiled cabbage and carrot. Cheese and yogurt (curds) were also available. I had carried some supplements also with me. The people were very kind, by turns someone or other would come and cook lunch for us.

One day in our walking rounds, we met two Indian students. I understand there are five thousands Indian students in various universities. A motor-car is a luxury, but there are plenty of them on the road all right. The owners feel themselves fortunate to have one. I understand they give lifts to anyone who asks for it, charging for it. This is how they supplement their income. This kind of offering taxi service by private owners is accepted these days. I was told that people need at least a thousand roubles to live in reasonable comfort these days. How do people get the money? They have all learned the art of circulating money. A car owner, for example, gives lifts to the people on the way and earns a little money. So when the car needs repair, he bribes the mechanic to fix it properly. When the mechanic needs to buy extra sugar, he bribes the manager of the store to get his sugar. The manager of the store bribes the petrol pump attendant to get petrol, and so on, *ad infinitum*. A thousand roubles passes through everyone's hands, keeping everyone happy. They do not call this corruption, but keeping money in circulation. Black market is a capitalist name for it. Life is really uncomfortable and hard indeed.

Human beings are very resilient. Under the rigid Communist system they had to adjust themselves for seventy-five years. Today, they seem to take so readily to this capitalist economy and move with it. The period of transition seems to be very corrupt. What is in the womb of the future is not very clear. People are adjusting themselves to this confused situation. Prices are soaring.

A traveller in Russia finds himself paying through the nose for everything. The train journey between Leningrad and Moscow costs twenty roubles for a Russian, but for a foreigner, fifty roubles. Even the hotel charges are very high for a Westerner, compared to the charge for local people. I believe there are some hotels which accept only dollars, not roubles. Naturally, the local people will not be able to go to these hotels. The dollar is the most cherished and respected currency. They tend to treat dollars and pounds on an equal basis, so I had to carry some dollars with me to meet any eventualities. One evening, when we went into a church to attend a service, we found a few beggars on the road. I told my host to give them a little money. The beggar loudly retorted he wanted foreign money, not roubles! Oh, the almighty dollar! By and large, people looked well-fed and decently dressed. I saw a big queue one day in front of a shop. When I remarked on it, my friend told me they were all ladies queuing up for perfume. So, plenty of cosmetic material is available, especially for women.

At the end of the week Swami Jyotirupanda and myself travelled by night train to Moscow, a distance of nearly eight hundred kilometres. Sleeping accommodation on the train was good and comfortable. We were received by Dr. Rybakov, and taken to the flat of the Swami, which is in

the suburbs of Moscow. I stayed in Moscow for four days only.

The Swami lives on the twenty-first floor of a block of flats. As the accommodation consists of only one room with a lot of furniture, the space is cramped. His kitchen was slightly bigger than the ones I had seen earlier. There was a bed in the kitchen. The poor Swami had to make himself as comfortable as possible. The bed I occupied became a settee during the day. The bedside table became the dining table. An antique office table in the room occupied too much space. The space was further reduced by a small glass showcase, full of expensive crockery and cutlery, surely belonging to the landlord. The Swami is so hard-pressed for space he has not completely emptied his case. The only accommodation Sri Ramakrishna could find for Himself there [His photograph] was a little space on the top of a wardrobe. His only consolation was that He was surrounded by a number of flower vases—something special. When a friend brought food for lunch, I requested her to distribute the flower vases all over the room, rather than smother Thakur tucked up on the wardrobe. If Sri Ramakrishna, for some reason or another, wants to come down, He must be careful lest He knock His head on the ceiling. I asked Him, why not in the glass showcase? But you know, He never answers questions. However, I found Him happily sitting. Now He has to find better accommodation for His work. Under the present circumstances, flats can be bought only with dollars, not with roubles. These are thoughts, let us see what His plans are. The existing accommodation costs one thousand roubles a month. The above arrangements have been assured until December, 1991. I am sure the Master has some tricks up His sleeve.

As the Swami was with me in Leningrad, and as my visit was finalized at the last minute, he could not organise any meetings for me in Moscow. It took us twenty-four hours to contact our friends. On 23rd and 24th, Monday evenings, we had parlour meetings, attended by about twenty people. To arrange this, we had to take away all the furniture, and brought in as many chairs as possible. They sat on bed, table, windowsill, and wherever space was available. I spoke on meditation and plenty of questions were asked. The meetings usually lasted about two or three hours, and always ended with a little devotional music and chanting of Hari Om Ramakrishna. Every morning we went for a little walk round the block, saw the so-called supermarket, with many empty shelves. There are school and hospital close by. The Metro station is within five minutes walk, which is a great convenience. Most of the time, the Swami has to use the Metro only, and it is cheap, too. One evening, we also went out for sight-seeing. Another evening, I showed the documentary video of Sri Ramakrishna, which was much appreciated.

It is an experience to live in a tower block on the twenty-floor. I used to hear in England how the minds of people are affected by living in high rise buildings. Though they live huddled together, they live in complete isolation. Once you are in your flat, you are shut off from the rest of the world. As people were forced to attend the Party meetings, and were aware of the all-pervading eye of the KGB, they would always be happy to isolate themselves from other people. The flat, though very small, is their sanctuary. Now, though, I found people were a little more open, and on sunny days they did greet and talk to people. I suppose communication becomes all the more difficult as the winter sets in.

I asked these close friends as to what would be the future of the work and the Swami in Russia. I was told that he would stay until the end of December in Moscow, conducting his weekly lectures and Sanskrit classes. He will spend the month of January in Leningrad, where the Ramakrishna Society has hired a flat for his use. They also have plans to send him to some other important cities, from where invitations have been coming. I have a correspondent in Krasnodar, near the Black Sea. At one stage, I had asked him to contact the Swami in Moscow. I also had informed him of my visit to Russia. Unfortunately, he arrived in Moscow while I was still in Leningrad, so we missed each other. However, we discussed the possibility of the Swami visiting this friend. He is a professor in a college, who is devoted to Swami Vivekananda for a long time. He has formed a study group, mainly consisting of his students. The Swami's visit will be a great support to the activities of this friend.

On 25th night, I travelled on my own by train to Leningrad. Michel, the secretary of the Ramakrishna Society, received me and accommodated me in a different flat. This flat had two big rooms, and was very comfortable. I stayed there until 29th, when I returned to London. We also had two evening parlour meetings in this flat, and several people came. The landlady became very much interested in what we were discussing, and showed friendship. It is her flat that has been hired for one year, for the benefit of the Society. The rent of their flat looked very reasonable from our point of view, and very beneficial for the landlady. During our discussions, it also emerged it would not be a bad idea if the Society could buy a flat as soon as possible. People are afraid prices will go up very much, because soon the city will be thrown open for free market. Already, many Western

firms are investing the potential market. I also understand many Jews are emigrating to Israel, making properties available. I hope they will succeed in acquiring one.

Sophia, a good friend, brought Radio St. Petersburg (Leningrad) for an interview one evening. They came at 7 pm and stayed until 10 pm, asking questions and recording. One morning I visited the Buddhist temple. It was built prior to the 1917 Revolution. They have vast grounds and solid buildings. In 1937, the Communist government liquidated all monks and occupied the buildings. In 1989, the temple only was given back to the Buddhist community. The rest of the property, the monastery buildings and open lands, are still in government hands, which they hope to get back. Though Buddhists are concentrated in Siberia, lay communities are scattered about all over the USSR. The temple in St. Petersburg acted as an important place of pilgrimage. The trustees of the temple have plans to build a lecture hall, guest

house, hostel, etc. in the grounds. A lot of money is needed to restore the place to its original condition. Now some monks are living in the temple building and are organising activities. They need the co-operation of all societies interested in broadening their spiritual and cultural vision to achieve this.

Sunday, 29th September, was my last morning in St. Petersburg. I took leave of the landlady and some friends, who had gathered at the flat, and reached the airport. Much queueing and waiting was necessary before we could check in. We can sympathise with and appreciate the people of Russia, who have been patiently queueing up for everything for the last seventy-five years. Patience, patience and more patience. To patiently queue up is just a joke in Russia. The plane took off at 3 pm local time. By 5.30 pm local time we landed at Heathrow. Oh, it is nice to be back in one's own home!

REVIEWS & NOTICES

SWAMI PREMESHANANDAJI'S LETTERS (Bengali), Edited by Dr. Satchidananda Dhar. Distributed by Udbodhan Office, Calcutta. 358 pages; Rs. 40.00.

During our college days in the mid-sixties we used to frequently hear from the monks one name: Premesh Maharaj—who was then alive in his frail body. They would invariably refer either to his life or to his notes they kept with them to elaborate some of the ideas. The name itself soon, of course, became more familiar to us as we had to read the booklet entitled *Atmavikash* by Swami Premeshananda. We started singing his songs which had once pleased Swami Brahmanandaji too. We drew immense inspiration from those notes, including some of the excerpts from letters written by him to many monks. We did not expect that one day the full texts of his letters could be published in book form for the benefit of all. We congratulate Dr. Dhar for his painstaking collection and presentation of the letters for the general public. Dr. Dhar has done a great job, and has in a great measure repaid his debt (as he feels he owes) to the rishis. He has announced that the dividends from the sale proceeds due to him will be deposited with the 'Premeshananda Memorial Fund' and be spent for the welfare of the residential students at the Ramakrishna Mission School at Sargachi, West Bengal.

With his love and sympathy Swami Premeshananda could attract young people towards himself and unflaggingly and unerringly guide them to their cherished goal according to their mental tendencies. He would suggest to some to stay in the world as life-long bachelors and live a pious life. Some he asked to remain as married householders, and to a few others he counselled to renounce the world for God and become sannyasins. Astonishingly, most of the people who came to Swami Premeshanandaji followed his advice. He would ridicule none by foretelling a troubled life in future, though he had the power to do that. In fact, he was looked upon by many as a physiognomist (or phreno-

logist too), though not in the usual sense. There was only encouragement all round from him as he desired to help and raise up everyone from where they stood.

The book under review includes letters of the Swami to people in all stages of life, but especially to well-educated young men and women who later became monks and nuns. Many are now holding positions of responsibility in the organizations of the Ramakrishna Mission and the Sarada Math. They all feel blessed that they once received his loving care and protection in the formative stages of their lives.

Premeshanandaji's letters have an abiding appeal to one and all who want to live the spiritual life after Swamiji's ideals of practical Vedanta. Speaking about *nishkama karma*, a difficult concept, he wrote to Mr. Amulya Mukherjee (page 320): "There is no such work as *nishkama* (desireless) work. Mind gradually gets evolved to a higher plane, when it has lost all urge to enjoy anything of this world. With this mind, whatever work is done becomes '*nishkama karma*'.

Premeshanandaji's letters provide a glimpse of his versatile genius. Readers will come to know of his humour, his style of writing, and his high literary attainments, specially as a poet, his love for the country and the scriptures, his organizing ability, etc. The book has already generated a lot of interest among the devotees in Bengal. It begins with a short life-sketch of the Swami by Swami Achyutananda and includes 331 letters, written in Bengali, to both monks and the laity. These apart, in the appendices we have Swami Avyaktananda gratefully acknowledging his indebtedness to Premeshanandaji. Swami Saradeshanda reminisces about him, and there are some notes by him on the "difficult or bad sides of the unmarried life". There is also his writing on "The Way to Fearlessness for the Ramakrishna admirers" in the next two sections.

Swami Suparnananda
Narendrapur

FOR SEEKERS OF SPIRITUALITY

Is God all-merciful? No, He is both merciful and cruel. He is softer than the flower, and yet harder than adamant. Sometimes He is the loving mother, and sometimes most terrible—the very consort of all consuming time! Infinite are His forms and infinite His qualities. He alone knows how He would guide someone or bless somebody. All that is beyond the comprehension of man, nay, of the gods even. He can be both infinitely kind and infinitely cruel—it is all according to His will. He cannot be guided according to our thoughts and wishes. We are His, and He will deal with us just as He pleases. Our devotion must not be dependent on any particular action, quality, or form of His ; our devotion must be without any motive. It is extremely bad if our devotion increases when He is kind and it takes to flight when He is cruel or does not heed our prayers. But I concede that for the beginners, devotion cannot be free from motives altogether.

Men do not understand this simple fact that it is of little consequence how one conceives of Him—as kind, cruel, or what not, but what is fraught with danger is not to call on Him at all. One must call on Him—no matter one does so under the idea that He is cruel or that He is gracious. I have no need of knowing what He really is, nor can there be any end of such knowing ; and what does such knowledge count for? I have come to the mango orchard to taste mangoes, what do I care about a detailed knowledge about the tree and the orchard?

God likes play, He is both kind and cruel, and again He is beyond both—He is without attributes. Everything is possible in Him, for He is infinite, and He can become everything. He has no end, no finitude, no limit.

One should cultivate goodwill for others in one's mind with great assiduity, cordiality, and sincerity. One who keeps one's mind ever filled with goodwill for others can get a thousand faults of his own burnt to ashes and he comes to be remembered as a saint. Through goodwill for others he rises from lassitude to activity, from poverty to wealth, from miserliness to generosity, from insignificance to fame, and from ignorance to wisdom, nay from muteness to oratory and from lameness to a scaler of mountains. So powerful is goodwill.

Goodwill is so pure and holy, so strong and vital that even if one cultivates it for oneself, that goodwill converts itself into the welfare of others at last, indirectly and imperceptibly....To the outsiders, it seems at the beginning as though saintly people are engaged in their own welfare, hugging good wishes for themselves alone to their hearts, and engaging themselves in spiritual practices for their own good, but when they attain perfection, it becomes obvious to all that they cannot help spending the remaining portions of their lives in doing good to others alone. A good man means a man with good wishes for others.

According to some, the stage of family life is considered to be the highest of the four stages of life. It is a most sacred stage ; it is not meant for people leading a beastly life, but for those who have purified themselves by passing through an earlier stage of continence and purity of heart. Just think of the care one must take in living properly in that stage of a householder's life, to whom holy man or monk, nay even Narayana Himself pays visits!

*from the teachings of
Swami Trigunatitananda*