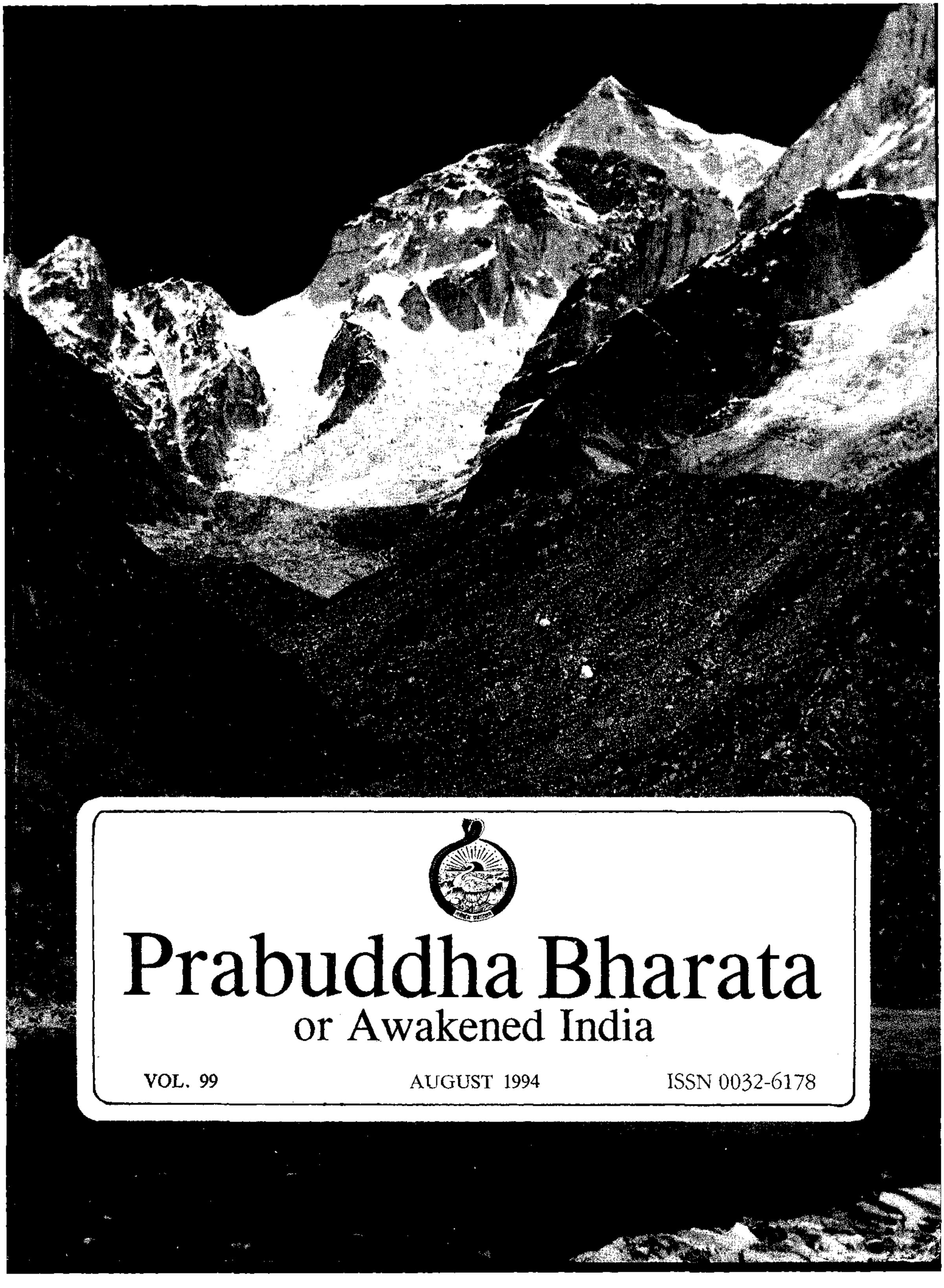

Prabuddha Bharata
or Awakened India

VOL. 99 AUGUST 1994 ISSN 0032-6178

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

A Monthly Journal of the
Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

AUGUST 1994

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

Publication Office
5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700 014
Phone (91)(33)244 0898
(91)(33)245 2383
Fax (91)(33)245 0050

Rates of Subscription
(inclusive of postage)

	Annual	Life *(30 Years)*
India	Rs. 30	Rs. 500
Sri Lanka & Bangladesh	Rs. 120	Rs. 2000
U.S.A. & Canada		
Surface Mail	$ 20	$ 300
Air Mail	$ 35	$ 600
Other Countries		
Surface Mail	£ 15	£ 225
Air Mail	£ 25	£ 375

Cover: A view of the Himalayas

CONTENTS

Divine Wisdom 321

Are Indians Religious?—II
Editorial 322

Madhusudana Saraswati on the Bhagavad Gita
Swami Gambhirananda 328

The Object of Vedanta 332

Existentialism and Swami Vivekananda
Swami Tathagatananda 334

Spiritual Experiences in Dream
Richard Chambers Prescott 342

What Swami Vivekananda Means to Me
Wade Dazey 347

Action Without Desire
Pavan K. Varma 353

Practical Vedanta 360

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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

Vol. 99 AUGUST 1994 No. 8

DIVINE WISDOM

Without God, Human Life is Vain

आयुर्हरति वै पुंसामुद्यन्नस्तं च यन्नसौ।
तस्यर्ते यत्क्षणो नीत उत्तमश्लोकवार्तया।।

A man has really lived only during those moments of his life that have been spent in the thought of the Lord. Vain are the lives of the rest, their life-span being merely food for Time to swallow through its jaws of sunrise and sunset.

तरवः किं न जीवन्ति भस्त्राः किं न श्वसन्त्युत।
न खादन्ति न मेहन्ति किं ग्रामपशवोऽपरे।।

Do not trees live their life-span? Do not bellows take in and send out air? Do not animals, domestic and wild, eat and mate? Alas! What is human life worth, if it fulfils only these very same functions!

श्वविड्वराहोष्ट्रखरैः संस्तुतः पुरुषः पशुः।
न कर्णपथोपेतो जातु नाम गदाग्रजः।।

He into whose ears the Lord's name has not entered, he is a man in form, but in fact only an animal — a dog, a pig, a camel, an ass, or the like.

बिले बतोरुक्रमविक्रमान् ये न शृण्वतः कर्णपुटे नरस्य।
जिह्वासती दार्दुरिकेव सूत न चोपगायत्युरुगायगाथाः।।

That ear into which words dealing with the Lord's excellences have not entered, is a mere cavity and nothing more. He whose perverse tongue has never uttered the Lord's names and praises, is verily as despicable as the tongue of a frog.

From the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*

Are Indians Religious ? — II

Last month's 'Are Indians Religious?' has raised some questions.

1. Why should we be *wholly* religious all the twenty-four hours? We are satisfied with the little religion we regularly practice. This way we are able to make money through any means, live well and enjoy. Too much religion with its repressive list of *Dos* and *Don'ts* is unwelcome in today's society. As for solving society's problems, corruption, exploitation, competition and so on, why bring in religion? These are things which individuals must learn to cope with as best they can.

2. Why should we allow religion to influence our social life also? The scientific and secular outlook should continue to shape our modern life of pragmatism, freedom and creativity. Great scientific advances and benefits from technology came only after we shook off excessive religious control. Too much of religion, with its orthodoxy, conformity, selfishness and individualism, and otherworldliness is not good.

3. Why religion in public life? It leads to hatred and conflicts.

4. 'Subjective reform', as you mention, reforming myself first before attending to the needed reforms in society, is impracticable because it tends to isolate me. There is a strong anti-religious attitude prevailing nowadays which is very discouraging. Is there any other way?

We are thankful to those who put forward these doubts. (We have left out minor ones.) However, we admit we are surprised by those questions, because our earlier views were based on the belief that Indians, except for a microscopic minority, are deeply religious! Just the same, we shall try to reply, part by part.

A summary

A summary of what we said in July is in place: The deeply religious Indians' social virtues are minimal today when the country desperately needs them. Beyond the short duration of ritual worship, prayer, etc., his integrity, concern for others and self-respect are milk-and-water. Hence the worsening conditions in the country. Those wanting to be righteous in social life also are frustrated by the vitiated environment. Still, instead of feeling that 'total religion' is unworkable unless social conditions change, Indians should initiate a subjective change first! They should resolve to lead a purer life, and practise service to others, truthfulness, and a discriminating control of their desires.

This requires great courage and a willingness to make personal sacrifices. So Swamiji stressed combining in our character *shakti* (fearlessness, strength) with *bhakti* (piety, worship, prayer, charity). His idea of fearlessness, however, excludes violence and aggression: it means a determination to stand by one's own convictions, one's conscience, one's trust in God. It further means that, when necessary and all other options have failed, one should be ready to resist every shade of evil.

Sri Ramakrishna too has pointed out: God's devotees should be able to say, 'What! I have taken shelter in God. How can I sin?' How many of us can say 'Never shall I compromise my conscience, even if I should lose

my possessions and life'? Fewer still who can assert, 'Being a child of God, I will neither be unjust and dishonest myself nor passively tolerate others' being so in my presence, whatever the consequence.'

Even among our educated people, most have unfortunately become demoralized and cynical. They have lost the grit to stand by truth, justice and duty. Sri Ramakrishna taught that one living in society 'must hiss' to frighten away wicked people and protect oneself, but not 'bite', not injure them. Swamiji has made this teaching explicit and practical: Absolute non-violence for the monk, self-defence for the householders, the pillars of society. So rituals, prayers, a little charity here and a little there are of avail only if our conscience firmly answers 'yes' whenever it is put this critical question: 'Are these practices slowly increasing my active concern for others, sincerity and, above all FEARLESSNESS?' For, only if we are fearless we can live up to the social virtues prescribed by religion.

When Swamiji exhorts us to hold on to religion, he is not advocating any of the traditional religions—not even popular Hinduism. Nor is he offering us a new religion. And as regards...our reluctance to accept religions as they are generally presented, he is entirely with us.

We may begin with charity, giving up small possessions, personal comforts, etc. But these should lead up to our being ready to make the greatest sacrifice, viz ourselves, for upholding our convictions. In this way alone can our present ineffectual routine religion become dynamic—affecting both our individual *and* national life.

We had quoted at length from Swamiji to conclude that Indians must not give up religion which is their national characteristic. On the basis of the country's pre-British, pre-Christian and pre-Islamic religion, spirituality, we should reorganize as in the past all our activities—personal, social and national. This ideal of spirituality will put in their right places freedom of thought and action, scientific outlook, enterprise, creativity, wealth-production and sharing, prudent enjoyment of life, and noble governance. Because, once a correct ideal is chosen, all activities fall into place. When such regeneration comes to India, the whole world will be the beneficiary. Western societies also, caught in the storm of non-spiritual (non-religious) motivations and facing grave problems, are in need of this spiritual view of life.

Reclassification

Considering the response to our views, however, we are obliged to conclude that it is simplistic to classify Indians into two types only: the deeply religious majority—ineffective and disorganized; and the irreligious microscopic minority—corrupt, well organized and powerful.

Now we have to take cognisance of those who have deliberately pared down religion and, leaving the good fruits of the Western societies, are hurriedly picking up the bad ones. Then there appear to be a section of the intelligentsia who are convinced that religious beliefs and scientific outlook are unfriendly, that we must have two personalities—a secondary-religious, and a dominant-secular—as different as chalk from cheese. The third query may be said to represent those which are greatly pained by the recurring violence in the name of religion, and are therefore lukewarm towards religion. The fourth, we are still sure, form the majority: who are economically vulnerable, socially heterogeneous and disunited; who are easily cowed down and exploited by the corrupt minority. These

return home everyday with a heavy heart, tired and confused by the violence, corruption, coercion and compromises they suffer in the field of work. And yet they hold on to God somehow, praying for the conditions outside to improve.

The remedy is right

Even so, our views hold good, because we had discussed religion as taught by Swamiji. Whereas the four objections have originated from justifiable misgivings about the *existing* religions that, a) they condemn enjoyment, b) they contradict the sciences and 'new thought' we have been educated in, c) they are powerless to solve the inter-religious conflicts and our other day-to-day problems of fear, corruption, injustice, etc., and d) they are unable to show us how to meet the demands of the rapidly changing society. When Swamiji exhorts us to hold on to religion, he is not advocating any of the traditional religions—not even popular Hinduism. Nor is he offering us a new religion. And as regards the above mentioned fears and our reluctance to accept religions as they are generally presented, he is entirely with us. What he means by religion is Vedanta, against which none of the above objections and apprehensions can stand.

Vedanta's advantage: what it is and is not

A lengthy discussion on Vedanta is not possible here. But we shall state a few of its aspects that are relevant to the questions raised. Vedanta is not 'a religion' as commonly understood. Though a Sanskrit word, Vedanta is not 'Hinduism' any more than 'science', though an English word, is Christianity, Europeanism, or Americanism. It is not 'a religion' because religion is usually understood as a rather narrowly limited system of beliefs, rituals and observations, well-ordered and complete in itself. Vedanta is not just another such religion: it is *the* religion which includes all the religions minus their exclusiveness and speculations in the domain that really belongs to the sciences. And, though it is not 'a science' it is *the* science which includes all the sciences minus their speculations in the domain that really belongs to the religions. Thus in Vedanta religions and sciences become harmonized.

Vedanta is individual-specific

Though Vedanta's scope is so vast and its sweep all-inclusive, what is of immediate interest is this: It is individual-specific. That is, while it asserts our innate divinity, purity and spiritual freedom, it does not lose sight of our distinctness, limitations, inclinations, needs and aspirations in the here-and-now world. After all, the masses are unaffected by the subtleties of religion, science and Vedanta. They are anxious about answers that help solve urgent personal problems. How can I prosper? how can I become happy and fulfilled? what should be my goal in life?—and in the present context—how can I overcome fear? how to defeat injustice, exploitation and intimidation? is trying to become rich and enjoying the world sinful? how to overcome greed, hatred, etc. and be of help to others? and so on.

Vedanta is individual-specific...it does not lose sight of our distinctness, limitations, inclinations, needs and aspirations in the here-and-now world. In contrast, none of the existing religions are individual-specific. The uniqueness of each one of us is of peripheral concern to them. Science too is not individual-specific.

In contrast, none of the existing religions are individual-specific. To them God, heaven, hell, emancipation from this world, etc. are of primary concern. The uniqueness of each one of us—our level of material,

mental and spiritual development, characteristic likes and dislikes, social circumstances, etc.—is of peripheral concern. So they prescribe a uniform code of morality and religious practice for all: 'Take this, and you go to heaven or attain liberation. Or leave this, and you go to hell or suffer repeated rebirth and death.' Science no doubt attaches great importance to our individuality, freedom, prosperity, etc. (though without having understood any of these with finality as yet). But it too is not individual-specific, because it has glossed over the spontaneous longing of millions of people for some form of religion, for some way to satisfy their spiritual hunger. So it also has treated all people uniformly as nothing more than material configurations.

Our new self-identity

For centuries religion taught us we are sinful sheep or bound souls entangled in suffering, who require vigilant shepherding. It directed us one way—giving us no choice—and we obeyed like religious robots. Then science cornered religion and taught us we are highly developed animals with individualities, minds and consciousness produced by material interactions. It showed us another way of conducting our lives, and since then we have been moving that way like science robots. Today the circuit in these robots has become messy, driving us to self-destruction, mutual destruction and environmental destruction. Perhaps we are on the threshold of receiving a new self-identity as spiritual beings and, correspondingly, a new direction—offered by Vedanta as taught by Swamiji.

Present concern

Until we assimilate the Vedantic teachings this disregard for religion and the conflict between religious beliefs and scientific (secular) training will remain in varying degrees. Nevertheless, civilized society requires character. Why should one disinterested in religion, or even one who is biased towards a scientific (secular) outlook on life, forsake social virtues or fear practising them? When harassed by a minority of unscrupulous people the responsibility of the majority, especially of the religious-minded, is all the greater. They should uphold in every walk of life the social virtues commonly taught by all the religions (virtues which are also the gist of the secular laws, and which Vedanta derives from the fact of the spiritual nature of all beings), viz sincerity, self-respect, respect and love for others, incorruptibility, etc. This is why Swamiji has brought out the practical implication of Vedanta in that one word—FEARLESSNESS.

The first question

However, there may be some, as the first question suggests, who say, 'We are not impressed by all this theory. We want more of material enjoyment, not more of religion and morality.' What is the answer? In the light of Swamiji's Vedanta we say: Friends, very well. But please do not claim to be religious, even partially, merely because of your five-minutes-prayer, visiting temples, charity, etc. Religious disciplines wholeheartedly followed must show as fairplay, feeling for others, sense-control, discrimination, and so on; there must occur a transformation in one's attitudes and motives.

The mad rush for sense-gratification we see in society is a reaction against religious coercion.

Take the case of a sown seed. Where lies the proof that it has been properly watered and stirred to life? It is here: In a few days the earth covering the seed cracks and the sprout emerges. So in the case of the soul. Sincerely performed religious practices stir the soul. Fearlessness, honesty, love for others, etc. are the various ways in which the soul shows it has awakened.

Otherwise it means your religious practices are just external formalities, unrelated to your life. You are sure to slide down into greater unrighteousness in spite of your routine religion. For in religion there is either a higher evolution of the soul or a degeneration—there is no such thing as stagnation, or a fixed state. Mechanical practices, which do not awaken the soul, are no better than the gentleman's attire worn by unworthy persons.

You may disagree. You may insist you will accept only so much of religion as will leave you free to have a good time in the world. We ask you: 'Why don't you give up your token religion? It is better to be bold and frank as are so many others who are candid about their total rejection of God.' You have no answer!

Vedanta on enjoying the world

But Vedanta has something to say: First, your peculiar condition, in which you are neither willing to control your hankering for worldly joys nor able to give up religion altogether, is nothing unnatural. The mad rush for sense-gratification we see in society is a reaction against religious coercion.

Over past centuries almost all the preachers have been moralizing to us that we—all without exception—should live in a lifelong state of sorrowfulness and repentance, having sinned by wanting to enjoy this world. We were drilled to believe that we are all bound souls caught up in this miserable illusory world, in transmigratory existence. There was nothing else to our existence on this planet. Any attempt to make this life comfortable and enjoyable—by fulfilling even innocent desires for colourful clothes, good food, well-furnished houses, etc.—was looked down upon as irreligious. No, no enjoyment here, but only in the hereafter, was the suffocating theme of religion.

The reaction to this came when science and secular education pushed out religion. Soon we felt free and began to ridicule our former 'tormentor', and took delight in breaking every one of its rules, the bad ones *and* the good ones. No wonder that as far as possible we keep religion out of our day-to-day activities.

Second, memories of the rich spiritual past of the country are preventing you from forsaking whatever religious form you are adhering to. You are incapable of denying the authenticity of the lives of the innumerable saints and prophets this country has produced.

Third, your flickering religious urge together with the intense desire to enjoy, and even the so-called evil in society, can be understood from the Vedantic perspective. This can be illustrated with a touching incident in Swamiji's life when he was in Cairo on his way to India from England. One day he and his companions lost their way in the streets of Cairo. Suddenly they found themselves in a squalid part of the city where prostitutes lived. When Swamiji heard one of them bawdily calling out to him, he did not scorn them or give them a discourse on right, wrong, sin, rebirth, etc. He gently went to them, tears streaming from his eyes, and said, 'Poor child ! She has forgotten who she is and has put her divinity into her body.'

Do you see the insights of Vedanta? It judges us with reference to only one universal standard, viz *our* divinity, and not with reference to an external standard—scriptural doctrines, God, or secularized social ethics. Whatever the activities of an individual, says Vedanta, they are but the struggles of the soul to express, to perceive, its divinity. Our soul is essentially free, blissful and deathless. So every activity of ours, secular or religious, is the soul's attempt to

establish one or more of its characteristics.

Purpose of the dos and don'ts

Thus your hunger to enjoy this world is really a sign of your struggle to perceive your soul's blissfulness. However, when you seek to grab the good things of life, without considering the harm, sorrow, or loss to others because of your greed, you are injuring yourself. Because, that way you are suppressing your soul's divine character. Besides, you are denying others the right to experience joy in their own way. Similarly when we exploit others for personal gain, accept bribes, steal, etc. For example, what do I gain by adulterating food or short-weighing the foodstuff I sell, as in the case of the 'pious grocer' we cited in the July editorial? Money. For what? To buy things in abundance and enjoy without anxiety—good food, clothes, and so on. Swamiji would say, 'Poor child ! You have forgotten who you are and put your divinity into your food, consumer goods and bank account.'

From Swamiji's viewpoint, the important part of your question is that you are determined not to give up your religious practices, nominal though they are. That is an indication that your soul is active to a degree. It has advanced a step from the level of animal-like enjoyment the utterly irreligious people relish. Now it is for you to help your soul further along its natural course of evolution. Once this idea is grasped, you will be able to see the importance of the dos and don'ts of religion and select only those that are useful for your soul's journey. Swamiji would say that, after all, most of these rules are for helping you rescue your divinity from your body and senses where you have put it.

Prayer

Earnest prayers help us identify the dos and don'ts that are useful and practical at our respective stages of spiritual growth. If we pay particular attention to those rules that urge us to be serviceful towards others and honest, our soul's awakening will be hastened. However, when it comes to our adopting any of these virtues that have a bearing on society, we will face innumerable and frightening problems. So we have to pray particularly for strength—to resist our old tendency towards selfish and reckless pursuit of wealth and enjoyment, and to hold fast to our resolves. This is why Swamiji insisted that fearlessness is the conclusive test of our commitment to spiritual convictions.

We hope you can see that Swamiji's approach to your question is eminently suitable: Since as householders you are the pillars of society, you should strive for prosperity and enjoyment, but through moral means. This will help others also to have their share of wealth and joy, without being mercilessly ground by an exploitative society. Your personal wealth will be of use to society, and your life will be tuned to the natural course of your soul's evolution.

This is the scheme of life our forefathers had perfected, and which we should adopt again: A way of life in which hard work, integrity, wealth-creation and sharing, and righteous enjoyment are guided by only one principle: A human being, far from being a mere consumer or a pawn in the game of the corrupt, is essentially divine, and life is but a means for the soul to establish its freedom, blissful nature and deathlessness.❐

Religion is for those who are afraid of going to hell. Spirituality is for those who know they have been there—perhaps through involvement with religion.

Fr. Patrick Collins,
University of Notre Dame, USA.

Madhusudana Saraswati on the Bhagavad-Gita

SWAMI GAMBHIRANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

KARMA-YOGA

(Arjuna:) 'Even if there be absence of sin for one who fights under the idea that it is his duty, still is it not improper for You to advise me to fight as a duty, because with regard to an enlightened person all actions have been repudiated in, "He who considers this One as the killer," (2.19) etc. and in, "how and whom does that person kill, or whom does he cause to be killed!" (2.21)? Indeed, there can be no such understanding as, "I am a non-agent and a non-enjoyer, and I am pure by nature", and "By engaging in fighting I shall reap its fruit", because of the contradiction (between the two ideas). For there can be no combination of Knowledge with action, just as of light with darkness.'

And this idea of Arjuna will become explicit in the verse, 'if it be Your opinion (that Wisdom is superior to action)', etc. (3.1).

'Therefore, can I not argue that it is not logical to impart instruction about Knowledge and action to a single person like me?'

(The Lord answers:) 'No, for it is justifiable to impart instruction about Knowledge and action in accordance with the states of the enlightened and unenlightened.'

Thus the Lord says:

एषा तेऽभिहिता सांख्ये बुद्धियोंगे त्विमां शृणु।
बुद्धया युक्तो यया पार्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहाम्यसि।।

Eṣā te'bhihitāsāṅkhye
buddhiryoge tvimāṁ śṛṇu;
Buddhyā yukto yayā pārtha
karmabandhaṁ prahāsyasi .(2.39)

O Pārtha, this knowledge about the Self has been imparted to you. However, listen to this (wisdom) which is to be adopted in the Yoga (of Karma), (and) through which wisdom you, involved as you are (in action), will totally get rid of the bondage caused by actions.

Through the twenty-one verses beginning with 'But certainly (it is) not (a fact) that I (did not exist) ...,' etc. (2.12), *abhihitā*, has been imparted; *te*, to you; *eṣā*, this; (*buddhi*, knowledge) *sāṅkhye*, about the Self. *Sankhyā* means *upaniṣat*, that in which the reality of the supreme Self is fully presented, established, as bereft of all limiting adjuncts. *Sāṅkhya* is that which is established by that *(upaniṣat)* alone as the final conclusion after examining its purport;[1] i.e., the all-pervading Entity presented by the *upaniṣat*. 'The knowledge *(buddhi)* regarding that (Entity) alone, which is the source of the cessation of all evils, has been imparted to you by Me.' For one who has this kind of knowledge, action has not been enjoined anywhere; for

1. The import of a text is determined through the application of six tests: Conformity of the beginning and the end; repetition of the same idea; originality (of an idea); result; eulogy; and reasoning. See *Vedāntasāra* of Sadānanda, paras 183 to 190.

it will be said, 'for him there is no duty to perform' (3.17).

'If, again, even after being told so by Me, this Knowledge does not arise in you owing to the impurity of (your) mind, then you ought to practise the Yoga of Karma for the realization of the reality of the Self through the removal of that (impurity).'

Tu, however—the word *tu* is used to show that the earlier knowledge is distinct from the subject-matter of the Yoga (of Karma)—; *śṛṇu*, listen; *imām*, tothis, wisdom, as it will be spoken of by Me extensively; which is to be adopted in that *yoge*, Yoga, the Yoga of Karma, (and) which has been spoken of in the text, 'Treating happiness and sorrow ... with equanimity' (2.38), (and) which consists in the renunciation of hankering for results. And thus since the instruction of Knowledge is for one whose mind has become purified, and action is enjoined for one whose mind is not pure, therefore where is the scope for conflict through the apprehension of a combination of the two?—this is the idea. He (the Lord) eulogizes the wisdom about Yoga by mentioning its result: *yayā buddhyā*, through which wisdom, which is onepointed; you, *yuktaḥ*, involved as you are in action; will get rid of *(hāsyasi)* totally *(pra)*—in such a way that there will be no emergence of obstacles again—(the *karma-bandhaṁ*) the bondage *(bandha)* caused by actions *(karma)*, in the form of impurity of mind which is an obstruction to Knowledge.

The idea is this: The obstruction to Knowledge, which is given rise to by action, can be removed by action alone, called righteousness; for the Śruti says, 'One removes sin through righteousness'.[2] Deliberation *(vicāra)*, however, in the form of *śravaṇa* etc., removes through perceptible means the *asambhāvanā* from one who is free from the obstacles consisting of actions. Hence it cannot be taught for the purpose of dispelling the obstruction created by actions.[3] 'Hence, since your mind is very impure, therefore you should undertake the external discipline, (viz) action itself. Till now you have not even earned the fitness for *śravaṇa* etc., let alone the fitness for Knowledge!' So does He say, 'For you let there be the idea, "this is my duty", only with regard to action' (2.47). Hereby is dismissed the question, 'Why is it that, leaving aside the internal discipline for the Knowledge of the Self, (viz) *śravaṇa* etc., the external discipline of action is taught to Arjuna by the Lord?'

In the explanation of the older people, viz 'You will get rid of the *Karma-bandham*, the transmigratory state, through the acquisition of Knowledge by God's grace', there is the defect of unnecessary addition. And it also becomes necessary to explain the redundance of the word *karma* (in *karma-bandha*).[4]

(Arjuna:) 'In accordance with the section

2. *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, 13.6.

3. *Asambhāvanā* and *viparītabhāvanā* are removed through *śravaṇa, manana* and *nididhyāsana. Śravaṇa* removes the *asambhāvanā*, the idea of impossibility, with regard to the upaniṣads—that it is impossible for the Upaniṣads to be a proof of the existence of Brahman. *Manana* removes the *asambhāvanā* with regard to the object presented by the Upaniṣad—that it is impossible that Brahman, or the Self, exists. And *nididhyāsana* removes all *viparīta-bhāvanā* (contrary ideas). These are the tangible results of *śravaṇa, manana* and *nididhyāsana*, the three together called *vicāra*. But *vicāra* cannot remove the impurity of the mind, for which selfless righteous actions are absolutely necessary.

4. *Bandha* itself means transmigratory bondage. So the word *karma* becomes redundant.

dealing with "Separateness of Injunctions"[5] (i.e., separateness of what is optional from what is a necessary constituent of anything), is it not that by the Upaniṣadic text, "The Brāhmins hanker to know It through the study of the Vedas, sacrifices, charity, and austerity consisting in a dispassionate enjoyment of sense-objects"[6], all actions have been enjoined for the attainment of *hankering* for knowledge and enlightenment?[7] And there (with regard to hankering), again, since purification of the mind is the means, therefore performance of actions is enjoined for me. In that case, since exhaustion of the results of work is possible as declared by the Śruti, "As to that, as in this world the result acquired through action gets exhausted, in the very same way the result acquired through virtue gets exhausted in the other world"[8], and since sacrifices etc. performed with enlightenment and hankering for knowledge in view fall under the category of *kāmya-karma* (motivated actions), (and) since (even) when all the accessories needed (for a sacrifice) have been collected together it may become defective on account of the least incompleteness (due to inadvertence etc.), (and) since even at the end of the (whole) span of a man's life it is not possible for one person to perform all the works enjoined by the sentence, "(The Brāhmins hanker to know It) through (the study of the Vedas,) sacrifices, etc.,"[9] therefore how can there be an expectation of the result as stated in, "you ... will totally get rid of the bondage caused by actions"(2.39)?'

Hence the Lord says:

नेहाभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते।
स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात्।।

Nehābhikramanāśo'sti
pratyavāyo na vidyate;
Svalpamapyasya dharmasya
trāyate mahato bhayāt. (2.40)

Here there is no destruction of the result of action; nor is there (any) loss of merit. Even

---

5. *Jaimini-Mīmāṁsā-Sūtras*, 4.3.3.

   Saṁyoga-pṛthaktva-nyāya: saṁyoga means a Vedic sentence of injunction, and *pṛthaktva* means separateness. *Nyāya* means an *adhikaraṇa*, or section, which consists of five members: subject-matter, doubt, the opponent's view, answer, and conclusion. According to this section when two Vedic injunctions dealing with a thing are different, it is to be understood that the same thing produces different results. For instance, it is enjoined by one Vedic text that a stake for binding an animal to be sacrificed in honour of Agni and Soma has to be made of either Fig-wood or Acacia Catechu (Khādira). Another Vedic text says that one desiring vigour should make his stake out of Khādira. Thus the use of the stake made of Khādira yields two different results because the Vedas say so. Similarly, from the injunctions, 'For increasing the vigour of the organs one shall pour oblations of curds', and 'One shall pour curds as oblation', it is concluded that curd in an accessory of the *nitya* (regular, obligatory) *Agnihotra*-sacrifice performed by one who is without selfish motives, and, again, that it increases the vigour of the organs of one performing this sacrifice with a motive.
6. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22.
7. In *'vividisanti*, hanker to know' (in the Śruti quoted), two verbs are involved—*hanker* and *know*. Of these, *hankering* is the principal verb, and *sacrifices* etc. as also the nominative, *brāhmins*, have to be grammatically connected with *hankering*, and not with *knowing* which is the object of *hankering*.
8. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 8.1.6.
9. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22.

Further Wanderings in Argentina and Brazil

SWAMI BHAVYANANDA

(*Continued from the previous issue*)

Now I must tell you what is happening in Belo Horizonte. In the 1940's, a gentleman had a vision of Swami Brahmananda, who instructed him to look after the poor children of the locality. For the last fifty years, he has been building up this work. He is also propagating the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda, by publishing a four-page, monthly newspaper. I have acquired an authenticated, detailed story of the service that is being done by him, which is as follows:

"The Ramakrishna Mission had its beginning more than fifty years ago, in about 1942, in a work of total dedication by Mr. Arlindo Correa da Silva, who is our 'uncle', as everyone affectionately calls him.

"Arlindo Correa da Silva was born on 2nd June, 1910, in Campina Grande in Paraiba, a state in the north of Brazil. His parents were Jose Joaquim Correa and Josepha da Silva Correa. He lost his mother when he was seven years of age and studied in the Baptist College in Recife, which is a Protestant institution. He was trained as an accountant and became a journalist, when he began to struggle against social abuses and defend victims, being greatly motivated by his love for children. When he was twenty-two years old, he came south and after passing through various towns, settled in Belo Horizonte, in the central region of Brazil. He joined the spiritualist movement and founded a magazine called "*The Power*". One day, (he cannot say the exact date), in about 1942, he had a great surprise. He was bathing in a pool when a person rose up in front of him and began to speak to him. Faced with this strange situation—after all, he was bathing—he did not immediately perceive who the person was. What did he want? Who was he? 'My name is Brahmananda, and I am a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.' Arlindo did not know what to say. At that time, as he was still a spiritualist, he was startled by this apparition and the words it spoke, which were more than these short sentences recorded here. He contacted a person who was interested in philosophy, named Francisco Xavier, who is now widely known as "Chico Xavier". The latter comforted him and said that in the *Gospels*, Jesus says: 'In my Father's house there are many mansions,' and that he must be going into another mansion. Arlindo took heart and ceased to be frightened, because he had never heard anything about these names and had never been interested in any other religion besides Christianity, and he decided to co-operate. The Swami Brahmananda began to appear to him frequently and guide him, even as to what books he should read. Even the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, a present from a friend, came into his hands. At that time he still had a job, but the Swami advised him to give up everything and devote himself solely to children. In view of this guidance he sold everything he had, and bought a piece of land in Betim. In that area, because there was no water, land was cheap and it was possible to buy a property. At that time, there were some friends with him: Jose Waldir Fonseca, Jose Joachim Costa, Antonio Luiz Araujo and Clemente. As he had no money, he could not manage to get a loan from the banks. Sri Ramakrishna then brought Rosalina Dutra Agricola, a woman of high standing in the

Prabuddha Bharata, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1896

The Object of Vedanta

It was a very 'beauteous evening calm and free' like the heart of a saint. Nature seemed to be wrapped up in herself in blissful meditation—like a sage in samādhi. The birds had gone to their nests; the cattle were safe in their sheds, and after the day's toil man was either saying his prayers, or enjoying the repose that reigned throughout. The nightingale alone was pouring forth a flood of the softest melody, which accorded very well with the sublime stillness of the hour. The song of any other bird would have appeared silly at that time. The gentle, unobtrusive smell of the flowers of the evening enhanced its sweetness, while the gentle stream of the infant moonlight of the time lent to it an ineffable charm. The Jumna was flowing on at its usual majestic pace, and on its silver sands, now become classical by the wealth of associations, and on that splendid moonlit evening, entered Krishna accompanied by the gopis, and Radha, Rukmini and Satyabhama. The favourite flute was soon on his lips, and the tune he sang at that silent hour,—ah! who can describe it—was to the galaxy that surrounded him a veritable magic spell. This harmony was not, however, to last long, for, shortly after, Krishna noticed a calf lying dead a few yards' distance from them and, when approached, it was found to be his most favourite one. The sorrow for the loss was general, but after musing for a while Krishna said: 'No matter. It can be restored to life. There is one way for it and only one, and that is, every one of you should speak out what she most sincerely desires at this hour, what thoughts the moonlight, the river, and this evening hour put into her mind. This, if honestly and frankly said, would bring back the calf to life. Such is the power of truth.'

This was agreed to, and the ladies began one after another to speak out their hearts. One gopi said, 'I should most like to undisturbedly enjoy the music of thy magic flute, O my Krishna! That I value above all others.' Another said, 'I wish to swim with thee in this delightful moonlight in this Jumna which flows on like melted silver.' A third said, 'I have always been longing, and the desire is now intensified, O Krishna! for as much independence as a man has, longing to set at naught all social superstitions about woman's modesty, weakness and so forth, all of which merely mean woman's slavery; to wear male attire, and walk about with a stick in hand and shoes and turban just wherever I please. Woman's life, as it is, is simply a curse.' A fourth said, 'I should like to be a *ṛṣi* saying his prayers on the Himalayas and performing ablutions on evenings like these at the very birthplace of the Ganges.' Another said, 'I wish to go about helping the poor, looking after the sick and the wounded, and carry consolation and peace to desolate homes. What selfish enjoyment could be desired in this world so full of misery?' 'I should like to be a great orator,' said another, 'delivering, on evenings like these, eloquent speeches on the reform of society, advancement of civilization and so on, and be talked about everywhere.' 'These do not please me,' said another, 'I should like to be the very harmony that reigns at this hour, the inner calm that pervades the world this splendid evening.' The turn passed on—one wanted wealth, another jewels, another beauty, and

so on—till it came to Satyabhama and she said, 'My only wish at all times is to have you, my Krishna, incomprehensible cunning Krishna, all for myself.' Then followed Radha saying, 'Beautiful as our bodies are, I wish that we should cast them off and be the very love that binds us both. I wish to be all Love and nothing else. There is nothing sweeter or more beautiful.' Last came Rukmini's turn and she said, 'My Lord, what a curious drama you have caused in so short a time! All my sisters here have spoken the truth, but what pleased one did not please the rest, and that is because the things desired have no intrinsic virtue of their own. One thing however is common among all here, namely, a desire for happiness, and that too for that kind of happiness knowing which the mind does not wish to know further and where it permanently abides. It is this stability, this fullness of knowledge and this happiness that all seek alike, but they seek for them exactly where they are not. The large catalogue of things now desired by them itself shows that it is not in the power of any external thing to give what they seek. I have learnt this, and knowing this, sit calm; and in the "myself", or rather in the self that alone remains (for the "my" is a changing external thing) are all the three—permanence, bliss and knowledge. All I desire is that I should desire nothing and be the self alone.' No sooner were these words spoken than the calf, which had already begun to show signs of life, rose up and danced with joy before the lovely group.

Rukmini's words in the above story are pregnant with wisdom. To understand them aright, we shall study the story a little more closely. Gopi Laksmi wants jewels: she thinks that they would make her happy. Here, evidently the desire is not for jewels as such, but for the happiness which she expects them to give. Gopi Sarasvati thinks about Laksmi's request within herself: 'Jewels I have known, they please it is true, but only for a while. A more lasting pleasure is that of learning: nobody can rob me of that; so I want learning. It will make me perfectly happy.' Had Laksmi already known about the happiness which jewels give, doubtless she would have asked for something else. It is therefore plain that the mind seeks not for mere happiness, but for happiness with a new element of permanence added to it, and it tries one thing after another and says 'this won't do, this won't do.' Had the happiness from jewels been stable and all sufficient, the mind would have rested there, and there would have been no longing to know about learning and the happiness that it could give. In other words, the knowledge of jewels is not all-sufficient, because the happiness from it is not all-sufficient and stable. Where there is perfect happiness, there the mind does not seek to know further, for desire means insufficiency, want. Therefore perfect bliss is identical with all-knowledge (i.e., the absence of necessity to know further), and no bliss can be perfect unless it be all-knowing as well as permanent. So perfect happiness means all-permanence, all-knowledge and all-bliss. The mind is constantly seeking for perfect happiness, i.e., for the above indivisible triad. Life is nothing but a chain of experiences, and under the prompting of the inner impulse to seek this triad we try one thing after another—wealth, learning, beauty, fame, etc., and after ages and ages of experience come to know what Rukmini has said, that no external thing can ever give what we seek.

The result is, the mind gives up the futile search and ceases to do its only function—that of projecting itself into the external world and searching for and collecting experience. But the cessation of this function does not mean total annihilation of life. There is an ultimate substratum of con-

(Continued on page 341)

Existentialism and Swami Vivekananda

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

Time and again humanity has found itself compelled to pause in the midst of its worldly preoccupations and wonder—about the vast universe, and its origin and purpose. The most enigmatic wonder has been the appearance of human beings. Existentialism is a study of the enigma. In this article the author scans the main ideas of this school and concludes that Vedanta surpasses the former's understanding of human existence. The Swami is the spiritual leader of the Vedanta Society, New York.

What is existentialism?

Existentialism is a movement, a predominant emotion, and not a precise system. It is one of the avenues through which the thinkers tried to respond to the challenge posed by the contemporary crisis. This crisis stems from the lack of knowledge about man. Man has forgotten his spiritual heritage and the dignity of life. He is considered as one of the things of the world. 'There is something frightening about the last half century's description of modern man', says Karl Jaspers, a noted existentialist:

> Burning the bridges to the past, he surrenders to the situation, to chance, to the mere instant. He still lives among stageprops left from other times, but they have ceased to set the stage of his life; they look like piles of rubbish. Man can see they are fictions. Man seems bound for the void, turning to it in despair or in a triumph of destruction.[1]

From this depressive situation in man's life, existentialism aims at the freedom of man.

Existentialism has captured the mind of modern man, especially in Europe. Two great wars and their devastating effect, frustrations, and the scientific view of life gave birth to this philosophy. Existentialism is a revolt against naturalism, idealism, and over-intellectualism. Naturalism advocates a materialistic philosophy of life, and man loses his significance, being completely engulfed in matter. Idealism, though improving his self-image, still does not satisfy his innate craving. He feels helpless and sees no freedom ahead. He is goal-less. The overdose of intellectualism chokes with abstract thought the life of passion and feeling.

Existentialism raises its voice of protest against the rigour and discipline of reflective contemplation. It wants to give articulation to feelings through this philosophy as was done in the ages of Romanticism, Nietzscheism, and Bergsonism in earlier periods. Ennui, emptiness, helplessness and meaninglessness of life demand a new search for meaning, freedom and peace in life. This philosophy poses the question: What is unique about man? Does man have anything unique in his character? Existentialism urges nothing short of concrete reality. Can it pacify what is called the 'metaphysical demand' of human nature? Man's individuality, freedom, and 'responsibility' for being what he is, is emphasized in this philosophy. Man is not to be equated with things and beings. He is very unique.

---

1. Karl Jaspers, *Existentialism and Humanism* (New York: Russell F. Moore Co., 1952), pp. 65-6.

There exists a number of different versions of existentialism. There is the nihilistic and atheistic existentialism of Sartre, the Protestant existentialism of Kierkegaard, the Catholic variety of Gabriel Marcel, and varying shades of other opinions. It has no rigid or systematized philosophy. The schools vary in their principles and there is wide divergence in their philosophical outlook. There exists incoherent, loose ideas throughout their literary works. They seek to articulate their views more through novels and plays than through philosophical works. This is in substantial measure responsible for the popularity of their points of view. It is a developing philosophy with various ramifications extending into the various areas of art, literature, religion, psychotherapy, history, etc. It is also a highly controversial and much misunderstood system of thought. It has been interpreted in altogether contradictory ways. One group maintains that it has brought philosophy down to earth for the first time in the West. It is a new label for Christianity. Other groups denounce it for individual liberationism and its proneness to nihilism.

This school does not hold any fixed thought and therefore it does not come within the purview of any systematic philosophical discussion that is logically intelligible. Heidegger had political alliance with the Nazis. It is also difficult to say whether he was a theist or an atheist. He, of course, in later life became a mystic, having deep faith in the ultimate mysterious nature of Reality. Sartre in later life became a torrid Marxist and joined the French army to fight the Germans.

Protest against intellectualism

Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish thinker (1813-1855), who is regarded as the true precursor of modern existentialism, raised his voice of protest against *intellectualism*, particularly in the form of Hegelian Absolutism which laid stress on the objectivity of truth. Hegel's objective idealism incorporates the truth of subjective idealism and realism. The world is the externalization of the Absolute. Kierkegaard asserted, 'Subjectivity is truth or truth is subjectivity.' He could never have though that God was an object. Moreover, Hegel's system reduced man to an insignificant item in the universe and denied him any freedom. Kierkegaard laid stress on the simple truth, generally overlooked in traditional philosophy, that

> ***Man is not to be equated with things and beings. He is very unique....Man first is, and afterwards he is this or that.***

existence is primordial and irreducible. This concrete existence is unamenable to rational analysis and proof. It rather forms the very core of human reality in its inner subjective attitude. This philosophy tends to emphasize the importance of the individual's goals in life and the values he has discovered for himself. The fundamental strain of existentialism finds its explicit formulation in Sartre's statement: 'Existence precedes essence.' In 'I am a man', the 'I am' denotes existence, and 'man' signifies essence. 'Essence is what a thing is, and existence that it is.' Sartre makes it clear in his statement: 'Man first is, and afterwards he is this or that.' This point has been further clarified by Dr. S. N. L. Shrivastava as follows:

The existence which precedes essence is the cardinal principle of existentialism and the one which has given the name of the movement. This principle, which is applicable to man is best understood when contrasted with its opposite principle, viz. that essence precedes existence, which is applicable to a material object, say, a paper knife. One cannot *suppose that it (knife) has been brought* into existence without essence, i.e., the

> manner in which it is made and the definite purpose for which it is made. In the case of man also, according to the theists, the individual, before he is brought into existence, exists in the mind of God or his essence is there in the mind of God.[2]

This idea is the pivot round which this philosophy moves. It has been criticized, however, by Dr. Ras Behari Das in the following manner:

> ...the strength of the existentialist philosophers lies rather in their acute psychological or phenomenological analyses than in the logical coherence of their ideas. When they separate essence from human existence, I do not know how they can still make any significant assertion about human existence. If I am absolutely free, as Sartre points out, and if there is no God and no objective value, I do not see how and to whom I am still responsible, especially when there is no standing 'I' to bear the burden.[3]

Subjectivity of truth

Although existentialism has been stigmatized by several thinkers as the 'philosophy of irrationalism', and 'the philosophy of disillusionment', it has also been addressed as 'a philosophy of faith and crisis'. Soren Kierkegaard was indeed a great genius, and the most daring and courageous exponent of the existentialist movement. His originality and serious thinking command our respect. He definitely inaugurated a new era of philosophical inquiry for the West by declaring the subjectivity of truth. He earnestly sought to shift the European speculative balance. (Theodore Haecker described this dramatic reversal process of philosophical inquiry in the West thus: 'He wishes to go from the person over the things to the person, and not from the things over the persons to the things.') He extolled the silence and detachment necessary for deep spiritual experiences. 'God loves silence.' 'The moment I talk to another man about my highest concerns...in that very moment, God has less power over me.' He says, '...God is a subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness.' Human existence has to be understood subjectively as the real and intrinsic truth emerges out of one's inmost depth of existence. Actually he meant the kindling of inner light—the real source of wisdom.

European philosophers in general, excepting a few, take an objective attitude to comprehend the Self. They labour hard to explain the subjective in terms of the object, the inner in terms of the outer. This bias for objectivity is at the root of the failure of the Western theories of Self. Kierkegaard pinpointed, with all the emphasis at his command, the Western substitution of man for God as the root cause of all our maladies. He says, 'Truth is naked...in order to explain the truth, one must divest oneself of all one's inward clothes, of thoughts, conceptions, selfishness, etc....' The riddles of life stem from a partial knowledge of life. The most fundamental problem of human experience—the relation of the one and the many, changelessness and change, unity and plurality—can be solved only through the Vedantic approach to the Self. Swamiji says,

> The background, the reality of everyone, is that same Eternal,... It is the Atman, the Soul, in the saint and the sinner,...[4] All this universe was in

2. *Aryan Path*, July, 1986, V. 21, p. 309.
3. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, *History of Philosophy: Eastern and Western*, p. 438.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 2, p. 168.

> Brahman, and it was, as it were, projected out of Him, and has been moving on to go back to the source from which it was projected, like the electricity which comes out of the dynamo, completes the circuit and returns to it. The same is the case with the soul. Projected from Brahman, it passed through all sorts of vegetable and animal forms, and at last it is in man, and man is the nearest approach to Brahman. To go back to Brahman from which we have been projected is the great struggle of life.[5]

Uniqueness of man: Objective study

This movement has rendered a signal service to us all by demanding our sincere attention to the uniqueness inherent in all of us. This awareness of our own mystery and dignity of life is very important in view of our absolute helplessness in the midst of colossal organized structures threatening to reduce us to an object. This self-introspective mood, if sincerely pursued with greater acumen, finer insight and deep spiritual intuition, may in due time evolve the concept of Atman as the true inner self of man, so dear to Swamiji. A speculative philosophy, based on reason and sense-experience cannot determine the immortal Self in us. As regards the incompetence of reason to unveil the suprasensuous truth, Swamiji remarks,

> The field of reason or of the conscious workings of the mind, is narrow and limited. There is a little circle within which human reason must move. It cannot go beyond. Every attempt to go beyond is impossible, yet it is beyond this circle of reason that there lies all that humanity holds most dear. All these questions, whether there is an immortal soul, whether there is a God, whether there is any supreme intelligence guiding this universe or not, are beyond the field of reason. Reason can never answer these questions. What does reason say? It says, 'I am agnostic; I do not know either yea or nay.' Yet these questions are so important to us. Without a proper answer to them, human life will be purposeless. All our ethical theories, all our moral attitudes, all that is good and great in human nature, have been moulded upon answers that have come from beyond this circle.[6]

Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers and others belonging to the rightist group (the group maintains a more or less milder attitude and accepts a theistic world-view; the leftist group is represented by Heidegger and Sartre, who are spokesmen of atheism) resort to faith as an aid to having communion with God. They believe that life without communion with God is absolutely meaningless. This school puts much emphasis on mood, feeling and other emotions as the means of knowing the problems of life, and due to this dependence it has landed in great trouble. They have challenged the prevalent trend of intellectualism and its exclusive emphasis on the role of reason in philosophical discussion. However, this method of experience 'is more like that of an artist than that of a scientist'. Again, 'by over stressing the non-cognitive approach to reality, this school seems to be moving to the opposite pole—irrationalism. To prescribe the irrational at the cost of the principle of rationality may be inviting some sort of chaos in mental life, thought and conduct.' That is why this school is 'anti-intellectualist through and through.'

In the modern age Swami Vivekananda is the best exponent of Vedanta which postulates pure consciousness as the support and substance of the manifold. The central

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 258-9.

6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 181.

principle in all knowledge is consciousness, the light that reveals the object. Each and every act of cognition is but an expression of Pure Consciousness through a mental mode. In Western thought a clear-cut demarcation between the mind and the cognizing Self is rarely seen. Mind, normally is accepted in the West as characterized by consciousness. Self in Vedanta is not an existent but existence—not in the sense of a category, but as identical with experience. The Self, thus, is pure being and plenary awareness. This is the real source of abiding happiness. Hence it is referred to as *ānanda* (bliss).

Subjective approach

Whatever be the label of existentialism, there is a unanimity among them, which recognizes the primacy of man. They are not concerned about existence as such, but with human existence. 'Existential philosophy is a personal philosophy; the subject of inquiry is the human person.' Man cannot know himself from the outside. Once the truth of his existence is known, the individual will give up the world and be contemplative in search of himself. They take man as the central theme of philosophy, and they accept man as a true, self-creating, self-transcending subject.

> ***European philosophers in general, excepting a few, take an objective attitude to comprehend the Self....This bias for objectivity is at the root of the failure of the Western theories of the Self.***

The importance of existentialism consists in its turning the attention of man on himself. It realizes the need of inwardness. But unfortunately they (philosophers) themselves never accepted seriously this life of inwardness. Moreover, their method of self-analysis is defective in view of their mistake in accepting 'the shadow of man for man'. They accept the self as an existent, and separate man from himself and the objective world. This is not a satisfactory concept of man. This is evident from the series of terms indicating 'certain states or moods that they attribute to human existence'.

The students of this philosophy are constantly confronted by the negative terms such as: anguish, dread, frenzy, horror, despair, absurdity, nothingness, nausea and death. The man is surrounded by hostile forces without, and depressive fares within. Therefore his life is beset with problems which do not leave till death. This life of man 'is a nucleus of nothingness', and man has been moving towards his destiny which is death. This constant threat of extinction causes nausea and its concomitant evils. Man leads a dull, drab, dreary and cheerless existence. 'Man, thus, is an unwanted being'; in the words of Sartre, 'he is a useless passion.' Heidegger goes one step further and demands that man has to be aware of the inevitability of death every moment to enable him to meet the challenge of death. The greatest advantage of having a Vedantic view of man—divinity of man, man as a spiritual being—is here. The Self of man is eternal, immortal; hence it is beyond death. Weak man can transcend through spiritual struggle the strong grip of cause-and-effect determinism and become completely free.

Vedantic views

The existentialist concept of consciousness, as upheld by its atheistic school, does not accept the Vedantic view. Sartre does not accept both Kant and Husserl for their belief in a Transcendental Ego. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), who represented atheistic existentialism, did not develop any unambiguous philosophy. Heinemann says about Sartre: 'The French existentialist leader knows that most of his terms are ambiguous, but he needs them in this form in order to build up his system, which is in

fact a philosophy of ambiguity.' Swamiji's philosophy—essence of Vedanta—does not suffer from such defects. Vedanta is very helpful in solving the anomalies faced by Sartre. Vedanta admits a distinction between the real Self and individual Self in the relative plane, but this apparent duality vanishes in Samadhi. The manifold, being a reflection of the One underlying the many, gets completely eclipsed in the super-conscious experience which is beyond all relativity. Following the spirit of Vedanta and on the basis of his own personal experience, Swamiji accepts the unity of existence. There is only the 'One, eternal, unchanging, infinite—the "One without a second".'[7]

False knowledge divides us; true insight born of genuine mystical experience gives us the wisdom of Unity. Existentialists have deprived themselves of having the comprehensive vision of truth by giving undue stress upon choice, commitment, and action. Intense spiritual life may win the vision of truth through intuition. Vedanta accepts unity of existence, but the latter is never divorced from the essence—the being of the manifold. Essence—being the source of ethics, values, and culture—has to be accepted in a comprehensive philosophy of life. Swamiji says,

> The infinite oneness of the soul is the eternal sanction of all morality, that you and I are not only brothers—every literature voicing man's struggle towards freedom has preached that for you—but that you and I are really one...this is the dictate of Indian philosophy.[8]

Swamiji's philosophy gives adequate importance to both—essence and existence. By experiencing existence as the manifestation of the One, it does not create a false dualism as the existentialists do. They dichotomize between essence and existence and thereby become an easy victim of dualism—the root of all anxieties. Swamiji is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. He is a die-hard realist who is sure of our great future through illumination.

Divinity of man

The tragedy of human life squarely stems from our metaphysical ignorance about our divinity. Rootlessness creates all problems of existential anguish. 'A more serious source of resistance,' says Rello May,

> is the one that runs through the whole of modern western society—namely, the psychological need to avoid and, in some ways, repress, the whole concern with 'being'. In contrast to other cultures which may be very concerned with being—particularly Indian and Oriental—the characteristic of our period in the West, as Marcel rightly phrases it, is precisely that awareness of 'the sense of the ontological—the sense of being—is lacking. Generally speaking, modern man is in this condition; if ontological demands worry him at all, it is only dully, as an obscure impulse.'[9]

Swami Vivekananda's concept of man is that he is essentially spirit, Atman, encased in a psycho physical organism. In spite of the optimism of the philosophers; a thoroughly man-centred philosophy can never get through logic any glimpse of Swamiji's Atman-centred man. If, instead of the concept of a distant or extra-cosmic God giving His Grace to a devotee, life is looked upon as conceived and sustained in Divinity, revelation will be interpreted as the manifestation of divinity in a pure heart.

---

7. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 5
8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 189.
9. Quoted in *The Healthy Personality*, edited by Hung-Min Chiang and Abraham Maslow, p. 62.

This experience of the suprasensuous and the supramental does not depend on logical arguments however brilliant. Direct insight into the depth of truth comes to those who are absolutely pure in thought, word and deed. Vedanta is quite emphatic that impulses, weakness and impurity undermine man's capacity to think clearly, perceive correctly, or reason rightly. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

Existentialism and Vedanta

The difference between the two systems—existentialism and Vedanta—is radical. The Being of Vedanta, being spiritual in nature, can never be adequately conceived by any one system or by the numbers of systems that depend on reason and sense experience. Although the existentialist movement has rightly upheld the glory and dignity of human life, yet it has failed to present any practical scheme of discipline leading to final emancipation from all bondages and consequent illumination. In Swamiji's philosophy *moksa* (illumination) is the bedrock on which his entire teaching is founded. Religion and life are not different poles, but they are one and the same. Indian genius discovered harmony in a higher synthesis where apparent contraries get dissolved. Vedanta sees One in many. The conflict between faith and reason is due to the dichotomizing tendency of the intellect. Moral life helps to gain insight into spiritual life. Morally pure persons with the help of their pure intellect can develop a suprasensuous and suprarational faculty of intuition, which is far superior to intellect and unravels truth hitherto not known.

Revelation introduces to us an aspect of life which is not otherwise accessible. Thus reason, through intense spiritual living, culminates in faith, and intellect in intuition, in the due process of development. Therefore they are not a leap 'over seventy thousand fathoms of water'. The thinkers of this school do not accept any divine plan behind the world. Vedanta accepts the presence of one selfeffulgent Reality which holds, penetrates, monitors and regulates worldly phenomena. Our indwelling divinity enables us to have Self-knowledge. That is the sole purpose of creation. Man has been travelling always from lower truth to higher truth. This perception of the cosmic plan, and the understanding that Self-knowledge is attainable through the mastery of our weaknesses is a positive source of deep satisfaction and joy, says Swamiji. 'Man's struggle is in the mental sphere. A man is greater in proportion as he can control his mind. When the mind's activities are perfectly at rest, the Atman manifests Itself.'[10]

Vedanta wants to study the entire gamut of life in all its aspects....Existentialism lacks both the breadth of vision and the comprehensiveness of understanding that Vedanta has.

Therefore in Vedanta the cause of evolution is much deeper. It is the innermost urge of life to experience the true nature of life. Our ego creates division and tension; therefore Vedanta exhorts us to transcend the finite ego to attain spiritual consummation. Kierkegaard accepts the limitation of reason and our sheer incapacity to know our real nature in our unregenerated state. He also accepts that real knowledge of ourselves, and not a mass of objective knowledge, is the saving truth in life. These are accepted by Vedanta too.

That truth is subjectivity, that the practice of detachment and the cultivation of true inwardness is a means of transcending one's weakness, and, finally, that it is the individual's responsibility to attain Self-knowledge, receives hearty appreciation

10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, pp. 154-5.

from the Vedantists. Vedanta wants to study the entire gamut of life in all its aspects, it is not interested in the superficial study of life. Existentialists lack both the breadth of vision and the comprehensiveness of understanding that Vedanta has. The mistake lies in the one-sided view of life they study. They are no doubt men of extraordinary insight and scholarship. But a fundamental misconception about the timeless Truth underlying the manifold has caused their shortsightedness. Most of the high priests of this school of thought are definitely original thinkers with deep insight. However, they did not attain the beatific vision of that timeless truth due to a materialistic concept of life. If they had such an experience, as we find in the life of Swamiji, this philosophy would have been completely different. That certainly does not mean we are not aware of their singular achievement in giving a new philosophy of the dignity of life. Existentialism is a new name for an ancient Vedantic way of self-inquiry—*'Ātmānam viddhi'* or 'Know thyself', so beautifully delineated in the Upaniṣads. True existentialism gets full articulation in the *mahāvākya* (the great saying): *'Tat Tvam Asi'*, 'That Thou Art'.[11] Swami Vivekananda became a great humanist in the real sense of the term by experiencing in his personal life the Absolute, and visualizing the Divine in and through all. He realized that one Supreme Brahman who pervades the whole universe and is the sum-total of all souls. Therefore, from a superficial point of view we find many of his ideas in common with this School. Beyond that, agreement must stop.❐

11. *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*, VI. 8.7.

The Object of Vedanta

(Continued from page 333)

sciousness behind the mind, as is daily seen in sound dreamless slumber where the mind is at rest. This consciousness is always present, it is permanent. Does it want to know anything outside itself, or does it want anything at all? No, for the mind by which it communicated with the outer world has already given up its work as useless. When I go to the office, I wear my coat and turban. Suppose I resign my office work as not worth my while? Then I lay aside the turban and coat and remain free. Similarly, when the search after external things is found not worth the while, the mind is laid aside and the consciousness behind it lives by itself: it does not want to know anything outside, nor does it want anything at all, and it always is. In other words, it is all permanence, knowledge and bliss. It is this threefold compound which is called 'the Self'.

The mind, in all its longings after external things, is, as we have seen, really seeking the above indivisible compound—the Self—only in the wrong place, as the beetle in the story of Sir Walter Raleigh's escape from prison, that went seeking after butter smeared on its own head. Therefore does the Upaniṣad say: 'Behold, not indeed for the husband's sake the husband is dear, but for the sake of the Self is dear the husband. Behold, not indeed for the wife's sake the wife is dear, but for the sake of the Self is dear the wife.'

This Self is not myself or thyself, for the 'mine' and 'thine' belong to the mind which as we have seen must cease before the Self is realized. In the light of the Self the differences of I and you are not. The aim of Vedanta is to point out where the Self is and how it can be reached. Whether we will or not, we (or rather all living creatures) are really seeking the Self in all our doings, and Vedanta only helps us in shaping our efforts in the right direction.❐

Spiritual Experiences in Dream

RICHARD CHAMBERS PRESCOTT

Are certain dream-experiences spiritually meaningful? At times Sri Ramakrishna gave some hints about it. The author attempts to study some of his reactions to the disciples' dreams. Mr. Prescott is of Edmonds, U.S.A.

MASTER: (in an ecstatic mood): Ah me! Ah me!
DEVOTEE: But, sir, it was only a dream.
MASTER: Is a dream a small thing?

Indeed, we spend one third of our life span on this earth in the dream state. And yet we disregard this wondrous state as just sleep, mere rest. The dream state composes our subtle life. It is somewhere between the realm of matter and pure Spirit, the Divine Mother, who is purest Consciousness. She is the ineffable Reality we all seek. *Taijasa* is the self-luminous dream state, the Fire of Consciousness burning self-radiant in the subtle plane....Only a dream, no, it is brilliant Self Consciousness reflecting Itself as seer, seeing and seen—the three-fold phenomena rising out of one's own Self's luminosity.

M: It is like that of a man just awakened from sleep. He becomes aware of himself. You are always united with God.
MASTER: Do you ever dream of me?
M: Yes, Sir. Many times.
MASTER: How? Did you dream of me as giving you instruction?
M. remained silent.
MASTER: If you ever see me instructing you, then know that it is Satchidananda Himself that does so.
M. related his dream experiences to Sri Ramakrishna, who listened attentively.
MASTER (to M.): That is very good. Don't reason any more. You are a follower of Shakti (the Divine Mother).

This is the real essence of the dream state—Reality Itself. The impersonal Satchidananda (Self, Luminosity, Love) is what reveals and revels within the emergence of Self. It is Ātman (Self) that shows Ātman, Reality, the Divine Mother, God, the Ineffable. Who is seeing whom? Ramakrishna was very interested in the details of M.'s dream. He must have dreamt of the Great Goddess. If he has seen Her, then he need not intellectualize about the nature of things anymore. In *svapna* (dream) M. has seen that the Great Mother is indeed everything! What else is there to think about or imagine over? She revealed Herself to him in the luminous *taijasa*!

MASTER: Again, there are instances of people's realizing God in a dream and by divine grace.

Most definitely! In these fourteen quotations from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* you will see that this can be so. Once an individual went to Swami Shivananda to receive a sacred and secret *bīja mantra*. But at the moment of getting the *mantra*, the person stated that he had already got that very same mantra in the dream state! The person said the Swami gave the *mantra* in the dream. Yet, the Swami stated that it was none other than God (Satchidananda) who is the only guide, instructor, teacher, gave him this mantra.

MASTER: Do you dream? Do you dream of a flame? A lighted torch? A married woman? A cremation ground? It is good

to dream of these things.
PURNA: I dreamt of you. You were seated and were telling me something.
MASTER: What? Some instructions? Tell me some of it.
PURNA: I don't remember now.

It seems clear that to Ramakrishna these are important dream symbols, dream appearances, auspicious images—primordial images that have great sentiments, full of depth and meaning. Yet, in this example, Purna cannot translate the dream instructions back into waking memory, as we all are often unable to do. The dream state has its own language, physics, logic and continuum. In the dream state conceptual images and thoughts come up in a free and spontaneous way. The dream-mind works better in some ways, not being restricted by logic of the three-dimensional waking condition. Yes, dreams are very important, as important as the waking state. In quantum physics, it is considered that thoughts (waking or dream thoughts) effect particles, and particles become the dense material of the waking state which we all believe is the only real thing.

There is a story in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna *about a farmer whose son Haru had died. The farmer's wife was upset with him because he showed no grief. The farmer replied quietly: Shall I tell you why I haven't wept? I had a very vivid dream last night. I dreamt I had become a king; I was the father of eight sons and was very happy with them. Then I woke up. Now I am greatly perplexed. Should I weep for those eight sons or for this one Haru? Ramakrishna continued: The farmer was a jnani; therefore he realized that the waking state is as unreal as the dream state. There is only one Substance, and that is the Atman (the Self). The Supreme Soul is the Witness—the witness of the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. These things are in your line of thought. The waking state is only as real as the dream....But for my part I accept everything: Turiya and also the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. I accept all three states. I accept all—Brahman and also maya, the universe, and its living beings. If I accepted less I should not get the full weight.*

In the great *mahā-bīja*, AUM, A is the symbol of the waking state, U is the symbol of the dream state, M is the symbol of the formless dreamless sleep state, and AUM itself represents *Turīya*, the Fourth State, which is Pure Consciousness, one's own Self (Atman). The farmer realized this Truth-formula, so for him the waking and dream states had the same consistent reality, or unreality if we prefer. For a *jñāni* (Knowledge-oriented) the three states compose the framework of illusion, unreality. Yet for the *bhakta* (Love-oriented), the three states make up the mansion of mirth, that is, they appear as a reality. For the *vijñāni* (realized-soul), the *Nitya* (eternal Reality), and the *Līlā* (relative Cosmic Play), are two aspects of the one same Reality.

MASTER: Ah me! (as he watched a drama in the Star Theatre).

The scene changes: Nityananda has arrived at Navadvip. After a search he meets Nimai (Sri Chaitanya), who, in turn, has been seeking him.

When they meet, Nimai says to him: 'Blessed is my life! Fulfilled is my dream! You visited me in a dream and then disappeared.'

The Master said in a voice choked with emotion, 'Nimai said he had seen him in a dream.'

So it seems that we may indeed see our Spiritual Ideal in the dream state, and that this can very well be an ecstasy of emotion, blessed and fulfilling. Certainly! Why is waking-life thought of as different from dream-life? They both move in one continuum, as waves in an ocean. It is our

tendency towards material thinking that makes us regard one over the other. Yet, we must remember that it is Satchidananda alone that is really instructing us in the waking or the dreaming states. It is simple. It is no mystery at all. The great Goddess Mother Kali can teach us, instruct us, no matter in what state our consciousness resides. This is the truth. She is the *background* of every appearance, and She *is* every appearance!

Consider for a moment the Holy Mother Saradamani. There are cases of people who never saw her picture, and yet, in the dream state they did see this Human Goddess protecting them during difficult circumstances. There are those who received *bīja-mantra* from her in the dream state, and later found the *mantra* tallied exactly with that they received in the waking state. No wonder, for Sarada-Ma is the Goddess Kali, and the Goddess Kali is Sarada-Ma.

MASTER: I noticed the other day that Baburam, Bhavanath, and Harish have a feminine nature. In a vision I saw Baburam as a goddess with a necklace around her neck and with women companions about her. He has received something in a dream. His body is pure. Only a very little effort will awaken his spiritual consciousness.

In the dream state, in dreamless sleep and, of course, in infinite *Turīya*, we may transcend the masculine-feminine barrier. This duality is most obvious in the waking state where consciousness is embodied in the physical, the dense material body. Satchidananda is neither masculine nor feminine, but we may impose on It any quality we desire. Perhaps Baburam had received something in the dream state about his own Goddess nature, the sacred and sublime Feminine. Ramakrishna saw him as a goddess, with feminine ornaments and female companions. He thus knew that the Goddess Kali had somehow emerged in the consciousness of Baburam. Really, what is masculine, what is feminine? Our prejudice confines us.

M: Yesterday they went to Dakshineswar to meditate. I had a dream.
MASTER: What did you dream?
M: I dreamt that Narendra and some others had become sannyasis. They were sitting around a lighted fire. I too was there. They were smoking tobacco and blowing out puffs of smoke. I told them that I could smell hemp.

Profound thinking tells us that all events within our space-time fabric are *condensed* within the Original Matrix of Consciousness at the beginning of the Cosmic Universe. Past, present and future are merely the spreading out of this wondrous Matrix. Over the horizon of our view of this continuum, all events have already occurred in the Consciousness of the Great Divine Mother. It seems that M. had a glimpse over the horizon of this continuum to see what we frame in our minds as the so-called future. Narendra and the others did become sannyasis, monks vowed to realize the Self Reality, when the Divine Matrix actually spread out to that point in the space-time fabric of things and events.

'Why have you disturbed my sleep? I was dreaming that I was a king and the father of seven children. The princes were becoming well versed in letters and military arts. I was secure on my throne and ruled over my subjects. Why have you demolished my world of joy?' 'But that was a mere dream', said the other man. 'Why should that bother you? Fool!' said the wood-cutter. 'You don't understand. My becoming a king in the dream was just as real as is my being a wood-cutter. If being a wood-cutter is real, then being a king in a dream is real also.'

Who is to say which is more real, the waking identity or the dream identity? Both are images, appearances over the surface of the Self, which is Pure Consciousness indeed. Who are you? the wood-cutter or the king? or something more? Consciousness can assume any identity, like pure fire on a redhot iron ball. In the *Katha Upanisad* and in the *Bardo Tholdol* (the Tibetan text on hearing about Liberation while in the After-Death-Plane) various dream state identities are described in precise and great detail. No one can say which is truly the more real, waking identity or dream identity or after-death identity. Obviously our real identity is in the Something More—more than the cosmic play of the *Līlā*, more than the abstract undivided Eternal. No sage, or sages, has ever portrayed the Great Mother as She simply is!

MASTER: I went into samādhi at the sight of the image of Bankevihari (Sri Krishna). In that state I wanted to touch it. I did not want to visit Govindaji twice. At Mathura I dreamt of Krishna as the cowherd boy. Hriday and Mathur Babu had the same dream.

This is a beautiful example of what may be called 'shared dreaming', or 'collective dreaming'. Indeed, everyone has his own individual dream language, but there are also dream symbols that arise in consciousness due to a shared geographical, biological, cultural, or religious background. Perhaps this is what happened at Mathura? Or perhaps this lucid collective dream was actually the condensation of Satchidananda into the form of the cowherd boy Krishna which appeared in three dream minds simultaneously? Another explanation is in terms of *Hiranyagarbha*, the luminous Golden Womb of all dream states, also called *Sūtrātmā*, which is the luminous thread of the Self running and woven throughout every individual dream state (*taijasa*). This is the Divine Mother Herself appearing throughout the relative phenomena of all dream states. Ultimately it is Kali who appears as Krishna. Perhaps, in this manner She manifested in three dream minds all at once.

At this holy place Khudiram had a dream in which the Lord Vishnu promised to be born as his son. And Chandra Devi too, in front of the Siva temple at Kamarpukur, had a vision indicating the birth of a divine child. Upon his return the husband found that she had conceived.

Sri Ramakrishna's own parents saw him in visions and dreams before his actual birth into the physical embodied waking plane. How is this possible? Nothing is impossible for the Great Goddess. Somehow Khudiram and Chandra Devi saw the luminous subtle body of little Gadadhar (another name of Sri Ramakrishna) before his birth. Or perhaps they actually saw the *Bhagavati-tanu*. the most spiritual Causal Body, of the Divine Mother. This is how an Avatāra (divine incarnation), or an Iswarakoti (God-like prophet) takes birth.

MASTER: Yes. Further, I think of the magician and his magic. The magician alone is real. His magic is illusory, like a dream. I realized this when I heard the Chandi recited. Sumbha and Nisumbha (two male demons) were scarcely born when I learnt that they were both dead....With the help of Adyaśakti (Primordial sacred Feminine), God sports as an Incarnation. God through His Shakti incarnates Himself as man (male or female)....Then alone does it become possible for the Incarnation to carry out His work....Everything is due to the Shakti of the Divine Mother.

The dream state is like a magic show. Within the Matrix of the Great Mother all

events have already happened. We are only yet to perceive these. No sooner than Sumbha and Nisumbha were born than they were dead. All events are like this. *The Chaṇḍi* describes the great Mother's Divine Play, wherein She destroys all ignorance and egotism embodied in the forms of patriarchal demons. From the level of the Absolute the Mother's Divine Play has already taken place in every single detail. It is She who is the Avatāra. All incarnations, whether female or male, are just particles of Her vast Luminosity. They are mere single waves of the surface of Her vast and effulgent being.

MASTER: Their aim is to attain Nirvana. They are followers of Vedanta. They constantly discriminate, saying, 'Brahman alone is real, and the world illusory.' But this is an extremely difficult path. If the world is illusory, then you too are illusory. The teacher who gives the instruction is equally illusory. His words, too, are as illusory as a dream.

But this experience is beyond the reach of the ordinary man. Do you know what it is like? If you burn camphor nothing remains. When wood is burnt at least a little ash is left. Finally, after the last analysis, the devotee goes into samadhi. Then he knows nothing whatsoever of 'I' 'you', or the universe.

Out of your own luminous Self appears the teacher, the teaching, the taught, whether in the dream or the waking state. Everything exists in you, it is you who are the Self of all. All gods and goddesses, all incarnations and great souls, all teachers, teachings and the taught arise out of your own luminous Self in the dream and in the waking state. You are the teacher, the teaching and the taught. Where else can it come from? God-like souls are like burnt camphor with no trace of egotism. Ordinary souls are more like wood-ash, which leaves a trace of egotism.

MASTER: ...Or perhaps you are frightened in a dream; you shake off sleep and are wide awake, but still you feel your heart palpitating. Egotism is exactly like that. You may drive it away, but still it appears from somewhere. Then you look sullen and say: 'What! I have not been shown proper respect!'

The impressions on the psyche, the feeling sentiments and the hidden unconscious desire-potentials of the dream state effect the waking state, just as those same of the waking state effect the dream. This is basic psychology. Egotism is merely the illusory identification of pure Satchidananda with the small space-time, psycho-physical organism. We are so much more than this material and subtle organism. The psychosomatic body-mind complex is a temporary phenomena. Egotism is believing you are this phenomena. When what you are is the deathless Ātman, the real Self, which might be thought of as Real Ego. For who is it that becomes the ego? Like every other thing, it is also a divine particle of the Great Goddess. It has been said by Ramakrishna, when speaking of Radha, that She was proud in the 'pride' of Krishna. So if this 'ego' keeps appearing from somewhere, perhaps you should *recognize* where it comes from!❐

The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.

—Dr. Williams James, the famous American psychologist.

What Swami Vivekananda Means to Me

WADE DAZEY

Perhaps because I have begun writing this essay on Easter Sunday I am again forcefully reminded of a comparison of Swami Vivekananda with St. Paul. Like St. Paul, 1900 years before him, Swami Vivekananda brought the wisdom of the East to the West and transmitted the invisible spiritual power of his master to those seeking answers to their innermost quest for spiritual truth. Like St. Paul, Swami Vivekananda travelled widely and taught both through inspired words and by the power of his spiritual presence. He overcame traditional restraints and shared the spiritual riches of his own tradition with those outside it. And even more than St. Paul, Swami Vivekananda—since he lived so much closer to our time—has revealed to us his inner life. We can come to know him as a very real flesh-and-blood person through the reminiscences of close disciples, through recorded newspaper reports, and through his own correspondence. It has been only one hundred years since Swami Vivekananda, or 'Swamiji' as he was known affectionately to his disciples and later admirers, proclaimed his noble vision of 'the harmony of religions' to the delegates assembled at the World's Parliament of Religions.

In this essay I want to explain what Swami Vivekananda means to me, how his life and thought have touched my own. To do this let me begin with some personal reminiscences and biographical notes as I try to show how the spiritual currents set in motion by Swami Vivekananda came to affect one person's life which began some forty-four years after he passed away.

It is probably impossible to know when our spiritual search really starts. For me it may have been when I sat cross-legged as a six or seven year old child and my parents jokingly said, 'You must have been a yogi in your previous life.' Not that they really believed in reincarnation, but it planted questions in my mind: 'What is a yogi?' and, 'Could I really have experienced an earlier life?'

While in junior high school my idle moments for a while became preoccupied with the intriguing question: How can we be sure that we are not dreaming or imagining the world into existence? How can we be sure that the world and people 'out there' really exist apart from our own mind? Or, again, maybe someone, maybe God, is right now dreaming me into existence! Thus started my intermittent interest in philosophy.

Later I spent one year of my high school education at Notre Dame International School, an English language Catholic boarding school in Rome, during the time of the Second Ecumenical Council, or Vatican-II. It was the year Pope John XXIII died. He had opened up the Catholic Church to the winds of the modern world, including a serious look at the teachings of other religions. My family was Episcopalian, so the school administrators put me in a 'moral philosophy' class instead of catechism, along with other non-Catholics. It was a small class but very international, and included boys from all over Europe, the Near East and Asia. There were Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, and Protestants of various denominations. The teacher was an American who had come to Rome for the year, but ended up in an apartment which seemed to be targeted by the Italian mafia. He gave us a week by week account of his ordeal. As I recall, he told us a dagger

had been stuck in his door, and there were other strange goings on. Needless to say, this distracted him from the moral philosophy instruction, and he decided that we boys could shoulder some of the teaching responsibility by sharing with our classmates the beliefs and practices of our own religions as we understood them. Unfortunately, around this time I became seriously ill for a while and missed most of the presentations. So I never learnt about the various religions...and I never did find out what happened to our teacher!

Although I had outgrown to some extent my fascination with the problem of solipsism while in high school, I nevertheless became interested in another moral and philosophical question. People are obviously different; they have different intellectual and physical abilities; different racial and social backgrounds; different religions. Is there any common core which is the same in all? More importantly, do all these differences mean that people are of different value or worth? In what way are people in any sense equal? I suspected, in fact fervently believed, that the 'soul' or core of people was the same, only the outward aspects were different. Hence, essentially all people were of equal worth or value.

Years later while visiting home from college I attended the lectures of Swami Prabhavananda and Swami Vandanananda at the Vedanta Temple in Santa Barbara. I had heard a little about Vedanta earlier from our neighbours in Santa Barbara, one of whom was Katherine Whitmarsh. I later learned that Ms. Whitmarsh, or Prasanna, had met Swami Vivekananda and sat on his lap when she was a small child. The lectures of both Swamis impressed me greatly, but I was even more impressed by their spiritual presence. The ideal of the unity of existence appealed to me, and especially the mysterious idea of an all-pervading ultimate Reality, or Brahman, which was —as the Swamis said as they touched it— 'even in this pillar' next to the lectern. The idea of a spiritual essence or core of truth underlying all reality—and all the various different religions and different doctrines—appealed to me greatly.

As part of a world civilization course in college—a portion of which was on Indian civilization—I came across excerpts from the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. I can no longer remember what book I read them in, or whether it had been assigned as part of the course. I spent a lot of time in the library and liked to browse through the stacks so I may just have come across the passages. At any rate I vividly remember being overwhelmed with the feeling that here at last was someone whose words were so simple, so direct, and personal that they carried absolute authority in spiritual matters for me. Here was someone close to our own times, someone whose words were based on authentic spiritual realization and could be trusted beyond question. This sense of conviction just seized me.

Strangely, I did not closely associate the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna with the lectures I heard from Swami Prabhavananda or Swami Vandanananda. Their lectures were exciting, but struck me as quite different in tone: more philosophical, more rational, and more connected to Western experience and tastes. Their lectures seemed more approachable, while still soaring to spiritual heights. In retrospect I discern the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda behind those lectures. It was Swami Vivekananda, of course, who pioneered the trail for Vedanta and the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in the West, explaining the heights of Indian spirituality in the language of Western philosophy, science and culture. Swami Vivekananda was a bridge, a translator, a messenger, whose own depth of spiritual experience and intellectual power transformed and reshaped the message of his master, applying it to the modern life while preserving its essence.

As I re-read the powerful words of this great son of India in his *Complete Works* I am continually moved by his noble character, his originality of thought, his emotional intensity, his endearing candour, and his selfless compassion. His majestic phrases, mostly from extemporaneous public talks, come alive today as we read them a hundred years later. His ideas seem surprisingly contemporary, with their breadth of vision and a depth of inspiration. Nearly all of his examples seem contemporary and apposite. His concerns and insights are for us today.

The life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda formed a grand synthesis, a bridge between two worlds: the world of India's ancient, timeless wisdom, and the world of West's dynamic, rational science. He brought the Vedantic spirituality of India's ancient elite to the educated public of the West who in the closing years of the 19th century were searching for a genuine spirituality free from dogmatism and narrow exclusivism. In return, he observed the rational efficiency, organization, and social activism of the West and inspired India's modern educated elite to take up the task of serving the often oppressed, uneducated and impoverished masses of India. In his message to India he was a far-sighted social reformer as well as an inspired spiritual teacher. He had a gifted intellect and prodigious memory, but dedicated his compassionate heart toward the material and social needs of India's poor. He loved to praise the Buddha for his synthesis of soaring intellect and compassionate heart, and to me these two qualities well describe Swami Vivekananda's own greatness.

The philosophical problems that occupied me during my adolescence have already been mentioned above: the problem of solipsism, and the problem of human equality. The first is expressed in the question, 'How can I be sure that the world out there really exists, and I am not imagining everything as in a dream?' And the second problem can be expressed as follows: 'People obviously look different, and have different intellectual and physical abilities. Does this mean that some are naturally superior to others?' I just couldn't accept this obvious conclusion. I thought there must be something underlying the differences, something which made all people equal in some ultimate sense. Could it be a soul? Well, if some souls would be saved and others not, then souls would also turn out to be unequal. No, I thought to myself, there is some core that is the same in all people. That spiritual core is the basis of equality !

Years later when I read Swami Vivekananda's words I found a clear and convincing explanation of Vedanta and non-dualism which gave a deep spiritual answer to these problems, an answer which at some level I felt I had always known. It seemed more a matter of recognizing an old, forgotten friend rather than meeting someone altogether new.

I would fail to respect Swami Vivekananda's own extraordinary candour if I omitted all mention of the apparent contradictions in his life or teachings. No doubt these were due to the different spiritual needs of the audiences he was addressing and the fact that many writings are transcriptions of extemporaneous talks. Also, occasionally his Victorian English appears quaintly old-fashioned. Furthermore, his own frankness and openness clearly revealed at times glimpses into the titanic struggles in his own life and personality. To me these contradictions are not detractions. Instead they reveal the real flesh-and-blood man, who himself had to struggle in his daily life despite his obvious talents and the blessings of his great master, Sri Ramakrishna. His candour and humanity only draw me closer to him, and make me feel that here was a real person who can be trusted; who also had to struggle in life against great odds and who despite

all his early doubts, and his physical and economic hardships, asserted the divinity of the soul and came to live his life constantly from that exalted spiritual perspective. He inspired other people not only by his own words but by the example of his dedicated, very active and eventful life, while all along freely hinting at his own material difficulties and spiritual struggles. This combination of energy and practicality, candour and soaring spirituality made Swami Vivekananda the potent force he has become in so many lives in India and the West.

In many Vedanta centres of the Ramakrishna Order in India, the Americas, and Europe there are pictures in the shrine room of the great master Sri Ramakrishna, flanked on either side by those of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual consort, Sri Sarada Devi. To me, Sri Ramakrishna represents the mysterious, divine wisdom of God which transcends ordinary human qualities and categories. Like Jesus, Buddha and other divine Incarnations, Sri Ramakrishna seemed to transcend and defy categorizing in terms of ordinary psychophysical categories such as masculine or feminine, introvert or extrovert, intellectual or emotional. To me, however, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi embodied the masculine and feminine spiritual ideals which were both present in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. They express, as it were, two aspects of the divine as manifested in human lives. On the one side is the heroic, dynamic and inquiring intellect, and on the other is the saintly, introverted, quiet, self-forgetful compassion. Yet mysteriously, behind this exterior appearance, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi both revealed in their depths the harmony of opposites: Swami Vivekananda frequently withdrew into deep contemplation, and Sri Sarada Devi quietly projected a spiritual power which animated the active service of the fledgling Ramakrishna Monastic Order.

Today's world is in a period of great transition. It is an age of diversity, discord, and moral confusion. Swami Vivekananda's message of the harmony of religions offers a spiritual beacon to guide us toward greater unity, balance, and mutual understanding. The goal of human life, he proclaimed, is the realization of the divinity already within us. It is the manifestation of our highest potential, and the life of highest freedom. It is a life united around a common core of spiritual principles, realized and realizable within each one of us, yet of necessity concretely expressed in diversity depending on culture, religious tradition, and the individual's level of spiritual realization. Just as there are inherent principles of musical harmony, and not all notes are appropriate and concordant, so too are there universal spiritual principles, and not all values, not all religious beliefs, myths and symbols are equally true and beneficial. Yet, it would make for an impoverished music if only one note were allowed, and—as Swami Vivekananda pointed out—a spiritually impoverished humanity if there were only one religious tradition.

To me, however, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi embodied the masculine and feminine spiritual ideals which were both present in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. They express, as it were, two aspects of the divine as manifested in human lives. On the one side is the heroic, dynamic and inquiring intellect, and on the other is the saintly, introverted, quiet, self-forgetful compassion.

On the level of actual daily practice, Swami Vivekananda advocated a balanced approach to spiritual life, explaining the four major Yogas of Hinduism in a way that makes them relevant to modern living; to monastic life and to the life of householders. His approach balances selfless service and individual mental discipline, emotional

depth and intellectual refinement, common-sense practicality and intuitive perceptiveness, genuine compassion and spiritual detachment. To exemplify these teachings, he organized the small band of brother disciples into the Ramakrishna Order, and inspired the Order to carry on the twin ideals of spiritual realization and service.

From my own experience, I believe we can indeed practise Swamiji's teachings. Concerning an awareness of the unity of life, and the oneness of existence, a senior swami of the Ramakrishna Order once impressed on me the need simply to apply this great insight which has been given to us. In other words, we should not wait until we have realized the truth of it directly ourselves before we are willing to apply it, but rather as we apply this ideal in daily life we will come to realize its profound truth more and more.

Another lesson comes from trying to see the divine unity in all life and trying to overcome attachment to our own little mind and body. This is the spontaneous awakening of a detached, universal love. Normally attachment is part of one's love to any individual, but there is a universal love which is not bound to any individual, but which is awakened through spiritual practice and meditative detachment. I have experienced this detached, universal love in the lives of certain individuals and I believe Swami Vivekananda exemplifies this detached, universal love and compassion.

Swami Vivekananda liked to refer to the trials and temptations of our daily life in the world as a kind of spiritual 'gymnasium'. We are given the opportunity to develop our moral and spiritual strength through the struggles of daily life, which if seen thus become opportunities rather than obstacles. We should learn to confront challenges in life boldly but calmly and with unselfish detachment. Swami Vivekananda assured us that like the hostile monkeys which pursued him one day on a street in Benares, the demons and dangers of life usually fled from us if we turn and face them boldly. 'Face the brute!' became his famous advice. Hard advice to follow, but I am convinced he was right ! This aspect of his teaching shows his natural nobility and spiritual heroism.

Imagination can also play an important part in spiritual life. First imagination and then realization, as Swami Vivekananda expressed it. We visualize the ideal and then slowly come to manifest it. Spiritual life is the manifestation of the perfection already within all of us, as he liked to say.

Finally, I suppose, in summation, that Swami Vivekananda's character impresses me more than any single idea of his, no matter how grand. And I would sum up his character in three qualities which he embodied and which, to me, get at the essence of his message. These qualities are intelligence, discipline and compassion. A popular song has it that, 'What the world needs now is love'. But as we also know, love can be foolish and blind. I believe that Swami Vivekananda's life is an inspiring example of what the world has always needed, and will continue to need: the rare synthesis of intelligence, discipline and compassion. And these personal qualities were combined with a deep spirituality awakened in him by his Master. Now it is up to each of us who has been touched by Swami Vivekananda in one way or another, through reading or by direct contact with the disciples of his disciples, to strive to manifest these qualities in our own lives. This effort, paraphrasing the words in the motto of the Ramakrishna Order, is not for our own salvation alone, but for the welfare of the world.

Attempting to write about Swami Vivekananda has been a humbling experience. How can my intellect describe his, or my words match his inspired eloquence. It is like a candle trying to shed light on the sun. Or perhaps a better analogy, it is

the moon trying to illumine the sun from which it borrowed its light. I feel one might do better to read Swami Vivekananda's words directly and seek illumination from the source. Despite this reluctance, I have shared with you the reader how one life has been touched by the great spiritual force that was Swami Vivekananda, for I can almost hear 'Swamiji' reminding us and urging us on, that in our depths we too are one with the source of all light.❑

from *What Swami Vivekananda Means To Me,*

Vedanta Society, Portland, Oregon, USA

Madhusudana Saraswati on the Bhagavad-Gita

(Continued from page 331)

even the *kāmya-karmas* (viz study of the Vedas etc., have been enjoined) for (developing) hankering for Knowledge.[16]

And thus since the rule to collect all the accessories applies only to actions performed with a desire for their results, therefore in actions that are different from these and are meant for purification (of the mind) there is no evil consequent on incompleteness of accessories, because those (actions) can be accomplished with the help of substitutes (of the accessories) etc. This is the meaning. Hence, *svalpam api*, even a little—from the point of view of either number or manner of performing—; *asya dharmasya*, of this righteousness—from among the meritorious actions meant for purification (of the mind) and enjoined through the sentence, 'The Brāhmins hanker to know It ...,' etc.[17]; even a little of this, when performed according to one's ability as a worship of God, *trāyate*, saves, the performer; *mahatah bhayāt*, from great fear—from the fear of transmigration, by ensuring the grace of God. This is borne out by the Smṛti,

Should a man prone to all kinds of sins meditate on Acyuta for a moment, he becomes a very great ascetic, a sanctifier of those who purify others sitting in the same row with them during dinner.

Since in the sentence, 'The Brāhmins hanker to know It ...,' etc.,[18] there is no injunction to combine (all the disciplines), therefore it becomes reasonable that there can be degrees of efforts in accordance with the degree of impurities. Hence it has been rightly said, 'you will totally get rid of the bondage caused by actions' (2.39).[19]

(to be continued)

16. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Vārtika-Sambandha-Bhāṣya*, 321.
17. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22.
18. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22.
19. Since there is no injunction to combine all the four disciplines, viz study of the Vedas, sacrifice, charity and austerity, any one of these can be the purifier of the minds of the aspirants according to the degrees and varieties of the impurities of their minds.

All things whatever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them.

Christ, Matt., vii. 12, Luke, vi. 31.

Action Without Desire

PAVAN K. VARMA

Here is an original and cogent understanding of Karma Yoga in the context of the complete message of the Gita and the manysided personality of Sri Krishna. The text of the article forms the section, 'Saviour', in the author's book, KRISHNA: THE PLAYFUL DIVINE, published by Viking, Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., with whose permission it is reprinted here. P.K. Varma is at present Counsellor & Director, Nehru Cultural Centre, Moscow.

When the great war was about to begin, Arjuna, the most accomplished of the Pandavas, refused to fight. The two armies were arranged in all their military splendour opposite each other. Conches and cymbals, kettledrums and trumpets sounded in the air. There was the glint of armour, as impatient warriors legendary for their skill and valour, stood ready for battle on horse-drawn chariots and magnificently caparisoned elephants. Arjuna, standing on his great chariot yoked to milk-white stallions, asked Krishna, his *sarathi* (charioteer), to halt mid-way between the armies. On both sides he saw kinsmen—fathers, uncles, brothers, teachers, elders, companions. And his will faltered. He did not want to kill them. 'I desire not victory, nor kingdom, nor pleasures,' he told Krishna, 'if these are to be won at the cost of so much bloodshed.' His lips were parched, his body shook and his hair stood on end. 'It is against honour to kill one's own cousins,' he said. 'There is a special place in hell for those who destroy their family, for once the family is destroyed, unredeemable chaos is the only consequence.' And so, on the great battlefield of Kurukshetra, Arjuna the great warrior slumped in dejection and put his bow and arrow down, overcome by sorrow and anguish.

It is with this dramatic portrayal that the Bhagwad Gita, a text of pivotal importance in the Hindu view of life, begins. The Bhagwad Gita literally translates as the 'Song Divine'. It is, however, much more than a lyric. Its 700 *shlokas* verses in eighteen chapters, placed in the sixth book of the Mahabharata, essay a philosophical outlook of the most profound impact and significance. The text unfolds in the nature of a dialogue between Arjuna, caught in the throes of doubt and confusion, and Krishna, who counsels him in his moment of crisis. In the end, Arjuna, his mental equilibrium restored and his sense of futility removed, picks up his bow and arrow and boldly enters the fight.

The eclectic ideological framework of the Gita allows for each of its commentators to interpret it from a subjective perspective, although, inevitably, many such commentators assert that their interpretation is the only valid one. The Gita, by its very nature, indulges such interpretative individualism. Perhaps, therefore it is better to comment on the Krishna-Arjuna discourse from a *personal* frame of reference, from a viewpoint that derives authenticity because it stems from an intimacy of experience. To do so does not require one to have a specialized knowledge of all the philosophical intricacies that have been tagged on to the Gita.

* * *

On the battlefield, Arjuna, representing

'generic man', suffered a motivational void. In a flash, all the carefully imbibed 'oughts' of his life crumbled. He was gripped by the sudden realization of the futility of effort in a world bereft of any ontological meaning. Endeavour and strife have intrinsic value if they are earthed in an explicable context. But to a man who does not know why he is born, and why he will die, the din and fury of the intervening period becomes, at the first moment of corrosive questioning, a pointless pantomime. There is no collective panacea for a man who, in one valid but unguarded instance, comes face to face with his own irrelevance. In a universe benumbingly vast, with galaxy upon galaxy existing in causeless, mechanical monotony, the individual is dwarfed by his own meaningless finitude. In one blindingly perceptive realization, the conditioned moorings of his life are swept away by the sheer barrenness of the cosmic drift, informing him and everything else in his life. One is born, one lives and one dies. There is no enlightening redemption from the starkness of this sterile charade. And all of a sudden the purport of ambition and achievement, of causes and goals, becomes opaque. And a weariness ensues. As Albert Camus writes:

But to a man who does not know why he is born, and why he will die, the din and fury of the intervening period becomes, at the first moment of corrosive questioning, a pointless pantomime.

But one day the 'why' arises, and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement... At certain moments of lucidity the mechanical aspects of their (men's) gestures, their meaningless pantomime make silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition: you cannot hear him but you see his incomprehensive dumb-show: you wonder why he is alive.

The greatness of the Gita was that it began by portraying this alienation. It recognized the thinking individual's rebellion against the unquestioning acceptance of the validity of effort. Arjuna was not Bheema whose actions were characterized by temperamental fluctuations; he was also unlike Yudhishtira, whose choice of volition had congenitally subordinated itself to the call of conventional duty. Arjuna's despair had authenticity because it afflicted *him*. The entire burden of his conditioning was to accept battle as his very *raison d'etre*. And yet, being Arjuna, at a crucial moment of his life he was consumed by doubt about the value, in any ultimate sense of his assumed role.

The aim of Krishna's discourse was to attempt to give purpose and context to the lives of people like Arjuna. The attempt was both adroit and Herculean; adroit because an armada of approaches were employed without scattering the focus of the exercise; and Herculean because the task was nothing less than to salvage for the individual a framework for existence, which would perhaps render palatable—or even help transcend—the essential meaninglessness of his life.

Krishna's first task was to devalue the human condition in its empirical attributes by postulating the infinitude of its essential and non-empirical attribute. It was an efficacious methodology, not because it was startlingly original, but because the basic Vedantic logic was put forward with refreshing clarity and as a pragmatic response to a specific existential situation. Arjuna could not comprehend an imperative for action in a phenomenal world that was stubbornly inexplicable. The Gita partially conceded his point. The world as perceived *prima facie* was indeed finite, tran-

sient and bereft of ultimate value. The body would wither away; friends and relatives were equally perishable; material wealth was ephemeral; the whole network of mortal life, unanchored to any larger, enduring reality, was a fleeting ripple in an endless sea of subsistence, and hence meaningless. But, said Krishna, there is, behind the bewildering futility of manifest phenomenon, something else which transcends empirical limitations. This is the Self, the Soul, the essential being, Atman, the Supreme Spirit, the Brahman—call it what you will. The body may suffer birth and death, but this Self is never born and does not die. It is indestructible, eternal, unchanging, immovable, indefinable, unseen and omnipresent.

* * *

The finality of death renders redundant mortal activity. The thread of life hangs in perpetual dread of the severance of death. Why? What for? To what purpose?—these are the questions which chip away the individual's sense of belief in his own being when confronted by his irrevocable vulnerability in the face of death. The assertion, therefore, that mortal death is not the final chapter, and that each *particular* soul on its way to salvation will reincarnate itself in another body, provides a continuum of perspective that at once imbues with value and meaning the scope of endeavour in this life. It gives to our otherwise puny and insignificant lives a larger canvas. The stage of our human here-and-now endeavours acquires a wider perspective. Our actions acquire intrinsic value, for their *quality* will determine the journey that our soul will take in more lives to come. Our *karmas* in this life will be responsible for the fruits we get in the next. Our actions are thus not forlornly adrift in isolation. At once we become part of a greater destiny, and the inert vacuum of purpose afflicting our lives is set aside by the breadth of this new vision. Life then becomes not a one-act, vaudeville show abruptly terminated by death, but a more serious business, with questions of purpose and meaning linked to a continuum governed by its own mortality—defying the dynamics of cause and effect.

Within this larger metaphysical framework, the question of how best to interface with the mundane world, with its daily tedium of action and choice, volition and consequence, remains. The Atman or Brahman may be eternally fulfilled, but the individual, even incorporating in himself an *ansh* (part) of that transcendent reality, has to strive to retain equilibrium and balance reflective of that reality, in the midst of the business of living. The bulk of the Gita is devoted to essaying a *modus vivendi* to answer this seminal existential poser. The first premise is that, in the human realm, involvement with action in some way or the other is unavoidable. There cannot be renunciation of action. The Gita is crystal clear on this:

> Not by refraining from action does man attain freedom from action. Not by mere renunciation does he attain supreme perfection.
>
> For not even for a moment can a man be without action. Helplessly are all driven to action by the forces born of Nature.
>
> He who withdraws himself from actions, but ponders on their pleasures in his heart, he is under a delusion and is a false follower of the Path.

If action cannot be avoided, then the next question is, how to 'cohabit' with it while retaining one's serenity and peace of mind. The 'action' in question here is not that which falls within the purview of mechanical stimulus and response. It is not an involuntary sequence of locomotion. The eye blinks, the tympanum vibrates, the nose twitches. The involuntary action of the

motor nerves is not at the core of the action-in-life which is the focus of the Gita. The Gita is concerned with action which is the result of *conscious choice*. It is this locus of movement which internalizes in itself the potential for turbulence. This was the source of trauma for Arjuna on that day of battle. In his own case the canvas was spectacular: shining banners, the battlefield and resplendent chariots. But the virus could as easily affect an ordinary clerk, one ordinary day, as he gets ready to go to the office: Is the effort justified? Is it required? What will be its reward? Can it be substituted by another course of action?

The clamour in action arises when the mental processes interface with the daily vicissitudes of living. This interface is unavoidable, but its consequences are not unalterable. An object, a person, a relationship, a situation, a place becomes important because we give it a certain value. The point to consider is, to what extent the giving of this value is a necessary and inherent aspect of the human situation.

* * *

The Gita firmly believes that the value-imbuing process is controllable. Going further, it strongly advocates that in order to overarch the tension and agitation of daily life, the individual should seek to control it. The Gita's prescription in this regard, breathtaking in its simplicity, but undoubtedly based on profound empirical observation, is that action-in-life should be performed free of attachment, sans desire, and most importantly, *without tainting it with the value of expectation*:

> Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work not for reward; but never cease to do thy work. Do thy work in the peace of Yoga and, free from selfish desires, be not moved in success or in failure. Yoga is evenness of mind—a peace that is ever the same.
>
> Work done for a reward is much lower than work done in the yoga of wisdom. Seek salvation in the wisdom of reason. How poor those who work for a reward !

A mind-set, acquired through conscious effort and discipline, which delinks the performance of action with a contemplation of its reward is, according to the Gita, an invincible panacea to the strife of daily living. Like much else in the Gita, it is an exhortation based on sound common sense. In the mortal world, involvement in action is unavoidable, but it hardly needs reiteration that there is no guaranteed nexus of efficacy between effort and achievement. There are in life too many imponderables and variables that can make the most well-planned actions go awry, and the most unintended effort achieve success.

> ***Each of us has an ego that strives for recognition and achievement....At one level it (Gita) devalues the scope of such an ego....At another level...[it] exalts the ego by claiming that it too is a part of the infinite Atman....***

* * *

But is the ideal of *nishkama karma—desireless* action—really feasible? After all, it appears but natural for an individual to work towards a result, to be conscious of the desired consequence of his efforts, to be seized, in short, of the likely rewards of his endeavours. Does the Gita, therefore, espouse an impracticable behavioural pattern? We are all conscious of our individual identities. Each of us has an ego that strives for recognition and achievement. Can this sense of 'I-ness', this *ahankar*, this consciousness of 'self' constantly striving for projection in competition with other individual egos, be nullified? The Gita's answer, draw-

ing heavily from the mainstream concepts of Hindu philosophy, is two-fold. At one level, it *devalues* the scope of such an ego. 'These warriors,' Krishna tells Arjuna, 'will one day cease to exist *even without you*.' A man who, therefore, thinks that without him the world around him will collapse is deluded. In a transient and ephemeral world there is a finiteness to our preoccupations, and an even greater finiteness to our abilities in configuring them. As Krishna reiterates: 'When a man sees himself as the only agent, he cannot be said to see.' More importantly, our actions are in the normal course, far less autonomous than we would like to believe. 'There is no being on earth, or among the Gods in heaven, free from the triad of qualities that are born of nature. but deluded by individuality, the self thinks, "I am the actor."

At another level, the Gita, as already stated earlier, *exalts* the ego by claiming that it too is a part of the infinite Atman, the supreme spirit. Once our individual self is assimilated in such an all-pervasive entity and elevated to such a transcendent pedestal, then the preoccupation with projecting our own little selves is logically diminished. The Upanishadic saying, *Tat Twam Asi*— That Thou Art—, becomes a three-word demolition squad against the normal expectation-ridden, ego-infested way of thinking.

* * *

If there is one dominant attribute of the Gita, it is its advocacy of the harmonious life as an overriding goal, valid in itself. Here its analysis is both ruthless and precise. The onslaught of the senses is forever at war with a person in pursuit of wisdom and serenity. If the onslaught is not checked, attachment arises, and from attachment, desire; desire leads to anger, and anger to confusion; confusion causes distortions in memory, and such distortion in turn leads to loss of understanding. Once understanding is lost, all is lost. Attraction and repulsion, attachment and hatred, are inherent in any interaction with the phenomenal world, if the senses are not kept in control. To the Gita, desire is the root cause of the loss of serenity. The power of desire is not underestimated; at more than one place the Gita equates it with a voracious fire, capable of devouring the resolve of even the wisest of men. The renunciation of desire is, however, not stated as a religious dictum; its harmful impact is psychologically analysed and its consequences spelt out with clinical elaboration. The man in the grip of desire is bound by a hundred shackles of hope, forever confused by fanciful thoughts, and consumed by pride, anger and greed. In short, desire while initially seductive is in the long run enslaving, and non-conducive to the peaceful life. It must therefore be vanquished through a control of the senses. 'Great Warrior,' Krishna exhorts Arjuna, 'kill the enemy menacing you in the form of desire.'

In stark contrast to the discordance and inadequacy of the man without harmony is the serenity and composure of the *sthita-prajna*, the man who has seen the reality of the world around him and his own role within it, and has his faculties and senses firmly in control. The Gita is most persuasively evocative in portraying the qualities of such a person. He is impartial to joy and sorrow, gain or loss, victory or defeat, failure or success. He neither exults nor hates. He is unmoved in fortune or misfortune, honour or disgrace. He is calm, controlled and poised, and possessed of a quietness of mind. Forever content, he is autonomous in his source of delight which is his inner self. He is beyond fear and anger and envy and greed. He has conquered cravings and passion and is free of desires, expectations and vain hopes. At peace with himself, his detachment is imbued with a transparent tranquillity. Imperturbable,

unwavering and still, his composure is not shaken by others, while others find peace in his presence.

* * *

In any case, in Hindu religious texts the intrusion by the Brahminical class of portions which give divine sanction to a social order congruent with their interests was not uncommon. It does seem likely, therefore, that the reference to the four *varnas* (castes) in the Gita, and its exhortation that the individual should acquiesce in their inflexible inequity, was included for such a purpose. Krishna was used as a mouth-piece for giving divine sanction to entrenched vested interests representing the Brahmin-Kshatriya coalition. To the same class would belong the following shloka in section 9: 'For all those who come to Me for shelter, however weak or humble or *sinful* they may be—women or Vaishyas or Shudras—they all reach the Path Supreme.'

The textual chastity of the Gita has been

> *To Arjuna...succour came not only because of the realization that there was, beyond death, another life...; to him solace came not only because he learnt of the beneficence of doing one's duty without thought of reward or gain; to him comfort came not only because he saw...the awesome infinity of the Divine; to him, deliverance came because Krishna said directly to him: 'Surrender your all unto Me and I will give you redemption.'*

blemished by such crude attempts to make it a vehicle for social biases and prejudice. The interpolatory nature of the attempt is also quite obvious. The *shloka* (verse) cited above fits in poorly with the general tenor of the section to which it belongs, and is even more out of place when seen against the totality of the Gita's perspective. More than anything else, to make Sringaramurtiman Krishna pronounce women as 'sinful' is, to say the least, disingenuously laboured, if not patently ludicrous.

This being said, it would be unfair to damn—as some recent commentators have done—the text as a whole for the unacceptable aberrations of a small segment of it. It is indeed a rare religious text that completely transcends the limitations of the thinking of its time, or is totally oblivious to the social circumstances of the period when it has been penned. There is, besides, another aspect to be considered. Perhaps, the Gita was deliberately less than sensitive to notions of social justice and egalitarianism because these concepts, while unquestionably valid in themselves, were not the primary focus of its concern. The Gita was seeking to essay the attributes of a life enduringly free from the viruses of anxiety and tension. Its aim was to give man a panacea for his perpetually destabilizing interaction with the world around him. Given this frame of reference, it is not inconceivable that, for the Gita, *contentment* was a higher goal than the agitation of mind that necessarily accompanies the struggle to change the parameters conditioning our daily existence. Of course, it would be wrong, even for a moment, to postulate that the Gita was consciously articulating a passive acceptance of injustice. Krishna asked Arjuna to pick up his bow and fight because the Kauravas represented injustice. It should not be judged as something it never sought to be. It was more a guide-book for enabling the individual to come to terms with the milieu around him.

* * *

But to return to the mainstream context of the Gita. The earth is a minor planet in our solar system. The sun is a minor star amidst the millions of other stars with their own solar systems that form our galaxy. And

there are millions of galaxies. The mind-boggling vastness of the universe, the timelessness of time, and the inevitability of creation, still act, for many, as a corrosive to faith. The notion that an individual life has an anchorage of purpose and meaning seems to stray adrift the moment we juxtapose it to the seamless canvas of its background. For those continuing to be assailed by such doubt, Krishna, in the Gita, offered redemption through an assertion of his own all-encompassing divinity. Arjuna, the ever questioning intellect, wanted visible proof of the Absolute to facilitate his quantum leap to faith. Philosophical reasoning and postulations were not sufficient for him. In the tenth and eleventh chapters of the Gita, Krishna fulfilled Arjuna's reverential curiosity. 'I am,' said Krishna, 'not only Vishnu, but also Shiva and all the other Gods; I am the mountain, I am the lake, I am the animal, and I am the bird and the serpent; I am the wind, I am the river, I am the sage, the detached philosopher, as also the God of Love; I am the creator of sound and its articulator, the beginning of time, time itself, and its destroyer. In Me are all the human attributes, the rhythm of every melody, the fragrance of every flower, the knowledge of every mystery. In short, I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all creation, and nothing animate or inanimate can exist without Me. And, even this elaboration,' he said, 'is not necessary; suffice it to know that the entire universe is pervaded and supported by but a fragment of My Being.'

But Arjuna wanted to see to believe. Beyond the theoretical description, he asked Krishna to physically reveal to him his being in all its majestic plenitude. Once again, Krishna complied, giving Arjuna, for that moment, a divine eye to see his glorious form. And Arjuna saw a Being whose radiance was equivalent to that of a thousand suns put together, a form which encapsulated in itself the entire universe, a Body, with innumerable arms and mouths, and eyes which had a glow as powerful as that of the sun and the moon. He saw too all the gods paying obeisance to this magnificent reality, whose beginning or end could not be seen, and in whom burnt the fires of destruction and of the terror of relentless time. In Him Arjuna saw the past, the present and the future, the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer. It was a wondrous experience, exalting as also daunting and, finally, unable to bear the sheer density and magnitude of the experience, Arjuna implored Krishna to assume again his human form.

Through this one interaction the votaries of the Krishna cult staked the claim of their deity as the presiding God in the Hindu pantheon. Such assertions were not uncommon in the ongoing struggle for supremacy between the sects and sub-sects of Hinduism, particularly among Vaishnavites and Shaivites. But, at a more personal level, there was something deeply stirring and human in Krishna's readiness to *reveal* his divinity in order to reinforce Arjuna's faith in him. This was not a remote and aloof god. As in his many other *roopas* (forms), Krishna was responsive saviour. His omnipresence was accessible; his omnipotence was approachable; and his omniscience was attainable. It was ultimately his Grace that provided, beyond logic and reason, the assurance of Salvation.

But they for whom I am the End Supreme, who surrender all their works to Me, and who with pure love meditate on Me and above Me—these I very soon deliver from the ocean of death and life-in-death, because they have set their heart on Me.

To Arjuna, the existential man, succour came not only because of the realization that

there was, beyond death, another life on the journey towards *moksha;* to him solace came not only because he learnt of the beneficence of doing one's duty without thought of reward or gain; to him comfort came not only because he saw for himself the awesome infinity of the Divine; to him, deliverance came because Krishna said directly to him: 'Surrender your all unto Me and I will give you redemption.' This guarantee of salvation was beyond fatiguing rationalizations and conceptualizations. It was a one to one bond of hope between the individual and his saviour. Faith and devotion were its only conditionalities.

> Hear again My Word supreme, the deepest secret of silence. Because I love thee well, I will speak to thee words of salvation.
>
> Give thy mind to Me and give Me thy heart, thy sacrifice, and thy adoration. This is My Word of promise: thou shalt in truth come to Me, for thou art dear to Me.
>
> Leave all things behind, and come to Me for thy salvation. I will make thee free from the bondage of sins. Fear no more.

The Gita was thus both a manual for life, a pragmatic and practicable guide on how to live with minimum strife and tension, and a gospel of personalized devotion, offering in the most unequivocal terms the benediction of unquestioning faith. The choice of interpretation is ours, and sometimes, there is no choice at all; for, in this empirical world, a person aching to give meaning to his life is likely to clutch at any and all straws that offer to him the possibility of hope.❐

PRACTICAL VEDANTA

UPRIGHTEOUSNESS

IT SO HAPPENED that when Khalifa Hazarat Ali was scrutinizing some official papers of his government, a gentleman came to meet him. Finding that the visitor had some personal matter to discuss, Hazarat immediately put out the lamp he was using and, in its stead, lit another one. This filled the visitor with curiosity, but he somehow suppressed his feelings.

Finishing his discussion, Hazarat once again put out this second lamp and lit the first one! This was too much for the visitor to bear any longer, and so he asked the Khalifa the reason for his acting so strangely. Hazarat replied: 'Sir, when you came in I was attending to some official work using the lamp supplied by the government. But should we spend government money for our personal matters? So I used my own lamp while talking with you!'