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or Awakened India





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उत्तिष्ठत

जाग्रत

प्राप्य

वरान्निबोधत



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

**ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED.**

Vol. 100

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No. 6

## Divine Wisdom

THE ĀTMAN IS EVER FREE.

सेयं भगवतो माया यन्नयेन विरुध्यते ।  
ईश्वरस्य विमुक्तस्य कार्पण्यमुत बन्धनम् ॥

Māyā or the mysterious power of the Lord is indeed that which, against all principles of rational understanding, brings about bondage and misery to the free and lordly Spirit.

यदर्थेन विनामुष्य पुंस आत्मविपर्ययः ।  
प्रतीयत उपद्रष्टुः स्वशिरश्छेदनादिकः ॥

Just as in a dream a person can have the irrational experience of his own head being cut off, the Ātman can experience a change of His nature without that change being factual.

यथा जले चन्द्रमसः कम्पादिस्तत्कृतो गुणः ।  
दृश्यतेऽसन्नपि द्रष्टुरात्मनोऽनात्मनो गुणः ॥

Just as the movement and other qualities of water are seen only in the reflection of the moon in water and not in the moon itself, so also it is only the Ātman, the reflected self—that is, the self as identified with the body—that is subject to the defects of the body.

स वै निवृत्तिधर्मेण वासुदेवानुकम्पया ।  
भगवद्भक्तियोगेन तिरोधत्ते शनैरिह ॥

This defect is gradually removed by the practice of devotion, by the dedication of all one's actions to God, and by the grace of Vāsudeva, the Soul of all souls.

यदेन्द्रियोपरामोऽथ द्रष्टात्मनि परे हरौ ।  
विलीयन्ते तदा क्लेशाः संसुप्तस्येव कृत्स्नशः ॥

When the powers of the mind and body get concentrated and absorbed in the Supreme Being, Śrī Hari, who is the Seer in all bodies, then all miseries felt hitherto by one will cease, as in deep sleep.

अशेषसंक्लेशशमं विधत्ते गुणानुवादश्रवणं मुरारेः ।  
कुतः पुनस्तच्चरणारविन्दपरागसेवारतिरात्मलब्धा ॥

Even the hearing of the excellences of Śrī Hari is capable of assuaging the miseries of life. Then what to speak of the state of a man who has attained to the state of loving devotion to, and delight in, Him?

—From the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*

## Consumerism and the Indian Ethos

Living here at the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in the remote mountains of eastern Kumaon, one feels far from the noise and bustle of the plains. Surrounded by dense forest, and enveloped in even denser silence, Mayavati makes the whole world seem far away, as though countries could be at war, nations could rise and fall, without the silence of Mayavati being broken.

Yet even here, if one looks closer, the economic change coming to India is leaving its mark. The local Pahari people who come to the ashrama show it. Today they are far better dressed than fifteen years ago. They now wear shoes whereas many were barefoot then. Some sport wrist watches. And when we go down from Mayavati to the town of Lohaghat twelve kilometers away, we see even more signs of economic change. There are twenty jeeps parked on the main road, ready for hire, something unthinkable fifteen years ago. The townspeople are even better dressed than the villagers. Many not only wear shoes, but stylish shoes. Many new shops line the streets. Photocopying is available. Video games tempt money from people's pockets. And there is a general bustle not seen fifteen years ago when it was a sleepy town populated by notoriously laidback Paharis.

Yes, even here in the Himalayas the signs of change are visible. Many new consumer goods are available. The general quality of goods is superior to what it once was. And people have more money and are improving their lot in life. This is all good. Swami Vivekananda wanted economic development. He wanted people to have an

improved quality of life, especially the poor and deprived. He even wanted there to be more opportunities for enjoyment, for he said that only one with the power and opportunity to enjoy could truly renounce: the renunciation of a beggar has no meaning.

India is now open to the world market. This also is good. Swamiji wanted India to

*Along with consumer goods, the spirit of consumerism is entering India. But consumerism is based on principles which are opposed to the very basis of Indian civilization.*

join the world community, as we discussed in last month's editorial, and he warned that She should not hold Herself aloof out of a false sense of self-sufficiency of superiority.

Why then are so many of us worried over the changes coming to India? Because we see that, along with improved goods and quality of life, India is in danger of losing something of far greater value: Her dharma. This was discussed in the last month's editorial. Here we wish to discuss consumerism in relation to the ethos of India, the dharma of India.

It is one thing to improve the quality of life, to raise the standard of living, to give people the means for legitimate enjoyment of life; but it is another to adopt the philosophy of consumerism. That promises to destroy the country's ethos, which will destroy the country itself. Along with con-

sumer goods, the spirit of consumerism is entering India. But consumerism is based on principles which are opposed to the very basis of Indian civilization.

What are those principles, and how do they conflict with the spirit of Indian civilization?

□ There is a strange basis to the modern market economy: there must be constant growth for an economy to be healthy. There is no idea of stasis, of a stable point of equilibrium. No economic growth means economic deterioration. In America, for example, the health of the economy is often measured by the number of 'housing starts', that is, the number of new houses that are under construction. But can economic growth be continuous? Recognizing that uncontrolled growth will lead to disaster, people nowadays speak in terms of sustainable growth. But in the long run can there even be such a thing as growth which is perpetually sustainable?

Because of this need for constant growth, there is a need to constantly stimulate the buying urge in people. If people are not buying, the economy is not growing. That is the psychology behind the ubiquitous words 'new' and 'improved' on packaged items nowadays. You may have the old version, but you really need the new and improved one to be happy.

Admittedly, many things *are* being improved, and there is no harm in people trying to improve their lot in life, but consumerism doesn't stop there. It creates in the mind a constant sense of dissatisfaction with what one has and a desire to get something new. In America there is a popular bumper sticker<sup>1</sup> which says, 'He who dies with the most toys wins.' It is meant as a joke, but a

joke based on a real tendency. Thus modern consumerism has no place for contentment.

But the Indian spiritual traditions have always taught contentment as a necessary virtue for spiritual life, and even for ordinary happiness. It is one of the *niyamas*, the second discipline in the eightfold path of Pātañjala Yoga.<sup>2</sup> It is praised in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* as a door to *mukti*.<sup>3</sup> Among followers of the path of *bhakti* or devotion it is essential in the practice of surrender to God (for, what surrender can the discontented practice?). And it is said even of people in general that the contented one is the wealthiest person in the world: if one is rich and still unsatisfied, then of what use is one's wealth?

*In India a man is valued by his character...But consumerism preaches that, not only one's happiness but also one's worth is based on one's possessions. ('He who dies with the most toys wins.')*

□ In India a man is valued by his character, which is the result of the values upon which he has established his daily life. A poor man may be great, and a wealthy man despised, depending on their establishment in character. But consumerism preaches that, not only one's happiness but also one's worth is based on one's possessions. ('He who dies with the most toys wins.')

□ In India there is a widespread sense that life has a spiritual purpose: *mukti*, realization of God, Self-knowledge, or however one wishes to approach it. Most people here don't actively seek the highest purpose, but they know that it eventually must be the goal of all in some life or another. But con-

1. An oblong piece of adhesive paper with a message printed on it, placed on a car's bumper or body.

2. *Yoga-sūtra*, II.29, 32, and 42.

3. *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*, II.xvi.18.

sumerism is based on the idea that the purpose of life is to have fun, here in this world, which really means, 'Life is meaningless, so have a good time while it lasts.'

□ Consumerism is built on a time-concept different from the Indian concept. Here we are not speaking of Western promptness as opposed to the Indian tendency to be late for everything, but of the philosophical foundations of the time-concept in the West and in India.

Western time is linear, with an absolute beginning leading through progressive development towards an endpoint. Not only is Western religious thought based on a linear concept of time, but so in general is science.<sup>4</sup> A linear concept of time is behind technological development, behind the ideas of biological evolution, behind the thought of social evolutionists, behind Marxism. This gives time great importance, because time is working towards an endpoint of fulfilment; that is, time promises fulfilment at the end of its process. Therefore Western man looks to the future, and expects progressive development; that is, he looks for fulfilment within time, and as a result of temporal processes. This is behind the Western passion for improvement of life; it is behind the tremendous manifestations of energy and power in the Western world. And this time sense is *used* or exploited by consumerism.

In India the concept of time is cyclic. Winter is followed by summer, which is followed again by winter. Day is followed by night, which is followed again by day. A wave is followed by a trough, which is followed by another wave. Life is followed by death, which is followed by rebirth. Creation of the universe itself is followed by

4. Twentieth-century science has radically changed its sense of time, but that has not filtered down to society as yet.

dissolution, which gives way to creation once again. Therefore time does not promise fulfilment. The great search in India has been for the timeless, that which is outside of time. This has had a profound influence on all of Indian civilization, just as time-consciousness has had a profound influence on all of Western civilization. That is why Swami Vivekananda once said in America: 'You live in time; we live in eternity.' That obviously doesn't mean that all Indians are conscious of the eternal, but it does mean that there is a palpably different sense of time in India. Even casual visitors to India notice it. The ordinary Hindu still seeks some temporal fulfilment, some enjoyment, some betterment; but there is the background awareness that these things are temporary, and that eventually the timeless must be realized.

To the Westerner, time is like a path we must walk down under our own volition, and along which we must make things happen. To the yogi, time is felt as a subtle current carrying us and the whole world forward in its mysterious flow, where events unfold of themselves: all we need to do is participate, not initiate. This spiritual awareness of time has affected the general sense of time in India, even of the common people. Consumerism threatens to bring an alien sense of time to India.

Other contrasts between the values of consumerism and the Indian ethos should be discussed—the cult of ease as opposed to self-discipline, the five-minute attention span as opposed to steady concentration of mind, as examples—but space bids us approach a conclusion.

Swami Vivekananda said that the West has developed the power to do, the East to suffer. He saw value in both powers, and said the ideal society would come from the perfect blending of suffering and doing. 'Suffering' here means accommodation to

circumstances without complaint or thought of sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> 'Doing' means improving circumstances. He wanted Indians to be more active, he wanted them to improve their material conditions. He wanted a stronger civic sense, though a civic sense built on the highest spiritual foundations: serving the *samaṣṭi* (totality) as God. But all of this he wanted without destroying India's ethos. He felt that the Hindu tradition, if understood and followed properly, had all it needed within itself to meet these needs. That this wasn't just the wishful thinking of the Swami is proven by the fact that in ancient times India had these desired characteristics.

In fact, he even thought that the West was in dire need of a tempering dose of the Hindu ethos. If one reads his *Jnana Yoga*, one

What then are we to do in the face of growing consumerism in India? As we said in last month's editorial, vast historical processes are at work. We aren't in control of the country or of the world. We can't dictate the direction of the country. Therefore we have always to cultivate two different attitudes: one towards ourselves and another towards the world. This has usually been recognized in the great spiritual traditions of the world. For instance, in Mahayana Buddhism there is the beautiful idea of the six *pāramitās* or perfections which form the basis of spiritual life for followers of that tradition. These six *pāramitās* fall into three pairs. First come *dāna* and *śīla*. *Dāna* or charity is the attitude we should hold towards the world, while *śīla* or self-discipline is the attitude we should hold

*'Assimilated' means 'harmonized with our svadharma'. So with national life: a nation must learn from other nations, but learning must come as a process of assimilation, not imitation. For nations also have a central ideal enlivening a more complex ethos. Assimilation strengthens that, whereas imitation weakens it.*

finds very little discussion of *advaita sādhanā* (spiritual practice). Even his *Practical Vedanta* lectures are not practical in the sense of daily *sādhanā*. What he has done in these two collections of lectures is to give the world a new basis for civilization, by giving new concepts of time, space, causation, human nature, mind, and the world. In the West he often referred to cyclical time. He taught contentment. And he taught that character is the only lasting value in life, not material possession. He said that children should be taught concentration of mind as *the* fundamental element of education. And he insisted that anything short of perfect self-control is nothing but 'the sowing of wild oats.'

towards ourselves. Next come *kṣānti* and *vīrya*. *Kṣānti* or forbearance is the attitude we should have towards the world, and *vīrya* or heroic energy is the attitude we should manifest in ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

In general we should take a broad, liberal attitude towards the world, and a strict attitude towards ourselves. So let us not worry over what others are doing: we have no control over that, nor is it our concern. But let us be very careful of ourselves. We must remember that, not only for our own salvation but also for the good of India and of the world, we must be very careful of

(Continued on page 626)

5. सहनं सर्वदुःखानामप्रतीकारपूर्वकम् ।  
चिन्ताविलापरहितं सा तितिक्षा निगद्यते । ।

*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 24.

6. The other two *pāramitās* are *dhyāna* and *prajñā*, or meditation and wisdom, which are not relevant to the immediate point under discussion.

# Madhusudana Saraswati on the Bhagavad-Gita

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

## KARMA YOGA

Thus then, the entire meaning of the Scripture (*Gītā*), which was introduced in the first chapter, has been aphoristically stated in the second chapter. To explain: Steadfastness in selfless works comes first; from that follows purification of the mind; thereafter the renunciation of all actions led by *śama, dama*, etc.; then comes steadfastness in devotion to the Lord, together with *vicāra* on the Upaniṣadic sentences. From that comes steadfastness in the Knowledge of Reality, and the result of that is *jīvanmukti*, which comes through the cessation ofnescience consisting of the three *guṇas* and continues upto the end of the experience of the fruits of *prārabdha-karma*. At the end of that comes *videha-mukti* (Freedom of the disembodied). And during the state of *jīvanmukti* one acquires supreme detachment (*para-vairāgya*) through adherence to the highest human Goal, and the virtuous dispositions, called divine wealth, which are helpful to it (*para-vairāgya*) should be acquired. But the non-virtuous dispositions, called demoniacal wealth, which are opposed to it should be shunned. The specific cause of divine wealth (*daiiva-sampat*) is faith (*śraddhā*) born of *sattva*, and the cause of demoniacal wealth (*āsurasampat*) is that (*śraddhā*) which is born of *rajas* and *tamas*. Thus is exhausted the entire purpose of the Scripture in dividing what is acceptable and what is rejectable.

As to that, steadfastness in selfless works, which was aphoristically stated in, 'By remaining established in Yoga, ... undertake actions' (2.48) etc., and which is a means

to purification of the mind, is being elaborated in the third and the fourth chapters in general and specific ways. After that, steadfastness in renunciation of all actions in the case of a man of pure mind, which (steadfastness) follows from the perfection of the disciplines of *śama, dama*, etc. and which was aphoristically stated in '(That man attains Peace) who, after rejecting all the enjoyable things...' (2.71) etc., (is explained) briefly and in detail in the fifth and the sixth chapters. And by this much (of the *Gītā* text) is ascertained the meaning of the word 'Thou' (in 'Thou art That') also. After that, in six chapters is set forth the various kinds of steadfastness in devotion to the Lord, together with *vicāra* on the Upaniṣadic sentences, which has been aphoristically stated in, '...becoming concentrated, one should remain seated by accepting Me as the supreme' (2.61), etc. And by that much (of the *Gītā* text) is determined the meaning of the word 'That' as well. And we shall show in the respective places the secondary connections in each chapter, as also the differences among the secondary purports (of each chapter).

After that, steadfastness in the Knowledge of Reality, in the form of comprehension of the identity of the imports of the words 'That' and 'Thou', which has been aphoristically stated in, 'he who knows this One, which is indestructible, eternal' (2.21) etc., has been elaborated in the thirteenth (chapter) by making a distinction between Prakṛti (Nature) and Puruṣa (soul). And the



fruit of steadfastness in Knowledge is the eradication of the effects of the three *guṇas*, which has been aphoristically stated in, 'O Arjuna, the Vedas have the effect of the three *guṇas* as their object. You become desireless' (2.45) etc. In the fourteenth, in the course of describing the characteristics of one who has transcended the three *guṇas*, that (eradication) itself has been shown as *jīvanmukti*. In the fifteenth, through the 'felling of the Tree of Mundane Existence', (has been elaborated) steadfastness in *para-vairāgya* (supreme detachment), which was aphoristically stated in, 'then you will acquire dispassion' (2.52) etc. In the sixteenth (it has been elaborated that) the divine wealth (*daiva-sampat*)—which is helpful to *para-vairāgya* and which was aphoristically stated in, '(The monk) whose mind is unperturbed in sorrow' (2.56) etc.—has to be acquired, and that the *āsura-sampat* (demonic wealth) opposed to it and briefly stated in, '(the unenlightened people, who accept as the best) this talk—which flowery' (2.42) etc., has to be eschewed.

And in the seventeenth, the faith (*śraddha*) born of *sattva*, which is the specific cause of the *daiva-sampat* and which was aphoristically stated in, '(You become) free from the pairs of duality, poised in unwavering *sattva*' (2.45) etc., (has been elaborated) by rejecting those that are opposed to it. So, steadfastness in Knowledge, together with its result, has been expounded in five chapters. And in the eighteenth has been concluded all that has been stated earlier. This is the interconnection among the topics in the *Gītā* as a whole.

There, in the preceding chapter, steadfastness in Knowledge, on the basis of the knowledge about the Self, has been stated by the Lord in, 'this knowledge about the Self has been imparted to you' (2.39). Similarly, steadfastness in Action, on the basis of the wisdom that has to be adopted in the Yoga

of Action, has been stated (by the Lord in the text) beginning with, 'However, listen to this (wisdom) which is to be adopted in the Yoga (of Karma)' (2.39), and ending with, 'For you let there be the idea, "this is my duty", only with regard to action.... Let there be no inclination in you for inaction' (2.47). But the distinction between the persons competent for these two steadfastnesses has not been clearly taught by the Lord. Nor can it be said that, since the intended purpose is a combination (of the two), therefore the same person is verily competent for both. For it has been stated in, 'O Dhanañjaya, since action is far inferior to the yoga of wisdom' (2.49), that steadfastness in Action is of lesser value than steadfastness in Knowledge. Besides, in, '(As) the extent of need (fulfilled) in a well...' (2.46), it has been shown that the results of all actions become included in the result of Knowledge; and, after having spoken about the characteristics of the man of steady Wisdom, the result of Knowledge has been eulogistically summarized in, 'This steadfastness relates to Brahman. O Pārtha,....' (2.72). Moreover, in, 'that (Wisdom) which is (appears as) night to all beings' (2.69) etc., it has been stated that for the enlightened man there is no possibility of resorting to action, since there is no apprehension of duality. (Further,) according to common sense, Knowledge alone is accepted as the means to the result, (viz.) Liberation, in the form of the cessation of ignorance. Besides, there is the Śruti,

By knowing Him alone one transcends death; there is no other path to go by<sup>1</sup>.

*Objection:* Well then, since a combination of Knowledge and action, which are opposed to each other like light and darkness, is not possible, therefore they should belong to persons of difference competence.

1. *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad*, 3.8.

*Reply:* It is true that this is possible. But it is illogical that both should be enjoined for a single person, Arjuna. Indeed neither is it proper to enjoin steadfastness in Knowledge for a person competent for action, nor is it proper to enjoin steadfastness in Action for a person competent for Knowledge.

*Objection:* May it not be that both may be taught to the very same person as alternatives?

*Reply:* No, because it is not logical that a superior one and an inferior one can be presented as alternatives. Besides, there can be no question of degree with regard to Liberation, the nature of the Self, implied by 'cessation of ignorance'. Hence, since steadfastness in Knowledge and Action, being meant for men of different competence, are not fit to be enjoined for the same person; and since a combination of those two—which are opposed to each other—is impossible if they be meant for the same person; and since (in case a combination is admitted) it becomes impossible that Knowledge is superior as compared with action; and since on the assumption of their alternativeness it would be improper to reject Knowledge, which is superior and easy of attainment, and resort to action, which is inferior and replete with many difficulties, therefore, having thought so, (Arjuna,) with his mind in a muddle, (said:)

अर्जुन उवाच

*Arjuna uvāca.*

*Arjuna said:*

ज्यायसी चेत्कर्मणस्ते मता बुद्धिर्जनार्धन ।  
तत्किं कर्मणि घोरे मां नियोजयसि केशव ॥

*Jyāyasī cetkarmanaste  
matā buddhirjanārdhana;*

*Tatkiṁ karmaṇi ghore mām  
niyojayasi keśava. (3.1)*

*O Janārdhana (Kṛṣṇa), if it be Your opinion that Wisdom is superior to action, why then do You urge me to horrible action, O Keśava?*

*Janārdhana, O Janārdhana—(derivatively meaning) He who is prayed to (ard) by all persons (jana) for the fulfilment of their wishes—You, who are of this kind, are being prayed to by me also for determining what is good; thus it is not improper at all—this is the idea conveyed by the (word of) address—; cet, if it be; te matā, Your opinion; that buddhiḥ, Wisdom, concerning the Reality of the Self; is jyāyasī, superior, more commendable; karmanah, than action, though it be selfless; tat kiṁ, why then; niyojayasi, do You urge, specially impel by saying such things as, 'For you let there be the idea, "this is my duty"', only with regard to action' (2.47); mām, me, who am a great devotee; karmaṇi, to action; ghore, which is horrible, beset with such great troubles such as inflicting injury etc.; keśava, O Keśava, the Lord of all? It does not befit you, who are the Lord of all and the fulfiller of all wishes, to deceive me, a devotee, who have approached You as the sole refuge by saying, 'I am Your disciple. Instruct me' (2.7) etc. This is the idea.*

*(The Lord:)* Is it not that I do not cheat anyone whosoever, let alone yourself who are very dear to Me? But what sign of cheating do you find in Me?

To this he (Arjuna) says:

व्यामिश्रेणेव वाक्येन बुद्धिं मोहयसीव मे ।  
तदेकं वदं निश्चित्य येन श्रेयोऽहमाप्नुयाम् ॥

*Vyāmiśreṇeva vākyaena  
buddhiṁ mohaysīva me;  
Tadekaṁ vada niścitya yena  
śreyo'hamāpnuyām. (3.2)*

*You seem to bewilder my mind by a seemingly confusing statement! Then tell me for certain that by which I may attain the highest Good.*

Your talk, surely, is not conflicting. But to me, due to the doubt about the competence of the same person or of different persons, that talk of Yours to me—presenting the two steadfastnesses in Knowledge and Action—is mixed up (*vyāmiśra*), confusing; *iva*, as it were; *vākyena*, by that talk; *mohayasi iva*, You seem to bewilder, fill with misunderstanding, as it were—as a result of non-comprehension of Your talk—; *buddhim*, the mind; *me*, of mine, who am of poor intellect. The word *iva* means: You, being supremely compassionate, do not certainly confound, but I become deluded owing to the defect of my mind.

As stated earlier, since the combination of the two opposites (Knowledge and action) is illogical if the same person has the competence, and since as a result of not having the same objective it is illogical that they can be alternatives, therefore if You think that the competent persons are different, then, since it is improper to enjoin the two opposite steadfastnesses for the same person, (viz) for me, *vada*, tell me; *niścītya*,

for certain; *tat ekam*, that one only, either Knowledge or action, for which I am competent; *yena*, by which one, by Knowledge or by action, stated by You after determining my competence and practised by me; *aham āpiuyām*, I may attain, may become fit to achieve; *śreyah*, the highest Good, Liberation.

Thus since option or combination is impossible if steadfastness in Knowledge and action are meant for the same competent person, therefore it becomes established that Arjuna's question is for knowing the difference between the competent persons.

In this context all the defective views of others have been repeatedly refuted by the Commentator with great care on the strength of the Śrutis, Smṛtis and logic. Hence I do not proceed to do that.

By me who am aware of the essence of the Commentator's view, the text alone is being explained. The Lord's intention is being expounded (by me) merely for the purification of my own speech.

(to be continued)

Liberation and enlightenment do not exist outside of your own self. We need only open our eyes to see that we ourselves are the very essence of liberation and enlightenment. All dharmas, all beings, contain the nature of full enlightenment within themselves. Don't look for it outside yourself. If you shine the light of awareness on your own self, you will realize enlightenment immediately. Bhikkhus, nothing in the universe exists independently of your own conscience, not even nirvana or liberation. Don't search for them elsewhere. Remember that the object of consciousness cannot exist independently from consciousness. Don't chase after any dharma, including Brahma, nirvana, and liberation. That is the meaning of aimlessness. You already are what you are searching for. Aimlessness is a wondrous gate that leads to freedom. It is called the third Liberation Gate.

—Lord Buddha

# The Message of Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

*The following illuminating article has been transcribed from a talk given by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. It not only contains a deep yet very readable analysis of the message of Sri Ramakrishna, but also conveys conviction in the great value of that message.*

*Om nirañjanaṃ nityam anantarūpaṃ  
bhaktānukampā-dhṛtavigrahaṃ vai;  
Īśavatāraṃ paramēśamūdyam  
taṃ rāmakṛṣṇaṃ śirasā namāmah.*

*Om! One who is blemishless, eternal, and of limitless forms; who, indeed, out of compassion for devotees assumed a form; who is an incarnation of the Lord; who is the adorable Supreme Lord,—to Ramakrishna, who is such, we salute with our heads (bowed down).*

The message of Sri Ramakrishna is so vast, so varied, that it is impossible for me to give it to you in detail. At the most I can mention a few points that will come to my mind as I talk to you. They may not be very well arranged, and that is not necessary either. Whatever fell from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna was for the good of the world. Everything that he spoke and everything that he did was for the good of humanity. Therefore, whatever will come to my mind, I will share with you and believe it will be helpful to you in your life. As you know, Sri Ramakrishna from the early days of his life was mad after God. He did not know anything else in this world. As he said, 'Verily, I tell you, I know nothing except God.' That was his only concern in life. Other things were absolutely secondary for him. He lived for God-realization and for sharing his experience with others. He did not have the realization for his own enjoyment, as he often said, but for sharing it with others. I give you an illustration:

One day (as he later mentioned to his disciples) he was in a mood of deep samādhi. That mood was coming to him, but he resisted its coming. When samādhi, or complete absorption in God, comes, it makes it impossible for the person who experiences it to communicate with others. But he said, 'O Mother (addressing the Divine Mother), do not make me forgetful of the external world. I want to talk to the devotees.'

We cannot imagine the deep significance of this utterance. Samādhi or complete God-absorption is a thing which all aspirants of spiritual life aspire for, and that is the highest culmination of the pursuit of spirituality. When it was coming spontaneously to him, he resisted it, lest he forget the world, and the people assembled before him be deprived of the great truths that he made the main point of his life to share with them. That is what Sri Ramakrishna stood for. And his was a fountain unending of the

eternal wisdom which we call divine Existence, divine Reality, and of the various experiences associated with it. Sri Ramakrishna said he did not know anything else—that is of the utmost importance. But when he said he did not know anything else, that was only in comparison with the great experience of Divinity that he mentioned. Other things were almost nothing to him. Otherwise he was a keen observer of the external world also, when he was not absorbed in samādhi.

What are the particular points that he has emphasized? First, and the most important thing, is: God-realization is the only aim in life. That is the only goal which should be sought by mankind. Without God-realization everything is unimportant. And when God-realization is there, nothing more is to be attained, either in this life or, if there be any more, in lives to come. That is the highest culmination of the spiritual quest of man. Now, what that God-realization is, and what he meant by it—that is a big question. We may not have sufficient time to give a detailed description of it, but let us take it as a simple thing: namely, the intuitive experience of the divine Existence, the divine Existence being absolutely identical with the existence of the individual. The 'seeker' and the 'Sought' both become one and the same. Complete absorption of the individual in that Absolute: that is what is meant by his God-realization.

God-realization is not merely seeing a particular form, or various particular forms, or having any kind of feeling which may be described by different people in different ways. God-realization is the culmination of the progress of the ego in the sphere of spirituality where the seeker and the Sought become One. As it has been beautifully described in the Upanishad:

*Yathodakam śuddhe śuddham  
āsiktam tādrgeva bhavati;  
Evam munervijānata  
ātma bhavati gautama.*<sup>1</sup>

'Just as a pure drop of water falling into a vast reservoir of pure water, becomes one with it,...'—such is the case with people who realize God. That is, as I mentioned before, the individual becomes completely identified with the Absolute. The individual ceases to be an individual. But he is not lost, he becomes then the Absolute Itself. The drop of water becomes one with the Ocean. That is what is meant by God-realization. But there are various forms of realization, and he accepted all of them. Now, that is the catholicity, the breadth of vision that Sri Ramakrishna had regarding God-realization.

Aṣ I told you, of utmost importance in life is God-realization. And then, second to that is, we should have that realization for ourselves, and also share it with others. As Sri Ramakrishna says, there are some people who, when they get good things to eat, eat them secretly, and then wipe their face and lips and remain mum; that is, they have no desire to share it with others. Now, Sri Ramakrishna condemned that. The great realization has to be shared with others. Then only life has reached its full maturity. God-realization is the ultimate goal, but his realization meant realization not only for himself but sharing that realization with others, helping others reach the same experience that he got.

When Swami Vivekananda, his dearest disciple, was pursuing realization, one day Sri Ramakrishna asked him, 'What is your highest ambition in life?' Swami Vivekananda (then Narendranath, a young man learning at the feet of his Master) said, 'Sir, I want to remain absorbed in samādhi for long

1. *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad*, 2.1.15.

times at a stretch. And if ever I come down from that state, I may take a morsel of food just for the upkeep of the body, and go back to that state of absorption again.'

Sri Ramakrishna scolded him and said, 'What is this? I thought you to be like a banyan tree, which spreads its branches all around and when a tired traveller comes, gives him cool shade and rest there. So I thought you would behave like that—like the banyan tree. You would have that experience, and you would then spread around you the same experience so that others might be benefitted. Instead of that you are thinking only of your own pleasure, even if it is spiritual pleasure, without thinking of others who should be the co-sharers of that experience of yours.'

That shows the trend of thought of Sri Ramakrishna. He never wanted the experience for himself alone. His was an experience which was to be shared with others, and he never spared himself for disseminating those ideas among others, helping others to go ahead in spiritual life towards that highest experience. That was his ambition. His whole life was a demonstration of how he sacrificed his every breath for the sake of sharing spiritual joys with others. That is the second thing.

Then Sri Ramakrishna had a unique experience: that different seekers of God, following different approaches to God, are but travellers along different paths which ultimately lead to the same goal, namely, God-realization. There is only one goal for all these paths. He said in Bengali: '*Jato mat, tato path*—as many faiths, so many paths', all leading to the ultimate goal, God-realization. That was not only a thesis, not only an intellectual summarization of his experience, but it is a fact which he himself experienced through the pursuit of these different paths. He was a great experimenter

in this respect. He had God-realization in one way, then he wanted to know how others followed their paths, and how they reached the goal, and what that goal might be. So he experimented with other paths, and that he did scrupulously by following these different paths as followed by their respective followers. Then finally he realized that all paths lead to the same goal.

The realization itself is something uncommunicable because it is an innermost experience of one's own; there are no adequate words to give expression to that experience. But so far as words can go, he used to describe those pursuits in his unique way. Ultimately, being endowed with direct knowledge of these different paths he gained the privilege of being of assistance to the followers of different paths himself. That was the unique character of Sri Ramakrishna. We have never heard in the history of the world's religions that any teacher ever experimented in this manner. We find expressions of great catholicity in the old Hindu scriptures, perhaps of other religions as well, as in the Vedas we find: *Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*—'One Truth is described by the sages in different ways.' That is true, and even the prophets, the Incarnations of God, may have uttered such things now and then. But history has no record that any prophet actually practised these different paths and realized the ultimate Goal. That is unique in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. This catholicity was not merely a sort of intellectual expression or a philosophical contention; it was a most valuable experience that he gained through his experiments. That has to be remembered. He never tired of giving expression to such broad ideas in different fields to different people. So, from that experience he said: never pass any judgement about the paths that others are following. Have respect for every path if you can. If you cannot do that, suspend your judgement

unless and until you have experienced those paths and will be in a position to pass judgement on them. The fact is that you are yourself merely an experimenter. You are experimenting with your own path. Have faith in that path. Tremendous faith is necessary for strict adherence to that particular path right up to the end. So you must have that *niṣṭhā*, that eternal faith in your path—unflinching faith. But at the same time, if you can have equal respect for the paths that others are following, it will be so much the better.

Sri Ramakrishna never said, 'I have experienced; therefore you must take for granted what I tell you.' No, you follow your own experiments. You must go on experimenting on your path, or on the other paths if possible. But before realizing the proper worth of these paths, before being in a position to evaluate them properly, don't say that one path is superior to another. So suspend judgement, at least. But if you follow the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, you can look upon the followers of different paths as fellow travellers, passing through their own paths and leading ultimately to a goal which will be the same as yours. That is of utmost importance, particularly in this age of continuous conflict and disagreement between religions. That conflict happens because of our lack of understanding even of our own religion. This idea of Sri Ramakrishna makes you too guileless to pass judgement about others. That has to be carefully remembered. Have respect for others if you can. Otherwise, don't pass any judgement. Remember that they are also earnestly following their path.

And another thing in this connection that Sri Ramakrishna says is of utmost importance: suppose that somebody is following a wrong path but is earnest in his pursuit of that path; will not God realize that that man is travelling towards Him, even though the

man may have doubts, or even though it may be a wrong path? As Sri Ramakrishna says, 'When a little child has not learnt to speak any language articulately, he says in a lisping tone: "Papa" or "Baba", or something similar. Does not the father know that he is calling him? Similarly, God knows what you are seeking. Perhaps you are not able to follow a right path; even then He will see and guide you along that path until you reach Him.' Now, that is the judgement of Sri Ramakrishna about different faiths. As we can see, that is of utmost importance for the people of today. Mankind is so varied in other things and perhaps in religion as well. These differences can be resolved if we take this teaching of Sri Ramakrishna seriously, that we have no reason for quarrelling with others unless and until we have found out through our own experience that others are misguided and we are following the right path.

Now, this kind of humility, which is born through introspection, is of utmost importance in our life, because then only we can really be humble and tolerant and accept that all pursuers of different paths are merely fellow travellers on their way to the goal which is God. Now, that has to be remembered. Then Sri Ramakrishna says another thing: God does not see our failures, but sees our earnestness in seeking God. That is an important point to be remembered, which Sri Ramakrishna has emphasized.

Then, as Sri Ramakrishna says—and it is a very important point—for realization of God one must have complete identification with spiritual life only, and everything else will fall into its respective place so that we can direct all our energy in a concentrated manner towards the goal. Now, that earnestness, that one-pointedness, that sort of living faith in one's goal and concentrating one's energy towards that is absolutely necessary for making progress in spiritual

life. Sri Ramakrishna never said that spiritual life must be pursued in one uniform way. He said there are infinite varieties in one's individual temperament, individual approach, individual likes and dislikes. So there must be variety in the paths which alone can make it possible for all people to reach the goal.

If you rigidly insist on one path only, you are saying that most of the people will have to go without religious life. That is absurd; that can never be done; that is why, as God has created the universe with multiple manifestations, with diverse forms, similarly God has created various paths for realization of the highest Truth, so that everybody will find a suitable path. He never discouraged anybody from following his own path. Always he insisted,—particularly he taught his disciples and Swamiji most particularly: never try to impose your ideas on anybody. Let everybody follow his own inclination. That alone will be a natural way for him to make progress.

Once Swami Vivekananda, when he had some spiritual powers already, experimented to see whether he could transmit his ideas to another. The result was that the other person was completely changed. The person had been following the path of duality—that is, praying to God and considering the world and the various paths in one way. 'Worshipper and worshipped'—that relation he cherished in his mind. But when Swamiji transmitted his powers to him, he became immersed in the idea of identity, or unity of the universe, and of one's identity with God. Sri Ramakrishna called Swamiji and said, 'Now what have you done? You have transmitted your ideas to him and he has lost the practice that he had been doing so long; you have spoiled his career from the beginning.' 'However,' he added, 'he is lucky that you have given him a high ideal, but henceforth never do that.

Never try to impose your ideas on him.' Swamiji always remembered this, and in his lectures you will find in various places this point has been emphasized: never tinker with the ideas of others. Never try to impose your feelings or ideal on others. That is the teaching that he got from Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna always said that you should not spoil the approach of anyone; do not confuse anyone by infusing your idea into him. That is Sri Ramakrishna's word of caution which he gave during his training of the disciples. That is another important point that we should bear in mind.

Then Sri Ramakrishna was a man of renunciation, every inch of him. He insisted upon renunciation as the highest spiritual asset in one's life. It is through that alone God can be realized, as it has been mentioned in the Upanishads: '*Tyāgenaike amṛtatvam ānaśuḥ*—it is through renunciation that many people have realized God.'<sup>2</sup> And Swami Vivekananda further emphasized it by saying: '*Tyāgena ekena*—'only by means of renunciation' one can realize God. Now, that is learnt from Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna says in his own inimitable way that without renunciation, nothing can be attained. In Bengali he used to say, '*tyāg chhādā kichhu hobey nā bāpu!*—'Nothing can be attained without renunciation'—renunciation that is thorough-going, not half-hearted, not only perfunctorily practised; but you must go whole-hog about it and renounce everything for His sake.

But at the same time, he said that renunciation does not mean the same thing to everybody. A man who has renounced worldly life, a sannyāsin, should renounce outwardly as well as inwardly. But a householder cannot do that, and need not try. It is enough if he practises renunciation

2. *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, 8.14.



inwardly only. That is to say, he can follow his earthly pursuits; he can do his duty towards his family; he can do whatever is necessary as a member of society—but at the same time he must have complete detachment in his mind. That detachment is real renunciation. That renunciation may not be in the same form as we find in a sannyāsin, but a householder has to be equally a man of renunciation, though only inwardly. Now, that sort of division is necessary and does not carry away the value of renunciation. Inner renunciation is of course the highest thing and is absolutely necessary. But mere inner renunciation is not for a sannyāsin, who is supposed to uphold the example of renunciation to the world. So he has to be a man of renunciation outwardly as well as inwardly. But a householder should be a man of renunciation to the same extent—only inwardly alone. That is an important point to remember.

Then, Sri Ramakrishna knew that all are not equally anxious for God-realization. So he divided mankind into four groups: those who are in bondage; those who are trying to get rid of that bondage, and *there are* people who have achieved freedom from bondage. There is a fourth class, he says: those who are never involved in bondage, but who ever remain free.

He has given a description illustrating this point through fish caught in a net. The man in bondage is like the fish caught in the net. The fish thinks it is safe, and settles down into the mud. It never realizes that it is already caught in the net and that the fisherman the next moment will drag him out and his life will end. So that is the illustration of a man in bondage. Then there is the other man who is called in Sanskrit '*mumukṣu*' or desirous of liberation. He is struggling; he has the experience of being in bondage and is struggling to get free. Now, he is like the fish struggling to get out of the

net. That is the second class of people. Many people do not have the realization that they are in bondage, but the blessed ones are they who have the realization that they are caught in the net of Māyā and are struggling to get free. The third class are those who manage to escape from the net. These are people who by means of their intense struggle, or through the grace of God, have escaped from bondage, though they are very few in this world. But there are such people who have attained liberation, who have gone beyond the pale of Māyā. That is the third class. And there is a fourth class also. There are people, though very very few in this world, who are eternally free and never get entangled in bondage, never caught in the mesh of Māyā. That is the fourth and the supreme class. Now, as Sri Ramakrishna has mentioned, most people are in bondage and remain ignorant of it. They think this is the natural condition of life and never try to get out of it. That is the common fate of mankind.

But one of the disciples then asked, 'Sir, is there no way out for such people?' Sri Ramakrishna at once replied with great emphasis, 'Why not? There are ways; only they are to be followed.' What are the ways? He says: taking God's name, keeping the company of holy men, constantly thinking of God, and at times getting away from one's usual environment where people remain entangled in worldliness and forgetful about God. Get away from such environment, at least at times, and then think about God with no barrier between you and Him. In that way you will be in a position to gradually cultivate within yourself an intense desire for God-realization which will put you on the path to God. Now, that is how he has given hope even to people who are supposed to be always in bondage.

Sri Ramakrishna was the greatest optimist. He never thought that anybody is

eternally doomed. There is always hope for everybody, and he never uttered any word of condemnation that there are people who are eternally doomed. No, Sri Ramakrishna says, everywhere, even in the meanest sinner, God is there in a form that is not yet manifested. Latent powers are there in him to reveal his divinity, but only he is unaware of it. That sort of struggle has to be made so that you become aware that you have the possibility, that you have the innate capacity to realize your ultimate goal, namely God-realization. That real experience, that consciousness of the goal, will make you constantly discontented with whatever else you may be, so that you can never be at peace unless and until you have reached the goal. Such realization is absolutely necessary. Sri Ramakrishna holds that hope for everybody.

Nobody is eternally doomed. There cannot be any question of eternal damnation because God is there dwelling in every being. There cannot be a being where God is not present, where divinity is not hiding itself, as it were, and waiting for expression. That is the idea that Sri Ramakrishna has emphasized, so he could never think the gloomy thought: 'Oh, we are eternally doomed.' Sri Ramakrishna rather asked people never to think of their sins, but to think of the glories of God, think of the way that you can realize Him and have abiding faith in that ultimate victory at the end of the struggle. For him there was no eternal damnation; there was not a single soul for whom there was not a ray of hope, for whom there was no prospect of God-realization. That is an important point that we have to remember in Sri Ramakrishna's message.

Sri Ramakrishna was always a prophet of hope, a prophet of the ultimate victory of good over evil. Now that is what has to be considered as the message of Sri Ramakrishna. As I have told you in this brief

summary, Sri Ramakrishna's message is not meant for any particular sect or any particular religion. It is meant for everybody who has eyes to see and ears to hear. Sri Ramakrishna spreads broadcast this idea, that wherever you may be, there is that spirit of divinity throbbing in you and waiting for an opportunity to find manifestation through you. You are all children of God—or not only that, but you are simply the essence of God, only in a form which is hidden, covered with a covering as it were, which has to be removed. Then a light will shine forth at once. Sri Ramakrishna mentions it thus:

Suppose there is a room which has been dark for a thousand years. It needs only the striking of a match for the darkness to go. It goes at once, not bit by bit, just because the darkness was there for a thousand years. Similarly, a man may have been sinful apparently for many years—that does not matter. He has to be awakened. It is a bad dream, as it were. He has been dreaming that he is doomed. No! Just shake him to help break that dream. When he will awaken he will realize that that experience of damnation, the state of downfall, was merely a bad dream. It needs only a little shaking, as it were, to be awakened to the reality that you are eternally free. That is what Sri Ramakrishna says. Sri Ramakrishna's message gives you hope, encouragement, and infinite inspiration so that you never feel satisfied in the condition where you are. You feel a sort of discontent, a yearning to go ahead. Never remain satisfied with where you are; go ahead, as Sri Ramakrishna says, and stop not till the goal is reached, as Swamiji has put it. Sri Ramakrishna gives the story of the woodcutter.

A man was earning his livelihood by cutting wood from the outskirts of a forest and selling it in the market. With great difficulty he would make both ends meet. A

*brahmachari*, that is a *sādhu*, came to him one day and said, 'Go ahead! Go ahead!' At first the woodcutter did not give much thought to it, but one day he thought, 'Why did the sage tell me to go ahead? I am earning my bread somehow here, but why do I not follow his advice?' So he penetrated deeper into the forest and came across sandalwood trees. He cut some branches and sold them in the market and got a much higher price, so he was very happy. But after some days he thought, 'Well, the *brahmachari* asked me to go ahead, not to stop with the sandalwood forest only. Why do I not go farther and see what may lie ahead?' So he went farther. He found mines of copper and silver; he got more and more wealth by selling these metals. Then he went ahead and found a gold mine and became very rich. Still he thought, 'That *brahmachari* never asked me to stop anywhere; I must go farther.' He went further and found mines of diamonds, precious jewels, and so on, and became immensely rich.

Now, the idea is that we should not just feel satisfied if we have got some experience of pleasure in our pursuit of spiritual life. It has got endless possibilities. The more we advance, the higher the experiences are; and the more we are able to solve our problems, the more we find peace and joy in life. Now, that quest must go on and on. How long should this quest be carried on? As long as the seeker is. As long as *you* are there, your *quest* also will be there. And then ultimately, when you completely merge yourself in the Absolute, when you cease to be an individual, when you cease to have any limitation whatsoever to distinguish you from your Maker, it is then only that you have achieved the goal, and nothing further is to be done.

The goal is to reach that one ultimate Reality, which is the Absolute, without which nothing exists, beyond which

nothing can be attained—*Yam labdhvā cāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tataḥ*—'after the attainment of which no attainment is considered to be more precious.'<sup>3</sup> So that is the ultimate goal that you have to seek. Follow that goal without any kind of wavering, without ever desisting from it, without slackening your pace of enquiry. Go ahead undeterred by any circumstance, and then you are bound to reach the ultimate goal, which will be your complete merger in Divinity. Whatever that state may be, the ultimate experience is beyond words. We cannot express that through words because whatever is most intimate among our experiences, that can never be communicated to another. It is so deep, it is so self-absorbing that there is no question of its being conveyed to others, because 'others' also cease to be separate entities. You see the world as an expression of that one ultimate Reality. That is the goal that we have to follow.

Now, this may be experienced by people in different ways. Don't be confused by that. Take for granted that there are different kinds of experiences because of the differences of the experiencing mind. But ultimately all the experiences are meant for leading you towards the ultimate Goal which will mean infinite, unlimited Joy, unlimited Existence, unlimited Knowledge. *Sat-chit-ānanda-svarūpa*—that is the Ultimate. And therefore no attempt has been made in the scriptures to give expression to it. The words: *sat, chit, ānanda* also do not express that ultimate Reality adequately; they are just pointers leading to the Ultimate, where thoughts cannot reach. That is what has to be remembered as the conclusion of the experience of Sri Ramakrishna. Even the Vedas, the storehouse of our knowledge, fail to take you there. '*Tatra vedā avedā bhavanti*'—all knowledge that you boast of become like

3. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 6.22.

ignorance because they are individuated experiences. They are experiences through limitations. When you transcend all limitations you become as unlimited as the God you have been seeking. You become as full of purity as you consider your God to be. Now, that is the ultimate Reality which will remove all difference between you and your Goal, namely, Divinity.

I pray to Sri Ramakrishna that through his blessing, we may all proceed towards the same goal, and at the same time, be respectful towards others who are also seeking the same goal differently. Also we must be considerate towards others who remain forgetful, and feel it our duty to help them get rid of their dream. Thank you. □

## Consumerism and the Indian Ethos

(Continued from page 613)

what influences we imbibe from all sources. Every experience we take in goes to influence our character, as Swamiji says in the beginning of *Karma Yoga*.

We must be careful not only of what experiences we take in, but also of *how* we absorb them. In our individual lives, each of us has a unique ethos, our *svadharma*. All experiences and all types of knowledge that we accept into ourselves must be assimilated, not simply swallowed whole. 'Assimilated' means 'harmonized with our

*svadharma*'. So with national life: a nation must learn from other nations, but learning must come as a process of assimilation, not imitation. For nations also have a central ideal enlivening a more complex ethos. Assimilation strengthens that, whereas imitation weakens it. Let us then learn from others, but through assimilation, retaining the ethos which has been the life of this culture since its inception, thousands of years ago. If enough of us individuals do that, then there is no fear for us or for the nation. □

...Those who believe in God should pray—not for money, not for health, nor for heaven; pray for knowledge and light; every other prayer is selfish. Then the next thing to do is to think of your own body and see that it is strong and healthy; it is the best instrument you have. Think of it as being as strong as adamant, and that with the help of this body you will cross the ocean of life. Freedom is never to be reached by the weak. Throw away all weakness. Tell your body that it is strong, tell your mind that it is strong, and have unbounded faith and hope in yourself.

—Swami Vivekananda

# A Great Mystic of the World: Sri Ramakrishna

ALENA ADAMKOVA (SHRUTI)

*In this article the author from Czechoslovakia points out that faith, and not mere book-learning, is essential for spiritual progress. Faith works miracles and is mainly responsible for attaining perfect knowledge.*

**'God is in all men, but not all men are in God — that is the reason why they suffer.'**

The Eternal Energy, mother of all manifestations, creates, sustains and destroys the whole world. People call her Kali, or the Divine Mother. Kali is Brahman, and Brahman is Kali. It is one and the same Being. I call It Brahman when It is absolutely passive — that is, when It does not create, or preserve or destroy. But if It is involved in such activities, then I call It Kali — the Eternal Energy or Divine Mother.

Thus said Sri Ramakrishna about the Divine Mother to whom he was devoted all his life. Hindus loved him very much and looked upon him as an embodiment of Lord Krishna. All his unusual and colourful life was dedicated to one goal — to show the basic Oneness which lies at the background of all external religious diversities. Because of his deep devotion he reached such a high level of God-realization that the highest spiritual enlightenment and mystical gifts were bestowed upon him. Often he remained in the state of ecstasy (samādhi) for days.

After returning from such an exalted state, he used to exclaim, with tears of joy in his eyes and a shining smile on his face:

One God. Resplendent God. One for everybody! God is only one, there can't be two. Different people call Him by different names; some call Him Allah,

others call Him God, or Krishna, or Shiva or Brahman. It is like water in a lake. Someone drinks it from one place and calls it 'jal', someone from another place, and calls it 'pani', and still someone else drinks it from another place and calls it 'water'. Hindus call it 'jal', Christians 'water', Muslims 'pani'—but still it is one and the same entity. Opinions are but different approaches; different creeds are but different paths to reach the Almighty—like rivers coming from different places and at last uniting in the ocean.

By his humble, pure and devoted life as a temple priest in the holy temple of Mother Kali in Dakshineswar near Calcutta, Sri Ramakrishna gained the respect and deep love of people who visited him from the four corners of India. They came to hear his affectionate words of consolation and to ask for advice on worldly and spiritual matters. Not only ordinary people, but also highly educated intellectuals used to visit him. And Sri Ramakrishna, who could barely read, was always victorious in scholarly disputes because of his clear logic, delicacy of reasoning and most of all because of his real, practical experience and knowledge of God. Indeed, it was strange that university professors would approach this half-naked holy man to hear, or more correctly to 'see', the real truth about God, to see his open, palpitating love of God which was not

bound in the fetters of scholastics, dogmas, and empty words.

Sri Ramakrishna did not believe in book-learning; he said:

Only two kinds of people can attain to Self-knowledge: those whose minds are not encumbered at all with learning, that is to say, not overcrowded with thoughts borrowed from others, and those who, after studying all the scriptures and sciences, have come to realize that they know nothing.

Sri Ramakrishna was not a scholar, but his heart was shining with that which forms the very basis of every religion—love. Only love can lead one to God, dry theory doesn't help. God has many names and endless are His forms. Worship God with love—name or form is not important. In this way you can approach and realize Him', says Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the Absolute in the form of Its female aspect, the Divine Mother. He saw the Mother playing with the world. It is Her toy and has different forms and names, though sometimes She is the Absolute without any form. She is *Mahā-Kālī*, the destroyer of the world. Sometimes She is terrible, reigning over the cremation ground, *Smashān Kālī*. Or She may come as *Rakshā-Kālī*—blessing and protecting Her children. She may even appear in a dark blue veil as the goddess of Eternity and Infinity. In the holy Tantras it is written that before this universe was manifested, when there was neither Sun nor Moon, nor stars, nothing except dense darkness, there was She alone—the Mother Divine, devoid of any form, the Eternal Consort of Infinity. The Divine Mother is within this phenomenal world and also without it. She created the world and lives in it. (The Vedas give an example of a spider and its

web. Mother is like a spider and its created web. The spider brings out from itself material from which it creates the web it lives in. Mother is simultaneously the contents and the container.)

Sri Ramakrishna lived in deep devotion to Mother Kali, but he had also realized another aspect of the Absolute. Under the guidance of his spiritual teacher Tota Puri (a monk of Sri Shankaracharya's austere monistic Order), Ramakrishna attained *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the highest level of *samādhi*, where consciousness rises to the height of Knowledge, and the distinction between subject and object ceases to exist. Ramakrishna reached the direct knowledge of the Impersonal Absolute and realized that 'The personal and impersonal God are one and the same—it is like a precious stone and its lustre, which can't be separated even in one's thoughts.'

*In the life-long spiritual struggle it is not enough just to read books and hear philosophical discourses; most important is faith. Reason can't fathom the Divine Reality and is forced to stop and stay behind. Faith creates miracles.*

Ice, which is made of water, exists for a while in that form and then melts and dissolves back into water. In the same way the personal God is only a part of the unmanifested God—He arises from Him, exists in Him for a while and then again is absorbed and dissolved in Him.

Sri Ramakrishna says that God is with form and without form. Nobody can claim that God is only this and not that. For the devotee (*bhakta*) God is a personal being having a certain form. But he who attains the state of *samādhi*, in which consciousness of the lower 'I' is lost (through right knowledge), sees that God is without any

concrete form, and understands Him to be the non-material and absolute Brahman. Everybody must hold on to his own understanding of God until he sees God in His real essence. The most important thing in life is the incessant striving towards the Knowledge of God. But 'only a few persons understand that the aim of human life is to realize God', says Sri Ramakrishna.

In the life-long spiritual struggle it is not enough just to read books and hear philosophical discourses; most important is faith. Reason can't fathom the Divine Reality and is forced to stop and stay behind. Faith creates miracles.

'One who has faith, has everything. One who has no faith, has nothing', says Sri Ramakrishna. But most human souls are strongly bound to the world and worldliness. These people are cheating themselves, thinking they are happy. They are involved in the world's evil and are contented with it. And although they sometimes feel that this world is not real, they are not able to renounce it, nor to concentrate their minds on the Cosmic Reality. These souls nobody can awaken. Different are the souls seeking liberation and those free souls who do not desire any worldly things or sensual pleasures.

'The soul that is wholly earth-bound is like the worm that always lives in filth, and dies there having no idea of anything better. The soul whose worldliness is of lesser intensity is, however, like the fly that sits now on filth and now on sugar. The free soul alone is like the bee that always drinks honey and tastes nothing else.'

What is the basic condition for attaining Knowledge?

At first you have to understand the con-

cept of Oneness and practise right discrimination between the real and the unreal through the gradual renouncing of everything unreal, saying 'not this, not this'. When you reach that Oneness, then, going back to different manifestations you will see that their diversity derives from Oneness and that Oneness is the goal of diversity. As long as there is awareness of diversity, there will remain bondage. When perfect Knowledge is attained, man sees one Spirit in everything. In such a state man also realizes that the One has become the individual soul and the phenomenal world with all its variety.

Although Sri Ramakrishna gives faith the main role in attaining perfect knowledge, he also highly values the intellect. 'Everything is in the mind—bondage and freedom. The mind may be dipped in any colour which a person likes. Mind binds, but mind can liberate too.'

Sri Ramakrishna says that Knowledge has several levels, and compares it to light. The knowledge of worldly people is like the weak light of a lamp. Then there is the knowledge of *bhaktas*, which is like the light of the moon. But the Knowledge of the Incarnation of God is the brightest light, and can be compared to the resplendent sun.

For the Divine Incarnation, the *Avatara*, to which category Sri Ramakrishna belongs, there is nothing that can remain hidden. He can solve the most difficult problems of life and Soul. As it is said in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 'The radiance of an *Avatara*, like the Sun of Divine Knowledge, dissolves the ignorance accumulated through centuries.' □

The means should be loved and cared for as if it were the end itself.

—Swami Vivekananda

# Interview with Swami Vivekananda on the Bounds of Hinduism \*

Having been directed by the Editor, (writes our representative) to interview Swami Vivekananda on the question of converts to Hinduism, I found an opportunity one evening on the roof of a Ganges houseboat. It was after nightfall and we had stopped at the embankment of the Ramakrishna Math, and there the Swami came down to speak with me.

Time and place were alike delightful. Overhead the stars, and around the rolling Ganges. While on one side stood the dimly lighted building, with its background of palms and lofty shade trees.

'I want to see you, Swami,' I began, 'on this matter of receiving back into Hinduism those who have been perverted from it. Is it your opinion that they should be received?'

'Certainly,' said the Swami, 'they can and ought to be taken.'

He sat gravely for a moment, thinking, and then resumed. 'Besides,' he said, 'we shall otherwise decrease in numbers. When the Mohammedans first came, we are said—I think on the authority of Ferishta, the oldest Mohammedan historian,—to have been six hundred millions of Hindus. Now we are about two hundred millions. And then, every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less, but an enemy the more.'

'Again, the vast majority of Hindu perverts to Islam and Christianity are perverts

by the sword or the descendants of these. It would be obviously unfair to subject these to disabilities of any kind. As to the case of born aliens, did you say? Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on.

In my opinion this statement not only applies to aboriginal tribes, to outlying nations, and to almost all our conquerors before the Mohammedan conquest, but also to all those castes who find a special origin in the Puranas. I hold that they have been aliens thus adopted.

'Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts, returning to their Mother-Church, as it were; but on those who were only alienated by conquest,—as in Kashmir and Nepal,—or on strangers wishing to join us, no penance should be imposed.'

'But of what caste would these people be, Swamiji?' I ventured to ask.—'They must have some, or they can never be assimilated into the great body of Hindus. Where shall we look for their rightful place?'

'Returning converts,' said the Swami quietly, 'will gain their own castes, of course. And new people will make theirs. You will remember,' he added, 'that this has already been done in the case of Vaishnavism. Converts from different castes and aliens were all able to combine under that flag, and form a caste by themselves,—and a very respectable one too. From Ramanuja down to Chaitanya of Bengal, all great

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\* Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, vol. 4, no. 33 (April 1899), p. 49.

(Continued on page 649)



# East Meets West—Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic Spiritual Bridge

MS. KIRAN RAMACHANDRAN NAIR

*Each nation, each culture has its strength and weakness. Often, what appears to be faults in others is a consequence of our lacking in empathy. Besides, all nations have as much a predestined contribution to make for the progress of humanity as to assimilate the good in others for a balanced growth. This is the divine law we should follow, and which we shall be driven to follow in course of time. A hundred years ago Swamiji inaugurated the Vedanta-bridge linking diverse nations. Now we should start using it.*

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**'I HAVE A MESSAGE TO THE WEST AS BUDDHA HAD A MESSAGE TO THE EAST.'**<sup>1</sup>

This is none other than the voice of Swami Vivekananda which thundered over nations a century ago. The year 1993 marked the hundredth year of Swami Vivekananda's historic address at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, September 11, 1893. It was as if the Eastern and Western mind-floods, the vast oceans of thought converged as time stood still at Swamiji's command. He was the architect of the spiritual bridge that was to span the East and the West. His life was a confluence of the Oriental and the Occidental; the past and the future, tradition and modernity, religion and science. The gushing fountain of his wisdom, spirit and fiery enthusiasm poured out as Vedanta—the eternal divine message calling mankind to manifest its true and pure nature; to stop the turning wheels of destruction threatening to crush humanity.

The reminiscence of his soul-stirring and inspiring address is of vital significance to all nations, especially to those buffeted by strong winds of war and limping along

directionless, sans mission, sans hope. The world scenario presents a picture of desperate human beings caught in systematic webs of persecution of all kinds. The East is so caught up in its race for material progress that every other goal has shrunk in significance. The West has scaled great heights in material advancement, but they have failed to grasp the real essence of life in its fullest measure. The East, swamped by western materialization, looks westwards for respite, but has ended up in an imitation of shallow ideals. The West, weary of the cut-throat competition in the struggle for civilization, lifts its eyes eastwards to Asia, which has always been the torchbearer in spiritual matters.

Social and political reforms have failed to alleviate human misery. This realization sounds a final call for a change in the hearts of men, which is indeed the modern battleground where a victory is badly needed. It was time for Swami Vivekananda to deluge the world with a fresh wave of life-giving philosophic thought. His Vedantic message provided the new impulse of thought that was eagerly awaited, particularly in the West—the very spiritual food and drink for

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1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), vol. 5, p. 314.

which they (the thoughtful people) are hungering and thirsting.<sup>2</sup> He systematically and logically advanced arguments to break down the superficial barriers between the East and West, and established the underlying unity of ideas, thought and spirit. He forged a span between the two banks that had long lain separated by a stream of narrow and conflicting perceptions.

#### *Orientation of the East and the West*

Swami Vivekananda apparently represented Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. All the speakers at the Congress spoke about their own religions and their own Gods. But he alone unfolded the vision of a universal Religion and a God who embraced the whole world. He gathered the flowers of all the religions and, binding them together with the cord of love, made

giant cosmic puzzle, and revealed the already existing unity of humankind behind human failings in perception. Now it is up to us to join hands with each other and declare in one voice this underlying unity and harmony of the whole.

Swami Vivekananda drew world attention to the Orient which has been the cradle of civilization for ages, and where, indeed, all the vicissitudes of fortune can be seen. The Orient was an empyrean fount of power and learning in the world, commanding vast human resources, wealth and spiritual glory. It mirrored human achievement at its highest. The Swami also reminded the West that all the prophets without exception were orientals. The origin of all the great religions which can be traced to antiquity lay in the East—between the mighty Ganges and the Euphrates. No great religion has risen from the West.

*He envisioned India and Europe as 'two organisms in full youth...two great experiments neither of which is yet complete. They ought to be mutually helpful, but at the same time each should respect the free development of the other....'*

them into a wonderful bouquet for the worship of the highest—God, Humanity, and Truth. He was the first to present India in her true light to the Western world which had deluded and distorted ideas about the East.

Swami Vivekananda successfully altered decades of negative thinking about the East that had dominated in the western mind, replacing that with a new reverence for India's spiritual Ideal, the grandeur of which sparkled across oceans like a bright jewel. His various lectures on the East and the West, their cultures, orientations, ideals and religious beliefs were a vivid contrast of streams of humanity in a whirl of colour, which finally merged into the pure light of the One and only one Universal Existence. He put together the scattered pieces of a

The religious ideal is the greatest ideal in the East, whereas Europe is founded on the voice of politics which centres around their immediate societies, having no wider vision. The West has given the world organizational skills in establishing political institutions, social organizations, and military establishments along modern lines, '...but when it comes to preaching religion, they cannot come near the Asiatics, whose business it has been all the time—and they [the Asiatics] know it, and...do not use too much machinery.'<sup>3</sup> Eastern philosophy places a single lofty ideal before mankind, the goal of Self-Knowledge. In the Eastern scheme there is no dichotomy between science and philosophy, which are looked upon as two aspects of the great enquiry into

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 182.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 362.

the nature of reality, both being equally well grounded in reason and scientific truth.

The improvement of material comforts has been the prime concern of the western nations. History reveals that conquest of rich kingdoms was an indispensable part of their plan of prosperity. But history also evidences the existence of towering stalwarts in India who brought their regions to the very pinnacle of glory without crossing over to conquer other nations or coveting wealth in foreign lands. But these lands of plenty were targeted by outside nations who plundered their abundance and left them bereft of everything. Long periods of colonization reduced them to penury; but this did not bring about a change in ideals. They continue to toil to attain their former state of prosperity rather than indulging in wars and bloody conquests.

The East relinquished political greatness and military greatness in favour of spiritual fulfilment. Their mission in the cosmic plan lay in the conservation, preservation and accumulation of the spiritual energies of the entire human race into a powerful dynamo. This concentration of energy was to deluge the world whenever circumstances called them forth to prevail over the destructive tendencies of man and guide him back to the gentle realms of peace, brotherhood and love. As Swami Vivekananda says: 'India's gift to the world is the light spiritual.'<sup>4</sup>

Swamiji saw social life in the West as a peal of laughter with undertones of intense sorrow dissolving into a stifled sob. The tragic intensity of life is covered up by fun and frivolity bubbling on the surface. It is only after these bubbles burst that the reality of life comes to the fore in the West. The East presents the same emotions but in reverse order. The pall of gloom and sadness hanging heavy on the lives of people in India is what is visible to all European nations. But beneath this cover lies a fortitude and gentle

strength that takes the worst calamities and disasters of life in its stride and continues life with a spirit of philosophic calm and joy. No sorrow is so great as to deal a final blow to the indomitable spirit of the East, which will rise as the Phoenix of old to tower over adversities and assert its infinite potential time and again. This is a matter of the greatest wonder to western nations.

To the Oriental, the world of the spirit is as real as the world of the senses is to the Occidental. His pursuit of the spiritual leads the Oriental from the unquenchable thirst of the senses to complete fulfilment of life. But, misunderstood, to the Occidental, the Oriental's attitude is one of a dreamer living in Utopia. On the other hand, the Occidental's preoccupation with ephemeral toys amuses the Oriental. He marvels that grown-up men and women could be obsessed by transient matters.

The Western conception of spirituality and morality is that it is always linked with material prosperity. Morality cannot be imagined where there is abject poverty. But in India, Swami Vivekananda points out: 'Here and here alone, is the only race where poverty does not mean crime—poverty does not mean sin;...but poverty has been deified, and the beggar's garb is the garb of the highest in the land.'<sup>5</sup> So also, all Western manners and customs which seem grotesque to us, have all their meanings if we have the patience to study them.

The East presents mind-boggling variety of sects, sub-sects, castes, sub-castes, races, languages and religions. But all of these diverse ideologies have no serious clash of opinion, and have a firm faith in a single Existence and a Universal God. But Europe witnessed a growth of strict conformity in religion, and every deviation had to prove its advantages only after a bloodbath. This essentially resulted in as 'splendid social organization [but] with a religion that never

4. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 109.

5. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 311.

rose beyond the grossest materialistic conceptions.<sup>6</sup>

Swami Vivekananda observes that mankind acting on two planes, the spiritual and the material, requires adjustment on both these planes. Europe has been the basis of adjustment on the material plane, whereas the waves of spiritual regeneration has always originated in the East. There are many nations who do not conceptualize progress as materialistic advancement. Man is destined to conquer nature. Swamiji, no doubt, sees a reflection of God's grandeur and power in the variety of creation in external or physical nature—lofty mountains, sparkling rivers, gushing oceans—to mention a few. But he reveals a more majestic internal nature of man which transcends the physical world and opens up a vast realm for spiritual exploration. If the Occidentals excel in conquering physical or external nature, the Oriental demonstrates his great-

ness in conquering internal nature. Thus it seems befitting that adjustments on these two planes come from two directions. '...when the Oriental wants to learn about machine-making, he should sit at the feet of the Occidental and learn from him. When the Occidental wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul, about the meaning and the mystery of the universe, he must sit at the feet of the Orient.'<sup>7</sup>

Japanese or a Chinese, the religion would unite them into a bond of brotherhood. 'Religion is the tie, unity of mankind.'<sup>8</sup> He had foreseen the future in the West. His prophetic vision gives mankind the picture of human life shorn clear of its glossy exterior. His keen glance strips away the bark from nations to reveal 'the canker growing at the heart of the west despite all its outward glory,'<sup>9</sup> foreseeing the years of bloodshed, hatred and persecution that was to pursue man like an untiring genie. His prediction about the tragedy in the west is a distinct possibility today. 'Europe is on the edge of a volcano. If the fire is not extinguished by a flood of spirituality, it will erupt.'<sup>10</sup> After his crusades in the west, Swami Vivekananda's conviction deepened that the East and West must join hands.

He envisioned India and Europe as 'two organisms in full youth...two great experiments neither of which is yet complete. They

*Swami Vivekananda's message...is one of peace, harmony and unity. Its soothing life-giving waters have the power to douse the burning fires of religious persecution, materialism, corruption, exploitation and immorality raging in almost every part of the world.*

According to Swami Vivekananda, in Asia birth or colour or language did not constitute a race. Religion alone united men into a race. Nationality and language was no barrier—a Buddhist could be an Indian, a

ought to be mutually helpful, but at the same time each should respect the free development of the other...They ought to grow up hand in hand.'<sup>11</sup> Just as a change of perception is needed in the West to see the East in its true light the East too needs to display patience and have an emphathetic understanding of the Western culture. It is this observation that prompted Swamiji to lay down his plan of campaign in India with the ultimate aim of awakening the masses 'to centralize' the individual forces, to cul-

6. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 346.

7. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 156.

8. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 143.

9. Roman Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1953), p. 150.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

tivate the virtue of obedience, to learn to work unitedly for others.<sup>12</sup>

He is critical of the western civilization in which education is totally intellectualized with no place for the expansion of the heart. Such education destroys man by strengthening his selfish tendencies. Says Swamiji: 'When there is a conflict between the heart and brain, let the heart be followed, because intellect has only one state, reason, and within that, intellect works and cannot get beyond. It is the heart that takes one to the highest plane, which intellect can never reach. It goes beyond intellect and reaches what is called inspiration.'<sup>13</sup> He is sure that a man of heart could never be ruthless. The East has always laid greater emphasis on the cultivation of the heart than the intellect. Indeed, '...the knowledge of man, his powers of perception, of reasoning and intellect and heart, all are busy churning this milk of the world. Out of long churning comes butter, and this butter is God. Men of heart get the "butter", and the "buttermilk" is left for the intellectual.'<sup>14</sup> It is undoubtedly the voice of the Orient that questions the futility of possessing everything under the sun except spirituality. Swamiji emphasizes the aggregate grandeur and glory of the East and the West, but it was essential to harmonize and bring about a mingling of their ideals.

Swami Vivekananda asks mankind to review their judgements based on the worst experiences. Says he,

The product of the slums of any nation cannot be the criterion of our judgement of that nation. One may collect the rotten, worm-eaten apples under every apple tree in the world, and write a book about each of them, and still know nothing about the beauty and pos-

sibilities of the apple tree. Only in the highest and best can we judge a nation—the fallen are a race by themselves. Thus it is not only proper, but just and right, to judge a custom at its best by its ideal.<sup>15</sup>

This necessitates a balanced valuation by all nations of one another. They should not be dazzled by all the things found in other countries, but, nevertheless, open their minds to outside influences and learn valuable lessons, whatever be their source. These lessons should be assimilated and expressed in their own way, and not be just imitation of others.

*Swami Vivekananda's  
Vedantic Spiritual Bridge*

After his extensive sojourn in India and Europe, Swamiji was convinced that a greater contact between European and Asian nations would lead to a better understanding of world problems and initiate cooperative efforts to arrive at solutions which would have the collective welfare of humanity at heart. The West could help the East in achieving a rightful share in world prosperity, and the East would replenish the spiritual reservoirs of the West with its life-giving eternal waters. A global renaissance resulting from a confluence of these two powerful currents will give way to unity, removing the wide gulf that persists today.

Swami Vivekananda visualized Vedanta as the channel of scientific and religious reconciliation to achieve a balance of material and spiritual aspects of life,—a bridge for Eastern and Western unification. Vedanta, though a spiritual legacy, was not to be seen as a mere religion or philosophy. He was struck by the strength of the East in spirituality and noble traditions even in the darkest hours of despair. But the West, at the pinnacle of scientific progress and affluence, lacked a spiritual dimension. It is this imbalance in the East and West that needs

12. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

13. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, pp. 412–13.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

15. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 503–04.

rectification by a harmonious assimilation of one another's strengths to shake off their weaknesses.

Swamiji's quintessent belief in all his lectures, writings and teachings was that the rationalistic, idealistic, strengthening and practical principles of Vedanta would guide the progress of man on the mental, spiritual and scientific planes:

By preaching the profound secrets of Vedanta in the Western world we shall attract the sympathy and regard of these mighty nations, maintaining for ourselves the position of their teachers in spiritual matters; let them remain our teachers in all material concerns....Nothing will come of crying day and night before them, 'Give me this' or 'give me that'. When there grows a link of sympathy and regard between both nations by this give-and-take intercourse, there will be no need for these noisy cries. They

James, Sarah Bernhardt, Nikola Tesla and Madame Emma Calvé. His association with such distinguished personalities and his mass contact in the West with many others, through lectures and discussions, gave people a glimpse of that far-reaching and profound Vedantic thought. His Vedanta did not end in dualism, but carries man in his spiritual quest to that ultimate and all-embracing unity which is the goal of science as well as of religion.

His message of Vedanta divinizes humanity and deigns its worship as the greatest. His definition of Vedanta as a universal religion is one—

which will have no location in place or time, which will be infinite like the God it will preach...which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms and find a place for every human being...and whose whole scope, whose whole force will be centred in aiding humanity to

*'...the knowledge of man, his power of perception, of reasoning and intellect and heart, all are busy churning this milk of the world. Out of long churning comes butter, and this butter is God. Men of heart get the "butter", and the "buttermilk" is left for the intellectual.'*

will do everything of their own accord. I believe that by this cultivation of religion and the wider diffusion of Vedanta, both our country and the West will gain enormously.<sup>16</sup>

His words of supreme faith in the human potential for cooperation are a great inspiration for the world to redesign the future. His words are poignantly true in present times with many poor nations cringing in front of the more powerful ones for assistance that is hardly forthcoming unless motivated by personal gain. Swami Vivekananda came into contact with some of the outstanding giants in the West, such as Max Muller, Robert Ingersoll, Paul Deussen, William

realize its own true, divine nature.<sup>17</sup>

The central ideal of Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta is oneness, in which 'there are no two in anything, no two lives. There is but one life, one World, one Existence, everything is that One, the difference is in degree and not in kind.'<sup>18</sup> The voice of Vedanta was a unifying force providing mankind a common meeting ground for all ideologies. Its all-pervasive, subtle influence would gradually overcome men all over the world to forge a lasting unity. Swamiji envisages

17. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama 1958), p. 583.

18. Swami Vivekananda, *Practical Vedanta* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), p. 11.

16. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 448-9.

the duty of Vedanta as one harmonizing all aspirations and revealing the golden thread of unity everywhere on the globe.

Swami Vivekananda explains this process of world-confluence by citing the example of a kettle of water coming to a boil with bubbles rising one after another to a tremendous tumult. He regards each individual as a bubble; various nations as many bubbles. He pronounces that a day will come when the line of separation will be wiped out, to manifest the oneness towards which humanity is traversing—

...when every man will be as intensely practical in the scientific world as in the spiritual, and then that Oneness, the harmony of Oneness, will pervade the whole world....A tremendous stream is flowing toward the ocean, carrying us all along with it. And though like straws and scraps of paper, we may at times float aimlessly about, in the long run we are sure to join the Ocean of Life and Bliss.<sup>19</sup>

He heralds the wonderful voice of God, the Vedanta, that marvellous product of the soul of man, which alone can fill the vacuum created by dogmatic, crude and narrow ideologies with its broad, rational and noble ideas. He echoes the sentiments of the German philosopher Schopenhauer, who has foretold the flooding of the world with Indian spiritual ideas. He remarks: 'The

world is about to see a revolution in thought more extensive and more powerful than that which was witnessed by the Renaissance of Greek Literature.'<sup>20</sup>

#### Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda's message to the East and the West is one of peace, harmony and unity. Its soothing, life-giving waters have the power to douse the burning fires of religious persecution, materialism, corruption, exploitation and immorality raging in almost every part of the world. He asks for the removal of all the obstacles that have suppressed the natural stream of love in the hearts of all men. His Vedantic bridge is a part of his plan of world reconstruction. We recall Romain Rolland's tribute to Swami Vivekananda:

Nobody felt more clearly that the great Mediator between God and man was called to be the Mediator also between the East and the West; for the East recognizes him as its own. It was from thence he came to us.<sup>21</sup>

The memory of his message which poured forth on the world as gentle rain a hundred years ago should enthuse our spirits to follow the beats of that distant drummer whose body has gone beyond this earthly existence, but whose voice still resounds above the deafening clamour of the world. □

20. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 109.

21. *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, pp. 100–01.

19. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, pp. 187–8.

Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break them.  
Freedom is all I want, but to hope for it I feel ashamed.  
I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee, and that thou art my best friend,  
but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel that fills my room.  
The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death; I hate it,  
yet hug it in love.  
My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy;  
yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted.

—Song from *Gitanjali*, Rabindranath Tagore

# Towards an Index of Happiness

BHARAT DOGRA

*Are indexes of human development an adequate reflection of the social well-being of the people these pertain to? Is a 'development' society, by definition, also the 'good' society? Or, is it time—asks Bharat Dogra—that we look for criteria to measure the happiness that a society affords its members?*

All the frantic activity in the name of growth may quite often trigger even greater discontent and dissatisfaction. To avoid this enormous wastage, it is necessary to give some thought to how genuine well-being and happiness should be understood, an understanding which requires just plain common sense devoid of any vested interests.

First and foremost, the basic needs of all should be met. In basic needs we include the minimum norms of food (including water) which are necessary to keep the body healthy, the inexpensive housing, sanitation, furnishing and clothing that will provide adequate protection from weather extremes, and access to some basic health services and school-level education.

A state of happiness will not last long when basic needs are not met. Denial of basic needs has been known to exist with fairly high rates of economic growth. In such a situation clearly happiness has decreased. To judge a society's happiness and well-being we do not ask how wealthy its richest people are, we ask whether all people have access to basic needs.

Nations or communities which satisfy the basic needs of their own people but deprive other people of basic needs cannot

be said to be in a state of happiness or well-being. This is not just a moral judgement, as violence and exploitation are ultimately known also to harm and destroy the perpetrators of this violence and exploitation.

Another indicator of a community's happiness is the health of its people. Of course, some crucial aspects of good health are covered if the basic needs are met. But even when the basic needs are met, it is possible for a community to make a mess of its health—as can be seen in several rich countries.

The most obvious causes of bad physical health (other than denial of basic needs) are plain simple laziness resulting in lack of exercise and poor hygiene, and high fat, low-fibre diet including a lot of junk food; consumption of tobacco, alcohol and other intoxicants; exposure to dangerous chemicals in the food-chain and elsewhere and to high levels of pollution; tension and stress that comes from the rat race or breakdown of relationship; unhealthy conditions at workplace; high risk of injury in accidents, and indiscriminate sexual relationships. Such an unhealthy lifestyle will lead to constipation, obesity, frequent headaches, backaches, etc., irritability, frequent outbursts of anger and violence, and overall higher tendency towards heart attacks and cancers. High incidence of such problems has been noticed in several rich communities.

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\* Reprinted with permission from *The Hindusthan Times*, 15 May 1994.





The unrestrained pursuit of sensual pleasures (which ultimately becomes a main cause of ill-health) is to be regarded to a substantial extent a contribution of the consumerist and acquisitive values promoted aggressively in certain societies.

Longevity is an important indicator of good health, but we should also ask how healthy life generally is, how much chronic disease exists, to what extent life is prolonged merely by expensive (and frequently painful) medicare. This will give us a more complete picture of health.

This again is not a matter of individual failure, specially for women who generally suffer the most in such a breakdown of relationships. The individuals should more realistically be seen as victims of wider trends in society.

The relationship between parents and children is again of crucial importance. Children are the nearest and dearest symbols of our commitment to a better future. So something must be drastically wrong in those societies which report a large scale breakdown of relationship between parents and children, frequent incidents of child-abuse and a high degree of aggressiveness on the part of teenagers. In some rich societies an attempt is made to cover up this alienation by buying a lot of expensive gifts, but still the alienation and stress suffered by both parents and children remain.

The way in which elderly, aged and infirm people are looked after in families is an important indicator of happiness. If many people have to spend their old age in a state of neglect and loneliness, or spend their middle age worrying about the loneli-

ness and neglect in old age, that results in a lot of distress in society.

Another important indication of happiness relates to: to what extent people like (or dislike) their profession, workplace, colleagues and boss. Do they find work creative or alienating, do they have job satisfaction or feel threatened by unemployment, do they find work in keeping with their abilities and skills, do they feel that their work contributes to the betterment of society, how much time do they have to spend daily in travelling to workplace, and how comfortable is the daily travel; does professional work involve long periods away from their near and dear ones, does it involve the risk of accidents or serious long-term impairment of health?

The extent of equality in a society is an important indicator of its happiness. Equality even at low levels of income makes it possible to avoid the discontent that comes from comparing one's conditions with those of the neighbours. Social equality—absence of discrimination on the basis of race, colour, caste, etc.—is of course highly desirable. Nor can the importance of

gender equality be overestimated as this involves nearly half of humanity.

Crime is likely to be low in a society when basic needs are met and there exist economic equality and happy family life. High levels of crime and violence, apart from destroying and disrupting the lives of a large number of people, are also responsible for creating a psychology of fear and suspicion in society.

War (or large scale civil strife) poses a grave threat to the happiness and well-being of society. The use of highly destructive weapons now available can lead to the destruction of entire nations and the killing of several hundred thousand people.

Many wars are a reflection of the collective greed of people for a greater share of resources. Thus war is more likely to co-exist with aggressive pursuit of economic self-interest at the cost of others. While wars certainly harm those who are defeated, the victors of unjust wars cannot also escape the enormous guilt of killing on a large scale for greed, and this guilt also destroys their lives in several complex ways. □

Every duty is holy, and devotion to duty is the highest form of the worship of God; ... By doing well the duty which is nearest to us, the duty which is in our hands now, we make ourselves stronger; and improving our strength in this manner step by step, we may even reach a state in which it shall be our privilege to do the most coveted and honoured duties in life and in society.

—Swami Vivekananda.

# Service

DR. N. EAKAMBARAM

*Swami Vivekananda has said that renunciation and service are the twin ideals of India. Dr. N. Ekambaram takes a look at the second of these, examining some of the different meanings of the word 'service' and discussing the significance of service in the present-day context. The author is Reader in English at the University of Madras.*

'Service' according to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* has thirteen meanings. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* lists thirty-eight meanings, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* has the same number, but in greater detail. One has to find one's way through the maze of these meanings. Service 'involves work that should be efficient and of the right kind, in a particular place and time'. We speak of the 'services' rendered by politicians, officers, clerks, and attendants, by medical doctors, engineers, lawyers and teachers, who have service registers of thirty or more years and which bring in pensionary benefits to them. Of course, politicians and lawyers are left to their own strategies to provide for themselves while they serve others. There are many other workers who are not highly organized, like hotel servers, cobblers, house-servants, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and others who render service and receive pay for it. Electricity, water, and sewage connections to a house or building are called 'service connections'. The postal, railway, airline, roadway, telegraphic, and other departments also render services to the people. So too hospitals, colleges, schools, and hotels. It is difficult to imagine a society without all these agents of service. Businessmen render services inasmuch as they spend time and energy in making goods available to the people, though some of them seem to make disproportionate profits out of their business activity. Business institutions belong to the same category. Financial institutions like

banks and companies render a service as they take care of our money and make our monies grow, though of course, over a very long period. The newspapers inform of the news and help in the growth of public awareness. Radio, television and cinema inform, entertain and enlighten us in their own way. There are also organizations like the Lions, the Rotary Club, Red Cross, and Homes for the Old, for Orphans, destitutes, and others, which render service. The Armed Services: the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force render service in maintaining the country's borders and keeping enemies away. Also temples, churches, mosques, and other religious institutions conduct and render services fortifying the people so that their *kuruksetras*, fields of work and struggle, become *dharmaksetras*, fields of righteousness in the battle of life. Thus the word *service* is almost synonymous with *work*, and may be further divided into 'secular' and 'religious'. Secular may refer to individual work or to institutional work or to a combination of these. I suggest that it can also be divided into 'ego-centred' and 'altruistic' or 'other-centred', both being important in the growth of an individual's life.

The worker has to acquire the skills, tools and materials of work. Whether a carpenter wants to make a table, or an engineer design a machine, a doctor cure a patient, a lawyer argue a case, or a fit person manage a temple, everyone has to acquire knowledge about what he wants to do and has to do. He

has to understand the nature and purpose of his work, and then apply himself to the task with complete sincerity, concentration of mind, and complete it within the time assigned. It is a pity that some, in the name of perfectionism, never complete a piece of work and thereby become a problem to themselves and to others. That is why in an office or factory, working hours are specified and work done is accounted for. But then there are certain areas where accountability is difficult to be defined: the value of a teacher's work, or the value of music or painting, or of religious discourse done in the realm of the outer world is possible to account for, but work in the realm of the inner world, it is difficult to account for. And both kinds of work contribute to the good in a developed society. But I think it must be borne in mind that the completion of any work—one may even say, the successful completion of the work—is as important as the beginning of it. A good and efficient worker will anticipate and overcome the problems that he may encounter, and complete his work, unlike a bad and inefficient worker. But something may go wrong and he may not be able to complete the work or succeed in his task. The question remains: how is such an end to be considered?

In the western world high value is attached to success, and failure is looked down upon. Those who fail are considered to be dropouts and misfits. Men of letters sometimes take up their cause and portray them in a sympathetic manner in literary works. Successful men grow rich and fat, and in middle-age work in comfortable offices and live in even more comfortable homes. It is the pattern of life where millions in money matters, and not the people. At the root of such life is the severe pressure of competition, a kind of economic survival of the fittest. All this developed gradually in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries

with the advance of science and technology and liberal democracy.

What we have done in India in the last forty years is to import the fruits of science and technology in a massive way and to adopt the pattern of western liberal democracy as our own. This success-oriented and competitive pattern of life is edging out the more tolerant and older way of life. It is anybody's guess which way of life will survive, or what new combination of life-patterns will emerge. Indian culture today is at the crossroads, and especially the younger generation looks to the older for a sense of direction, but the older generation lacks conviction as to what it should tell the young. One symptomatic instance may be cited—the enormous influence of the television in our homes. While some of the older generation go to temples and attend religious discourses, some sit at home helplessly watching the TV and, of course, the young are glued to it. Conversation is displaced by the machine and every activity at home is carried on before the high altar of the TV. The complexity of the situation is sharply focussed when we recall that *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* were the most popular programmes, and these were highly simplistic and action-packed, a kind of mix that everyone would accept with gusto.

The Hindu attitude to work, that one should perform one's duties wholeheartedly and not look for the fruits thereof, is nowhere better expressed than in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In Chapter Three, 'Karma-Yoga', Sri Krishna points out how nobody can be free from action:

*Freedom from activity is never achieved by abstaining from action. Nobody can become perfect by merely ceasing to act. In fact, nobody can ever rest from his activity even for a moment. All are helplessly forced to act,*

by the *gunas*.<sup>1</sup>

In this, 'activity' includes the work of the body as well as of the mind, and then comes the more profound statement:

*The world is imprisoned in its own activity, except when actions are performed as worship of God. Therefore you must perform every action sacramentally, and be free from all attachment to results.*<sup>2</sup>

This means every action has a cause and an effect which in turn leads to another action—*kārya kāraṇa sambandha*—and man finds himself a prisoner in an unbroken chain of *karma* from which he can hardly escape. This may go on from one birth to another in an endless cycle. The only way out is to turn every work into an act of worship. In Chapter Two, 'Jnana-Yoga', occurs a more revealing passage:

*You have the right to work, but for work's sake only. You have no right to the fruits of work. Desire for the fruits of work must never be your motive in working. Never give way to laziness either.*

*Perform every action with your heart fixed on the Supreme Lord. Renounce attachment to the fruits. Be even-tempered in success and failure; for it is this evenness of temper which is meant by yoga....*

*In the calm of self-surrender you can free yourself from the bondage of virtue and vice during this very life. Devote yourself, therefore, to reaching union with Brahman. To unite the heart with Brahman and then to act: that is the secret of non-attached work.*<sup>3</sup>

It is this gospel of non-attached work that can enable a man to accept success and failure with equanimity, for there are unaccountable forces which may help or hinder in the completion of a work. One need not be elated by success or depressed by failure, for a mature person takes both in his stride. And, of course, one has to work with the utmost devotion and concentration of the body, mind and soul, for work is *tapas*, an act of worship of God.

Swami Vivekananda in his lectures on Karma Yoga points out: 'This is the one central idea in the *Gītā*: work incessantly, but be not attached to it.'<sup>4</sup> One has to work through freedom and love. Love that is possessive would be selfishness, but love that gives freedom to the person loved, that is non-attachment. Swamiji quotes the statement of Sri Krishna from the *Gītā*:

*Look at Me, Arjuna! If I stop from work for one moment, the whole universe will die. I have nothing to gain from work; I am the one Lord, but why do I work? Because I love the world.*<sup>5</sup>

Thus love and work go hand in hand in the evolutionary process of an individual's life.

Sometimes ego-centred work is looked down upon. On the other hand, it appears to be a legitimate part of one's life inasmuch as one has a duty to oneself. An individual has to develop the talents he is endowed with, and find an occupation of his choice for which he has the necessary skills. He should earn an honest livelihood for his family, and enjoy the fruits of his work. The Tamil poet-saint, Tiruvalluvar, accords the highest place to the householder for he

1. Swami Prabhavananda & Christopher Isherwood, *Bhagavad-Gita, The Song of God* (Hollywood, Calif., Marcel Rodd Co.), pp. 99–100.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–2.

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 1, p. 53.

5. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 58.

maintains the family which is the basic unity of society. If each individual works with sincerity and in the process brings into play even a small part of the philosophy he has imbibed, and takes care of the family of which he is a part, then the entire society achieves stability and welfare. Even in the discharge of this basic duty to one's own family there are bound to be deviants and dropouts, and then it is the duty of others to come to the aid of such persons and families.

There is another and more commonly seen kind of ego-centred activity that is negative, which seeks the glorification of oneself and of the members of one's family, and at the most, of one's kith and kin. It is undisguised pursuit of money and power. The individual will do anything to conserve and perpetuate the empire that he has built up most assiduously. Others are allowed to rise only to the degree (and as long as) they pay homage to this great man. Sometimes he may engage in public activity, and even spend of his money and power, but the harsh truth seems to be that this is only a mask to serve his own glory. It only shows that he has not grown beyond the love of himself and of his own family. There is a wide disjunction between what he speaks—his speech is a chain of golden words—and what he does. The idea of an integrated personality in whom the body, speech and mind (*kāya, vāk, manas*) act in unison is unknown to him. He is like a man who lives in a house without doors and windows. He never goes out and looks at the blue sky. He is a man who is always hounded by fear. How can he know the joy of altruistic service?

Service to others without looking for a reward seems to be the most liberating kind of activity. This is a measure of the growth of an individual from an ego-centred to the other-centred state. Also there is no sudden switching over from one centre to the other.

It is a gradual process of the evolution of consciousness from the individual to the universal. What Swami Vivekananda called '*daridra Nārāyaṇa sevā*', service of the poor, is really the service of God. And the ethic of such service is that both the served and the server are redeemed. Sometimes people assume an attitude of serving in a condescending manner. There is a need to eschew this attitude of looking down upon those whom a person serves, for that would be to allow the ego to take the upper hand. The truth is that a person should be grateful he is given an opportunity to do something for the good of others. And service may be rendered for those who are physically and materially poor and for those who are struck by calamity by way of feeding, clothing, housing, and providing hospitals and other services for them; and, for those young and old who want to acquire knowledge and other various skills, by opening schools and colleges, libraries and laboratories and workshops. The aim should be to help these unfortunate people again become self-reliant and move them on to positive ego-centred kind of activity. The recipients of service should not, of course, become dependent on those who serve. The government can also play a part and try to create welfare agencies as in England or France or America, by providing medical insurance, unemployment allowance, old age homes, etc. But till then individuals and institutions have to render service in all humility: 'Humility is endless'. □

It is the cheerful mind that is persevering. It is the strong mind that hews its way through a thousand difficulties.

—Swami Vivekananda

# Gleanings from the Wayside

PAO YI

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

## Nine

Some say reality is many;  
Others say it is one.  
Some say the world is empty;  
Others say it is full.  
Some say that God is outside us;  
Others say he is within.

Who is right?  
Both!

The One is the playground of the many;  
The many are the playground of the One.  
We move in it,  
And it moves in us.

## Ten

Some say that the One cannot be perfect,  
Because it contains the many.  
The many, they say, are imperfect,  
And therefore pollute the One.

Soot pollutes air,  
Mud pollutes water,  
Defilements pollute the mind.  
But the many do not pollute the One.

If perfection does not embrace imperfection,  
How can it be perfect?

## Eleven

Some look at the One  
And call it the Way.  
Why do they call it the Way?  
Because it is not a single point,  
But a vast continuum.

**Twelve**

Myriads of living beings  
 Rise out of the One  
 As the grass  
 Rises out of the ground.  
 You see the grass,  
 But not the ground.  
 Why is the ground hidden?  
 Because it has covered itself with grass.  
 Why is the One hidden?  
 Because it has dispersed itself  
 Throughout creation.

If it had not dispersed itself,  
 Creation could not endure.

**Thirteen**

Everything is complete,  
 Because everything is part of the One.  
 Our little minds are offspring  
 Of the One that floods the cosmos.  
 It continually gives birth  
 To multitudes of living beings.  
 They are born, they live, they die,  
 And are reabsorbed into the One.

Observe the interplay of the ten thousand things,  
 Shadows within the shining of the Matrix.  
 Move in the One like a fish in the water,  
 And rest in the fullness of things.

**Fourteen**

How to perceive the One?  
 Just sit down and watch.  
 For Oneness dwells at the heart of things,  
 And reaches out from the atoms  
 To embrace us.  
 Look at the many long enough,  
 And slowly the One will emerge.  
 But look with prayer and with longing:  
 For the One is shy, like a maiden.  
 Like a maiden, it has to be wooed.



**Fifteen**

There are those who seek illumination.  
It bursts upon some men suddenly.  
Others attain it gradually.

To be illumined is of no value.  
What is of value?  
To be illumined,  
Then transformed.

What is of more value?  
To be transformed,  
And then to become a vessel  
Through which others may be transformed.

The One is like a single taper  
Which lights a multitude of candles.

**Sixteen**

Electricity is useless  
Without lamps to shine through;  
Lamps are useless  
Without electricity to shine through them.  
Plug in your lamp,  
And you will get a shining  
That illuminates the world.

How to plug in your lamp?  
Just watch the world,  
And look for the One.  
When the mind is quiet,  
The One emerges.  
It shines forth from the world  
And suffuses everything.  
And see!  
Your lamp was on all the time.

**Seventeen**

The first time a man sees the One,  
It dazzles him and fills him with bliss.  
Later it becomes an old friend:  
Just to see it gives him contentment.  
When it breaks into his consciousness,  
He is pleased;

When it recedes,  
 He is not disappointed.  
 For he knows it is there,  
 Although hidden.

Harmonize yourself with the One,  
 And the One will harmonize itself with you.  
 How to harmonize yourself with it?  
 Just think of it all the time.

He who cherishes the One within him,  
 The One goes with him, wherever he goes.

### Eighteen

Dancing on the waves of the One,  
 I get the best of both worlds.  
 I rejoice in the beauty of the clouds and sky,  
 And the depths beneath sustain me.

Dive deep into the ocean to enjoy the depths,  
 Then return to the surface to tell others.  
 The best divers know how to stay down a long time.  
 They don't care about life on the surface.

Therefore those who are deep  
 Do not talk or write books;  
 Those who talk and write books  
 Are not deep.

If I take myself too seriously,  
 The One will laugh at me.

### Nineteen

If divers were meant to remain beneath the sea,  
 Nature would have given them gillslits.  
 If men were meant to dwell always in the One,  
 The One would not have become many.

Some men glimpse it only once in their lives,  
 And that is enough for them.  
 Others want to see it all the time.  
 If it were meant to be seen all the time,  
 It would not have hidden itself.  
 If men could see it all the time,  
 Nothing would ever get done.

The One gives each man as much as he needs.  
One glimpse will last you a lifetime.

Even so,  
To those who need it all the time,  
It gives itself all the time,  
And to those who dive deep  
It gives gillslits.  
For the One heeds those  
Who cry out for it.

*(To be continued)*

## Interview with Swami Vivekananda on the Bounds of Hinduism

*(Continued from page 630)*

Vaishnava teachers have done the same.'

'And where should these new people expect to marry?' I asked.

'Amongst themselves as they do now,' said the Swami quietly.

'Then as to names,' I enquired. 'I suppose aliens and perverts who have adopted non-Hindu names should be named newly. Would you give them caste-names, or what?'

'Certainly,' said the Swami, thoughtfully, 'there is a great deal in a name!' and on this question he would say no more.

But my next enquiry drew blood. 'Would you leave these new comers, Swamiji, to choose their own form of religious belief out of many-visaged Hinduism, or would you chalk out a religion for them?'

'Can you ask that?' he said. 'They will choose for themselves. For unless a man chooses for himself the very spirit of Hinduism is destroyed. The essence of our Faith consists simply in this freedom of the Ishtam.'

I thought the utterance a weighty one, for the man before me has spent more years than any one else living, I fancy, in studying the common bases of Hinduism in a scientific and sympathetic spirit—and the freedom of the Ishtam (freedom to choose one's form of worship) is obviously a principle big enough to accommodate the world.

But the talk passed to other matters, and then with a cordial goodnight, this great teacher of religion lifted his lantern and went back into the Monastery, while I, by the pathless paths of the Ganges, in and out amongst her crafts of many sizes, made the best of my way back to my Calcutta home. □

# Sanatana Dharma—Two aspects: Worship and Social Conduct

JANKINATH KAUL 'KAMAL'

*The author, a member of the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Srinagar, briefly examines the two basic aspects of the Vedic religion.*

Religions are sure ways for the realization of the ultimate Truth. That Truth, declare the Vedas from the most ancient times, is one without a second (*ekamevādvitīyam*), and is explained by the wise in different ways<sup>1</sup> to suit the capabilities and thoughts of seekers of different temperaments who are in different circumstances.

It is interesting to note that though India has a very large number of sects, partly because of its geographical size and partly because of the religious freedom accorded to its populace, there is practically no quarrel among them. Each individual as well as group lives according to its own beliefs and traditions, without interfering in the social order of the society as a whole. Religious conversion or interference in others' ideas is never preached or practised by the Vedic religion of India, rightly called the *Sanātana Dharma*—the Eternal Order for the overall well-being of the human race. Followers of different sects know that all must come together at the end and hence intolerance is a folly. Every individual worships his own *Iṣṭa*, chosen deity, and goes ahead towards his final release. The *Gītā* says, 'All prescribed actions attain complete fulfilment only in true knowledge.'<sup>2</sup> This is the

theory of *Iṣṭa*, which also says that one's *Iṣṭa* may be with or without form. In any case one should strive to realize one's *Iṣṭa*, to directly perceive it, which is an aspect of Reality.

There is one and only one reality that has to be realized. That reality is Supreme Beatitude, that Truth is eternal happiness, that verily is called God. But since the levels of spiritual comprehension in individuals or in groups vary, there is need of cultivating tolerance towards each other. Different natures require different methods. The method of coming to God for one may not be the same as for another. The idea that there must be one way for everybody is meaningless, injurious, and should be avoided. We should understand that collective progress is not possible unless each individual from his own level of consciousness is heading towards attainment of purified intelligence. Further, universal progress is possible through variety, which is the very soul of life. Without variety there is no spirit of competition, and there can be no creativity. We exist by keeping up of this variety. 'Diversity must work for unity' is the law of nature. For example, all trees and plants grow pointing towards the sky. Similarly, everyone is working to realize the same goal, namely, peace and joy. With deeper thought we come to understand that every effort moves us towards the same centre of unity. Had everyone been of the same religious temperament or taken to the

1. *Ekam sad viprā bahudā vadanti—Ṛg-Veda, 1.164.46.*

2. *Sarvaṁ karmākhilam pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate —Bhagavad-gītā, 4.33.*

same path, all would appear dull and lifeless. We exist because of this variation in thought, and hence we must not quarrel if we want to progress. The message of *Sanātana Dharma* is universal brotherhood, peace and progress.

To the address of welcome from the Hindus in Jaffna, Swami Vivekananda's eloquent reply was:

Your way is very good for you, but not for me. My way is good for me, but not for you. My way is called in Sanskrit, my *Iṣṭa*. Mind you, we have no quarrel with any religion in the world. We have each our *Iṣṭa*. But when we see men coming and saying, 'This is the only way', and trying to force it on us in India, we have a word to say; we laugh at them. For such people who want to destroy their brothers because they seem to follow a different path towards God—for them to talk of love is absurd. Their love does not count for much. How can they preach of love who cannot bear another man to follow a different path from their own? If that is love, what is hatred? We have no quarrel with any religion in the world, whether it teaches man to worship Christ, Buddha, or Mohammed, or any other prophet.

'Welcome my brother,' the Hindu says, 'I am going to help you; but you must allow me to follow my way too. That is my *Iṣṭa*. Your way is very good, no doubt; but it may be dangerous for me. My own experience tells me what food is good for me, and no army of doctors can tell me that. So I know from my own experience what path is the best for me.'

He further says:

That is the goal, the *Iṣṭa*, and, therefore, we say that if a temple or a symbol, or an

image helps you to realize the divinity within, you are welcome to it. Have two hundred images if you like, If certain forms and formularies help you to realize the Divine, God speed you; have by all means whatever forms, and whatever temples and whatever ceremonies you want to bring you nearer to God. But do not quarrel about them; the moment you quarrel you are not going Godward, you are going backward towards the brutes.<sup>3</sup>

About twelve centuries back Śaṅkarācārya revitalized this ancient theory of *Iṣṭa* for the easy grasp and practice of the people of India. Every religion must be based on love and not hatred for others. Sincere efforts alone can bring about love, peace and happiness to all and they alone can change hell into heaven. And in this regard the tenets of *Sanātana Dharma* are valuable for humanity.

There are two aspects of this Eternal Religion. One is the individual aspect of Dharma and the other is the social aspect or the moral aspect.

(i) The individual aspect involves a few essential ideas: Man approaches God through what is divine in himself. Swami Vivekananda described religion as the 'manifestation of the divinity that is already in man.' Therefore it is the joy of the soul that becomes the medium of approach to the Divine. Every person according to his or her own capability chooses a deity for worship. Divine assistance and grace are sought to help him out of his sorrows and imperfection. Sincere devotion in one's heart is enough for worship. Intricate rituals are not needed. God may be worshipped as the Divine Architect as is enjoined by the Vedas:

3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 3, pp. 131-2.

He who has eyes on all sides  
and mouth on all sides,  
arms on all sides  
and feet on all sides;  
He, the one God, producing  
heaven and earth,  
wields them together  
with His arms as wings.<sup>4</sup>

God is worshipped as light also. The *Sāma-Veda* says, 'Light is God, God is light.'<sup>5</sup> He is worshipped in all forms. 'For every form He has been the model.'<sup>6</sup> God is also worshipped as Mother, as Father, as Guru and so on. In all cases God is the source of Goodness. There is a Vedic prayer: *Savitā, God! Send far away all evil; send us what is good.*<sup>7</sup>

There is no mention of a particular religion in the Vedas, the primary scripture of exalted conduct and true knowledge.

(ii) The moral aspect: In order to follow the right path one has to subject oneself to a set of fundamental moral and spiritual laws. It is expressed thus: From perfect austerity were born Eternal Law and Truth (in the beginning of creation).<sup>8</sup>

Therefore 'consecration (*dīkṣā*) and austerity (*tapas*) are the foundations of personal character.'<sup>9</sup> This social conduct develops by

strictly following the fundamental principles of moral life which protect humanity:

Truth, great Law that is stern,  
consecration, austerity,  
prayer and sacrifice (ritual),  
these uphold the Earth.

May that Earth,  
the mistress of our past and future,  
make a wide world for us.<sup>10</sup>

Religion is, therefore, realization of Truth. Social conduct and worship are necessary for this realization that God is Truth. This is *Sanātana Dharma*, the acclaimed universal symbol of which is AUM (ॐ). The Vedas also instruct that 'God has Truth as the law of His being',<sup>11</sup> and Guru Nanak sums this up by saying that 'There is one *Aum* (Divine being) whose name is Truth.'<sup>12</sup> Lalla Yogeshwari of Kashmir, of the fourteenth century, echoed the above message of the *Sanātana Dharma*:

He in whose navel constantly abides  
none other than the One *Oṃkāra*,  
Who builds a bridge between his own  
and Cosmic Consciousness;  
By making mind one with this  
mighty spell—  
What need has he for a thousand  
spells?<sup>13</sup>

4. *Viśvataścakṣuruta viśvatomukho viśvato-  
bāhuruta viśvataspat;*  
*Sam bāhubhyām dhamati sampatatrair-dyāvā-  
bhūmī janayan deva ekaḥ. Śvetāśvatara-  
Upaniṣad, 3.3.*

5. *Agnir-jyotir-jyotir-agniḥ—Sāma-Veda, 18-31.*

6. *Rūpaṃ rūpaṃ pratirūpo babhūva—Rg-Veda, 6-  
47-18.*

7. *Rg-Veda, 5-82-5.*

8. *Rtam ca satyaṃ cābhiddhāt tapaso'dhyajāyata.—  
Rg-Veda, 10-190-1.*

9. *Vratena dīkṣāmāpnoti.—Yajur-Veda, 19-30.*

10. *Satyaṃ bṛhad ṛtam ugram  
dīkṣā tapo brahma yajñah prthivīm dhārayanti;  
sā no bhūtasya bhavyasya patnyurum lokam  
prthivīm nah kṛnotu.—Atharva-Veda, 12.1.1.*

11. *Savitā satyadharmā.—Atharva-Veda, 1.24.1.*

12. *Eka oṃkāra sat nām.—Japji.*

13. अक्य ओंकार युस नाभि धरे  
कुम्बय ब्रह्माण्डस सुभ गरे ।  
अक्य मन्त्र युस च्यतस करे  
तस सास मन्त्र क्याह करे ॥

—Lalla-Vakh (Sayings of Lalla Ded).

# Practical Vedanta

FOR THE GOOD OF THE MANY

**S**ri Ramanuja, the first Acharya of the Vaishnava sect, had just received his sacred mantra from his Guru. The initiation ceremony over, the Guru blessed his disciple, and then with an affectionate voice cautioned him, saying: 'Remember, my son, you must carefully keep this holy mantra a secret. Never utter this to anybody, or you will incur great sin.'

However, the great compassionate heart of Sri Ramanuja did not consent to obey his Guru's command! Someone within him seemed to rebel against this condition of secrecy. So, when with this agitated heart he sat down to repeat the holy mantra as per the instructions of his Guru, he could hardly concentrate his mind. He became filled with a deep compassion for the common people who were deprived of the opportunity of receiving the mantra. He thought: 'Keep the mantra a secret? Why? This purifying mantra verily has a life-giving power. It can bring salvation to everyone, irrespective of his or her caste and sect, whosoever has the good fortune of hearing it. Why then should it be kept secret?'

His compassion for the suffering people made him restless. He forgot all about the caution of his Guru. Leaving his seat immediately he came outside, and finding some persons near by he shouted out to them the mantra, so pure and precious to him, as though to bestow liberation to them then and there!

The Guru noticed this act of Ramanuja, and became very much annoyed with him. Calling him near the Guru gravely said: 'Ramanuja, how you dare defile the sacred mantra by uttering it to these unworthy persons! By letting these impure souls hear the mantra in spite of my caution against it, you have committed a great sin. I am afraid, you will have to suffer hell after death for this grave sin of yours.'

Ramanuja fell at the feet of his Guru. With utmost humility he asked: 'Master, should these innocent persons also suffer hell for the sin of mine?'

'No, my son, that can't be', replied the Guru. 'They will rather acquire a great merit on account of the mantra. Though they are not worthy of the mantra, yet the wonderful power of it will purify them and finally take them across the sea of the terrible bondage of the world.'

The words of the Guru brought a great relief in Ramanuja. His face became aglow with the gleam of love and compassion for the suffering people. He prayed: 'If my suffering can bring liberation to others, then, O Lord, please make me suffer a hundred hells for the sake of these unfortunate ones.'

## Reviews & Notices

**KRISHNA: THE PLAYFUL DIVINE.**  
By Pavan K. Varma; Publ. Penguin  
Books India, 210 Chiranjiv Tower, 43  
Nehru Place, New Delhi, 110 019; pp. 220;  
Rs. 295/-.

Krishna has a perennial fascination for both the scholar and the devotee. If the scholar finds in him a fabulous plenitude of enthralling, often contradictory, facets, the devotees find his intensely human qualities as eminently empathetic. In either case, Krishna provokes the intellectual, and evokes the loyalty of the devout.

No surprise, then, that this playfully divine personage continues to sustain one of the pervasive qualities of any myth: its virtual inexhaustibility to contemplation. In our own times we have studies by, notably, Bhagavan Das, A.S.P. Aiyar, K.S. Ramaswami Sastri, Krishna Chaitanya, D. Anand and others, not to mention the definitive, far-ranging work by western scholars such as Hawley, Edward C. Dimock and many more.

Pavan K. Varma's study, in the context of extant studies, by any reckoning is an outstanding contribution to our understanding of 'perhaps', as he himself says, 'the most popular Hindu divinity', 'a *purnaavatar*' (the complete incarnation). Krishna, in effect, 'encapsulates in himself the entire canvas of emotions and attributes that constitute the ideal human personality'. Transposing the divine and the human, in a unique way, Krishna is 'in Vrindavan, ... a prince in the guise of a cowherd, in Mathura and Dwarka he is a cowherd in the guise of a prince'.

With the foregrounding of Krishna's integrated personality, Varma studies, in an in-depth way, the various facets: child, lover,

warrior, saviour and god. All the chapters are linked together by what one could call the holistic controlling vision of the book: the interfaces of myth, legend, psychology and religious phenomena bound together as so many dimensions of an essentially indivisible psyche. This explains the effortless way in which Varma provides transition points linking legends with psychological motifs and psychological types with interior growth. (A case in point is his penetrating analysis of the Attributeless Brahman of the Upanishads vis-a-vis the 'absence of Krishna' from Vrindavan and its implications for the gopis. pp.122-5.) In fact, the overall typology exemplified by Krishna, as Varma rightly holds, is the *purusharthas*, values, which 'pursued in 'enlightened proportion and none pursued in exclusion' results in transcendence.

Varma studies Krishna the child as exemplifying 'the deification of childhood and in tandem and as a logical consequence the exaltation of motherhood'. But the quintessential child upholds a double image, 'a vibrant dualism'. If Krishna is 'the uninhibited child, willfully pursuing his aim, oblivious to the categories of right and wrong in adult life', 'the vulnerability and approachability of infancy' becomes 'the flip side of the infinite power and grandeur of god'. Indeed, the yogi is co-extensive with the butter-thief.

The most persuasive and original chapter is, however, on Krishna, the lover. In interpreting *rasalila* and the role of Radha in the macrocosm of Krishna—certainly the most controversial aspects of *Krishna-lila*—Pavan Varma brings to the job remarkable familiarity with primary textual interpretation as well as keenness of perception. Using a wealth of authentic, definitive texts—both the Puranic ones such as the *Bhagavata* and the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, and the literary ones such as notably the *Gita Govinda*, the



poetry of Surdas, the Alvars and others—Varma suggests that the erotic and the ascetic, the sacred and 'the profane' are kept in creatively transpositional tension. Thus Krishna's *Rasa-krida* are not either the sexual exploits of a puranic version of a playboy or the symptoms of a decadent culture (as our renaissance men such as even Bankim Chandra thought) but affirmation of 'the sexual as a window to the divine'. Thus in Radha/Krishna nexus we have an emblematic enactment of a process analogous to Yoga: 'a...state of both focused concentration and vacuity, in which, momentarily, the ego had been nullified. *Raga* (extreme desire) had coalesced with *anuraga* (ever renewed desire) to produce *mahabhava*, a feeling of unparalleled ecstasy'.

In interpreting the implications of this kind of equation, Varma discreetly but firmly grapples with the purely theological interpretation of the evidently physical bases of *rasalila*. For instance, the Vaishnavite categories of *jiva-shakti*, *maya-shakti* and *svarupa-shakti*, holding Radha as the manifestation of Krishna's *svarupa-shakti*, his 'essential self', but the most joyous aspect of it, seems to Varma an interpretative compromise essentially 'messy', unable to reconcile the '*svakiya*' and the '*parakiya*'. The logic here seems to me irrefutable, but interpretations are not always grounded in logic. For instance, at a few places Varma invokes Freud (and our own indigenous exemplars such as Sudhir Kakar) with what seems to me an almost pathological anxiety for sounding right.

Such citations seem to me to detract from what is certainly an extremely balanced approach, as when Varma, retrieving the situation, pinpoints the Hindu view of life as 'always informed by two parallel themes, one [emphasizing] the legitimacy of desire and the other stressing the joys of transcending such desire'.

This awareness that in the case of Krishna one should exempt oneself from 'a mutilating unidimensionality of vision' is

evident in Varma's explication of Krishna, the warrior, the saviour and god. The classic text *Gita* and Krishna's role in *Mahabharata* he finds reflecting the technique that 'the value-imbuing process is controllable'; and the *Gita*, 'breathtaking in its simplicity', 'based on profound empirical observation that action-in-life should be performed free of attachment sans desire, and most importantly, *without tainting it with the value of expectation*'.

Obviously these chapters do not have the range and thrust of the one on the lover. In spite of this, the overall achievement of the book is, indeed, of an enduring nature. In its thematic range and in its crisp, memorable language—it is a delight to read Varma's prose which with its limpid resonance could be the envy of any teacher of English—*Krishna, the Playful Divine* is indispensable reading for all those interested in Indian literature and myth, philosophy and religion. We do hope Penguin, well known for its commitment to promotion of Indian writing of admitted excellence, would publish more such.

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**A SOLDIER WITH A FLAMING  
SWORD: Ed. Belarani De, Sanjukta  
Mitra, Santwana Dasgupta; Publ.  
Nivedita Vrati Sangha, W/2 ACR, 16/4,  
Phase IV-B, Golf Green, Calcutta,  
700 045; 1993; Rs. 85/-.**

This volume is published by Nivedita Vrati Sangha, Calcutta, as commemoration of Sister Nivedita's 125th birth anniversary and the installation of the Sister's statue in Calcutta.

It is a collection of writings on this 'Soldier with a Flaming Sword', as the Sister was appropriately described by a Western admirer. The contributors are well-known

researchers and scholars in the field and include eminent monks and nuns of the Ramakrishna Order. The articles throw light on the valued contribution of this 'daughter of India' in politics, civics, women's education, literature, journalism, art, social reform, religion and culture. Nivedita actually proved in her life what Swami Vivekananda once predicted—'India shall ring with the voice of Nivedita.' All the articles are thought-provoking, well researched and rich in content. In the beginning of the book, the Sister's prayer to the Mother and her article on Sri Ramakrishna are reproduced.

The glowing homage paid to the hallowed memory of our Saintly Sister through this book is one of the best in recent times, and following her ideas and ideals will be the best way in which we can serve the cause of India's national integration in the era of crisis of hope and confidence.

The book has an attractive and meaningful front cover. The printing is excellent. We are thankful to the editors whose prodigious labour has produced this edition.

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**FRAGRANT MEMORIES: By Indira Devi; Publ. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 400 007; 1993; Rs. 75/- (card-bound); Rs. 95/- (cloth-bound).**

In the book under review, Indira Devi recalls her Fragrant Memories of her extraordinary Guru, Dilip Kumar Roy (known as Dadaji to his countless followers), and we get a glimpse of this many-splendoured personality—that of a profound seer, philosopher, free-thinker, poet and an excellent musician. His transparent sincerity, humility and modesty, his unswerving regard for Truth, nobility, keen sense of humour, his ability to raise the consciousness of people who gathered around him, his emphasis on per-

forming every work as perfectly as possible, his marvellous memory, loving disposition and completely dedicated and harmonious life leaves a deep impression on the reader's mind. Although an outstanding disciple of Sri Aurobindo, from his childhood he was gripped by Sri Ramakrishna's words—'The object of life is God-realization', and was blessed by almost all of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples, including Sri 'M' and the Holy Mother. His main teaching, which emerges from this book, is—'Live your life in such a way that people catch the contagion of Truth, Harmony and Love. Live for others, feel for them.' Verily he lived such a life, and was LOVE personified.

His love motivated Indira Devi to rise above herself. She recollects various incidents and her conversations with Dadaji from 1947, when she first met him, to 1980. When Dadaji passed away she couldn't help revealing the evolution of her own character and her transformation from the self-willed proud woman into a mellow, spiritual, humble and friendly person she became through the ennobling company of Dadaji. This book also gives insight into her spiritual ecstasies, sincerity, frankness, and profound love and loyalty for her Guru.

Meandering through the pages, the beautiful relationship between these two great souls also gets revealed. A relationship not only of Guru and disciple, a father and a daughter, but the relationship between two fellow pilgrims of eternity with one goal and one path.

The printing, format, front as well as back covers are elegant and attractive. The reader's heart becomes fragrant with these Fragrant Memories, because they speak volumes about spirituality.

*Dr. Chetana Mandavia*

God's devotees have nothing to fear. They are His own. He always stands by them.

—Sri Ramakrishna, *Gospel*, pp. 504-05