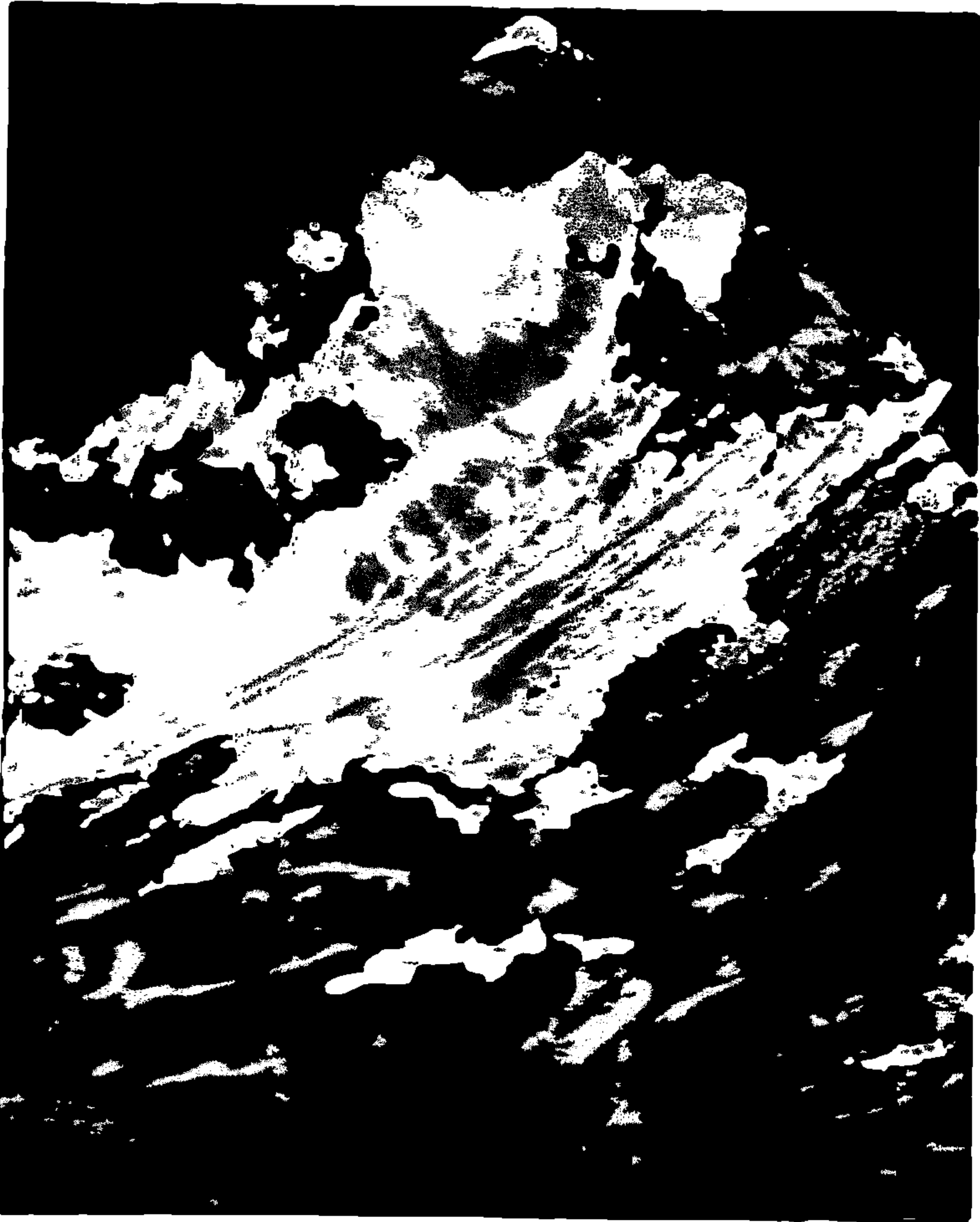


# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or Awakened India



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# Prabuddha Bharata

A Monthly Journal of the  
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*Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896*

JULY 1991

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

# Prabuddha Bharata

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No. 7

## The Divine Message

In our servile attendance on the (wealthy) wicked, their shabby manners and talk we have somehow put up with ; suppressing tears that welled up from our hearts, we have smiled out of vacant minds ; obeisance we have made to dullards stultified by too much wealth ; in what more fooleries wouldst thou have me dance, oh Desire, thou of ungratified yearning!

What have we not endeavoured to do, with our depraved conscience, for the sake of our *prāṇas* (five vital forces) which are unreliable and compared to water on the leaves of a lotus, since in the presence of the rich, with their minds stupefied by the pride of wealth, we have shamelessly committed the sin of recounting our own merits!

We have forgiven, but not out of forgiveness (but out of our incapacity to right our wrongs) ; we have renounced the comforts of home life, but not out of contentment after satisfaction (but as an exile from home in quest of riches) ; though we have suffered inclemencies of weather, cold and heat so difficult to bear, still it is not religious austerities that we have undergone ; with subdued vital forces, night and day have we brooded on money and not on the feet of Śiva ; thus we have performed those very acts which the Munis (saintly recluses) do perform, but of their good effects we have deprived ourselves.

The worldly pleasures have not been enjoyed by us, but we ourselves have been devoured ; no religious austerities have been gone through, but we ourselves have become scorched ; time is not gone (being ever-present and infinite), but it is we who are gone (because of approaching death). Desire is not reduced in force, though we ourselves are reduced to senility.

The face has been attacked with wrinkles, the head has been painted white with grey hair, the limbs are all enfeebled ; but desire alone is rejuvenating.

*Vairāgya Śatakam*

## Power of Words

SPEECH is the verbal expression of silent thought. The internal audible expression is word. Word and thought are inseparable. Speech is the vehicle which conveys our thoughts and feelings and thus builds a bridge of communication between human beings. The effective means of contact between two persons is speech. To express one's agreement or disagreement, annoyance or affection and so on, requires the medium of words. Our knowledge is preserved and built upon words. To accumulate and to transmit knowledge, communication is necessary. Knowledge, whether spiritual or secular, has to depend on some verbal structure. The scriptures of the world, though speaking in different languages, have the same thought and experience. Similar is the case with science and literature. Human pain and suffering, joy and pleasure are the same everywhere. But they are expressed in the myriads of languages differently. Science and technology have removed the barrier of physical distance between different nations, and as a result, the world has now become a closely knit society. Any new addition to human knowledge, new inventions or discoveries that are taking place all over the world, in no time become the common heritage of this united human society. Thoughts are translated into different languages so as to find their fruition in action. Therefore Thomas Mann, the famous writer went as far as to say that "Speech is civilization itself."

Without thought there cannot be word. And thought is not the exclusive property of any person or nation. On the other hand, language can be. But language is only an

external and inadequate symbol. Ironically, people neglecting the very essence attach much importance to these symbols and fight. India has become virtually a battleground over the issue of language. It is true that the mind becomes familiar, quite at home with the words and their meanings and phonemes of the mother tongue. It does not mean what is familiar is the superior. Then why this quarrel about language? The reason is not far to seek. The riddle lies in the human heart. Human beings, by nature, do not like anonymity, they want to be great and prominent. So, to them their culture, traditions, land and the language they speak are great. This superimposed greatness gives them a sense that they too are significant entities in the world. To establish their imaginary exalted status they coerce others to accept their own way of life and thinking. The moment a person says, "This is mine," he is attached to it.

Another arena of dissension is religion. Religious leaders instead of enlightening the minds and imparting ennobling truths to their followers, engage themselves in acrimonious quarrels over trivial things. "I like the silent church," wrote Emerson, "before the service begins, better than any preaching."<sup>1</sup> Whether the indwelling spirit is called Ātman, God, or Allah, or just 'Self' makes no difference to an earnest spiritual seeker. But these words and other external symbols mean a lot to idlers. Speech devoid of lofty thoughts is only thoughtless noise and uproar. There is more noise in the world than fruitful and purposeful speech. Barren, superfluous speech does more harm than good. Instead of soothing the bereaved hearts it stokes the

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1. R. W. Emerson, *Essays* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1910) p. 45.

flames of disturbance and disquietude. "I have often," remarked the Greek philosopher Plutarch, "regretted my speech, never my silence." Confucius, who lived in the fifth century B. C. in China, was a lover of silence. One day he took his disciples on an excursion to a museum. There was a statue, and attached to the lips of the statue's face were three clasps with the words:—"The ancients talked little; it is good for us to imitate them; those who talk much are liable to say things that should not be said."

The progress of civilization is chaotic. If it has advanced on one side it has also receded with equal momentum on the other. For everything that is gained something is lost. Our modern way of life has brought much comfort and ease and has degenerated the nerves and muscles of the organism. It has brought burgeoning advance in the field of medicine, but sacrificed good health. Invention and dependence on the software have dimmed the sharp thinking faculty. Spectacular growth in technology has ushered in disastrous consequences on the delicate eco-system. Civilization has brought much opulence but also increased mental unrest and tension. Increasing reliance on the high-tech gadgetry has swallowed up the natural skills of people. Acquisition of new arts has created a hiatus between man and Nature. Outwardly people appear to have become polite and charitable, but inside there is still the savagery of greed and hatred, and these are being nourished by heightened sense enjoyments. So our progress is like the vigorously pedalled stationary exercise-bike used for physical fitness. A rider covers in a few minutes five kilometres but remains at the same place.

In modern civilization, words have assumed enormous significance. Attractive and lavish advertisements in magazines, and the commercials on T V and radio provide ample testimony. The tremendous power of print-

media and the drumbeats of propaganda are some of the indicators. There seems to be an urgency to commit everything—either ugly or beautiful, ridiculous or sublime, into words. Words, barren words, have taken the place of experience. Yet the persons concerned are unaware of this. People think they understand something; they feel something; yet there is no direct experience except memory and hollow words. Due to exhausting repetitiveness of words, as mounting scientific evidence suggests, mind loses its spontaneity and freshness.

It cannot be denied, at the same time, that words are responsible for the extensive knowledge about the external universe. People now know more about different cultures, traditions and ways of thinking other than their own because of rapidly increasing dissemination of literature and cultural exchange programmes. The precious thoughts of great people would have been lost to posterity in the absence of words. Mankind owes much to the records of history. But it is also irrefutable that some recorded words have been the cause for great resentment and tension in human society. In India, still, many quote from the ancient outdated texts to show that women are not entitled to freedom and equality, or to justify resurrection of the diabolic sati-custom, or to try to perpetuate the stupidity of untouchability. In many countries, even in these days of fast progressing civilization, people adhere unthinkingly to such ancient superstitions because their recorded texts perhaps condoned them centuries ago. Many heinous crimes get their support from different religious books. Misinterpreted words have wrought great danger and are still doing harm. "Even a devil can quote scriptures," is an old adage. "How every fool can play upon the word!" exclaimed Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*. Inspired utterances of some great souls, despite many odds, have showered blessings on human society.

Buddha, therefore, laid great emphasis on right understanding (*sammādiṭṭhi* or *samyag dr̥ṣṭi*).

Proper understanding or wisdom can alone lead to right speech. In Buddha's *astāngika mārga*—the eightfold noble path that leads to spiritual freedom, right speech or control of speech (*sammāvāca* or *samyag vāk*) is one of them. Right speaking consists of abstention from lying, slander, using harsh words, and frivolous talk. People go in search of peace of mind but they themselves disturb their peace by excessive garrulity. Most people think that they have a wonderful opinion on all matters and they must say something to parade their wisdom before others. Uncalled-for or untimely speech more often than not mirrors the ignorance of the speaker. Most of our speech is frivolous talk devoid of any serious basis in thought. Speech surely dissipates psychic energy. Perhaps people are unconsciously aware of this weakness, therefore, their span of attention and capacity to listen to others is limited. One common observation at all meetings, conferences and seminars is that people in an audience patiently hear a speaker for a few minutes and then become fidgety and start to strike up conversations with one another and create a din. People do everything to avoid dreaded silence. They go to solitary places to relax their taut nerves. Ironically, even there they carry portable radios, TV's and cassette players to escape from the stillness. Often what begins as a mild fruitful discussion before long turns into an ugly heated argument or exchange of accusations. The unbridled mind leads to uncontrolled speech. Thoughts of anger, hatred, or jealousy, if one patiently waits, appear and disappear of their own accord, if left to themselves. But once the formless thoughts take the concrete shape in words, then it becomes difficult to escape from their formidable consequences. People never for-

get, even after many years, unkind words spoken to them. Malevolent words excite one to do unwise acts and bring misery. Words uttered by a fanatic wreck havoc in society. On the contrary, benevolent words or words of wisdom lead a groping soul to love and light. Mind is vulnerable to the influence of words, both constructive and destructive.

Distrust and fear of the tongue was voiced by the Christian James, a member of the semi-Buddhistic *Essene* sect and contemporary of John the Baptist. He said:

But let every man be swift to hear but slow to act. If any man thinketh himself to be religious while he bridleth not his tongue, he deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain. So the tongue is a little member and boasteth great things. Behold how much wood is kindled by how small a fire. And the tongue is a fire: a world of inequity among our members is the tongue; which defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beasts and birds, or creeping things, and things in the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind; but the tongue can no man tame: it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison.<sup>2</sup>

"Every idle word," warns the Bible, "that men shall speak, they give account thereof in the day of judgement."

Kind and well-spoken healing words have not only the power to draw people but also soften their hearts. Unkind and arrogant words cause revulsion in the mind and drive people away. A person with few, graceful and truthful words wins the goodwill of all. Everyone has an uncanny ability to detect whether a person speaks only from uncon-

2. D. Goddard, *The Buddha's Golden Path* (London: Luzac & Co., 1930) p. 38.

trolled habit or from the depth of his heart. Intense feelings and emotions do not require any artificial expression. When the heart is full the tongue is silent. In March 1911, Sri Sarada Devi stayed for about a week at the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore. Neither she could speak Kannada, the local language, nor could the people understand Bengali. Yet there was perfect understanding. One day she sat in the hall of the Ashrama surrounded by many devotees, in perfect silence as there was no verbal communication. When she expressed her anguish that a few words of hers could have given solace to the devotees, it was translated to the devotees present. They said in one voice, "No, no ; this is all right. Our hearts are full indeed. No words are needed on such an occasion."<sup>3</sup> When one does not trust his heart he surrenders the reins to the unruly tongue.

"Fortunes and misfortunes, friends and foes reside in one's tongue," is not an extravagant statement. "Mend your speech a little," cautions Shakespeare in *King Lear*, "lest you may mar your fortunes." The Sanskrit poet goes a little further and states: "Prosperity is in the gift of words ; tongue makes relatives and friends ; by wrong use of words one slips into an inescapable trap ; death knocks at his door who is unwise in the use of words."<sup>4</sup> Before one speaks one should be careful, otherwise later regrets will not mend the damage. Speech is a window to a person's character. One may be wealthy or powerful, but words uttered pierce all camouflage and reflect the true inner character. "One speaks as one thinks. If a man thinks of worldly things day and night, and deals with people hypocritically, then his

words are coloured by his thoughts. If one eats radish, one belches radish," says Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>5</sup> The wise saying of Bhartrhari is worthy of being remembered. He wrote: "Neither do bracelets, nor necklaces brilliant like the moon, nor bathings, nor the use of perfumes, nor flowers, nor decorated hair become ornaments to a man ; but it is speech with grace alone that adorns him. All other ornaments are destructible ; but the power of speech is an everlasting adornment."<sup>6</sup>

Some people boast that they are straightforward in speech, do not mince words and don't hesitate to speak boldly to the face of others what they feel. This is nothing but vanity. What they give to others will come back to them with compound interest. What goes out, ill or well, comes back to the sender—it is an inexorable law. People forget this and as an upshot suffer, blaming either their destiny or God. Talkative persons after doing some good to others go on for days bragging about it. Observing this weakness *Niti Sataka* states: "One should keep one's generosity a secret ; must extend cheerful hospitality to strangers arriving at one's doors ; should keep silent about the good he has done to others, but, on the other hand should proclaim among the people the benefits received from others."<sup>7</sup> The French novelist Alexander Dumas put it nicely—

5. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 686.

6. Bhartrhari's *Niti-Sataka*—19

केयूरा न विभषयन्ति पुरुषं हारा न चन्द्रोज्ज्वला  
न स्नानं न विलेपनं न कुसुमं नालंकृता मूर्धजाः ॥  
वाप्येका समलंकरोति पुरुषं या संस्कृता धार्यते  
क्षीयन्ते खलु भूषणानि सततं वाग्भूषणं भूषणम् ॥

7. *Niti-Sataka*—64

प्रदानं प्रच्छन्नं गृहमुपगते संभ्रमविधिः

प्रियं कृत्वा मौनं सदसि कथनं चाप्युपकृतेः ॥

3. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1969) p. 248.

4. लक्ष्मीर्वसति जिह्वाग्रे जिह्वाग्रे मित्रबान्धवाः ।  
बन्धनं चैव जिह्वाग्रे जिह्वाग्रे मरणं ध्रुवम् ॥

“Forgetting what one gives, and remembering what one receives.” Once Swami Saradananda said humorously about one woman devotee of the Master, who though otherwise good, was given to much talkativeness: “If she gives even a tender-coconut, the entire household will know of it by her shouting.” Even Sri Sarada Devi remarked on the harsh tongue of this particular devotee, “It is not good to be so much talkative. One only invites misery for oneself by constantly dwelling on defects in everything. G—has lost all sense of delicacy in her obsession about speaking the truth. I, for one, cannot bring myself to do that. An unpleasant truth should never be told.”<sup>8</sup> This recalls to us the famous advice given in the *Manusmṛiti*: “Speak the truth, speak the pleasant; do not speak the unpleasant truth, do not speak the pleasant untruth. This is the ancient Law.”<sup>9</sup>

Once at Dakshineswar a devotee was behaving in an improper way and Swami Adbhutananda found it impossible to check his irritation. He scolded him and the devotee felt very hurt. Sri Ramakrishna knew how the devotee had suffered, and when the devotee had left he said to Adbhutananda: “It is not good to speak harshly to those who come here. They are tormented with worldly problems. If they come here and are scolded for their shortcomings, where will they go? In the presence of holy company never use harsh words to anyone, and never say anything to cause pain to another.”<sup>10</sup> Such was the limitless compassion of Sri Ramakrishna! A few ambrosial words

issued from his lips used to dispel the dark clouds from the hearts of his listeners.

In the *Gita* speech is called *Tapas*—verbal austerity. It states: “Speech that is inoffensive, truthful, pleasant and beneficial, as also the study of the scriptures, is called verbal austerity.”<sup>11</sup> The *Bible* also warns, “The stroke of the tongue breaketh bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword; but not so many as have fallen by the tongue. And weigh thy words in a balance and make a door and bar for thy mouth.” One’s speech should be short and contain only precise words. When one is in a fit of anger or emotionally upset, one should try one’s best to refrain from the uncontrolled outbursts. When once words go out they cannot be stalled. Words feed on words and may lead to undesirable, violent actions and reactions. The tendency of the mind is to brood over some silly and petty matters and magnify them. It usually results in making a mountain out of a molehill. The monologue that goes on incessantly in the mind through the medium of words gives rise to all kinds of wild imaginings. One impetuous remark can cause much mental anguish. There is a humorous story in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Once a gentleman while being shaved by a barber was slightly cut by the razor. At once he cried out, “Damn.” The barber didn’t know the meaning of the word and insisted on knowing what it meant. But when he did not get any proper reply he said, “If ‘damn’ means something good then I am a ‘damn’, my father is a ‘damn’ and all my ancestors are ‘damns’. But if it means something bad, then you are a ‘damn’, your father is a ‘damn’, and all your ancestors are ‘damns’.”

The question arises how to deal with

8. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1984), p. 119.

9. *Manu Samhita*

सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् न ब्रूयात् सत्यमप्रियम् ।

प्रियं च नानृतं ब्रूयादेष धर्मः सनातनः ॥

10. Swami Chetanananda, *Sri Ramakrishna As We Saw Him* (St. Louis, Vedanta Society of St. Louis, U.S.A., 1990) p. 86.

11. *Gita*, XVII—15.

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।

स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥



wicked people? One can rebuke these people, but without hatred or malice. One has the right to hiss at these people but not to bite. Therefore it is said while dealing with the wicked watchfulness and caution should be exercised (*Śāṭhyam sada durjane*).

Of all the powers truth is the most powerful. Everything pays homage to it. The character of a truthful person is like the transparent waters of the Himalayan Ganga. His words are packed with immense power and purity. A liar or corrupt person, day and night is worried and anxious to shield his lies and misdeeds from exposure to the public. He spends sleepless nights in para-

lyzing fear at the prospect of sudden detection. Such a guilt-ridden life is a miserable one, in spite of worldly possessions and position. A truthful person, on the contrary, is free and happy. He may not have worldly goods or social status, but the contented and joyous life possible for him will make even a king envious. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna and other great souls emphasize again and again the importance of truth. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Even those engaged in worldly activities, such as office work or business, should hold to the truth. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in the Kaliyuga."<sup>12</sup>

12. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 177.

## Cry for Ties

DR. K. S. RANGAPPA

Man alone perhaps  
Pines for coordinates  
—Family, friends, forbears,  
Behind, before, all around.

Ego-bound, without egos beside,  
Right and left and centre,  
Lost he feels  
In time, in space.

Crowded more, prouder he is.  
Happier, too, he fondly believes,  
If he brighter burn  
Than brother stars.

Affinity each  
He quite forgets,  
Is coordinate, pinned the more,  
Of built-in pain early or late.

Every hook and bond  
Is mortal, he knows;  
Yet he hopes,  
Himself and planets his own  
Will last and last.

The sun-god, too,  
Seeming for ever,  
Born somewhere,  
Will die some day.

The timeless ONE, if he but saw  
Is feel beyond feel  
Of silent SELF within himself,  
Ticking away,  
Awake, adream, asleep,  
He'd happily do  
With or without egos more,  
For peace unspeakable, deathless, too.

# The Origin of the Universe—Science and the Vedas

K. K. BHATNAGAR

*Modern Physics is trying independently to unravel the deep mystery of cosmogony. But the Vedas, thousands of years ago, aphoristically outlined the origin of the universe. Will the findings of the new Science and the intuitive predictions of the Vedic Seers be the same? asks the author. Sri K. K. Bhatnagar serves in the Indian Administrative Service.*

CONJURE a picture of many millions of atoms frothing in an ocean of undefinable fluid energy. The image is somewhat similar to the earliest stages of the universe when present-day galaxies were only of the size of tiny groups of atoms, waiting excitedly to burst forth from their abode of compact energy fields to hurtle away from the centre of the 'big bang'.

Can one imagine the power of the system or person who could cause the explosion of an order which would throw millions of galaxies, each containing millions of stars, in a million different directions?

The existence of such a system cannot be envisioned with any degree of accuracy, but our five thousand year old Vedas tell us allegorically that the Person/Force who performed the miracle was the *Ādi-puruṣa* (God) who, if He were to be conceived in human terms, would have thousands of heads (*sahasra-śiṅṣāḥ*), thousands of eyes (*sahasra-akṣaḥ*), and thousands of feet (*sahasra-pāt*). If the spiritual words of the *Vedas* are to be believed, it checks logically, because only a miraculous superman with supernatural strength could throw anything with such force. However, to return to the actual recitation in the *Vedas*, let us turn to the original verse that threw up the questions of what, and how, and when of the origin of the universe. Along with this, let us trace the creation of the universe through

the twin time-streams of the *Vedas* and Particle Physics, and see for ourselves the startling resemblance between what is being seen now in modern physics and what was said by our ancients thousands of years ago—

*Na asat āsīt no sat āsīt tadānīm,  
na āsīt rajaḥ no vyomā paroḥ yat.  
Kim āvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarman,  
ambhaḥ kim āsīt gahanaḥ gabhīram.*

(*R̥g Veda, Nāsadiya Sūkta, Verse 1*)

*The non-existent was not (then) nor was the existent (then), the earth was not (existent), nor the firmament, nor that which is beyond, (when there was nothing then); what could cover what, and where, and in whose care? Did the waters and the bottomless deep (then exist)?*

In this 'hymn of creation' a profound height of speculative enquiry is seen. We think of the world and things therein as either existing or non-existing; we do not imagine beyond these two alternatives. Here, the author of the verse goes beyond and speculates on the nature of existence itself. In the beginning, was the world non-existent? If so, how could the existent come out of the non-existent? For, is it not a fact that in the beginning the earth did not exist, nor did the stars and the firmament? How did they come about then, and by whose power?

The most current and authentic belief today in the circle of high physics about the creation of the universe is that it began as the 'nebula', meaning an intense, red hot cloud from which galaxies came to be formed, and eventually, our own earth and life were created. Consider now the following verses of the *R̥g Veda*—

*Hiraṇyagarbhaḥ samavartatāgre bhūtasya  
jātaḥ patiḥ ekaḥ āsīt  
saḥ dād̥hāra p̥rthivīm dyāmutemām  
kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema  
(Hiraṇyagarbha Sūkta, Verse, 1)*

*In the beginning of creation there existed the Hiraṇyagarbha. He was the sole master of all that was created. He upheld the Earth and the Heaven...*

The word *Hiraṇyagarbha* means one whose interior is lustrous (like gold). This is the *Vedic* expression to denote the brightness and effulgence of the 'nebula' which was the first product of creation.

*Āpaḥ ha yat b̥rhatīḥ viśvam āyan  
garbham dadhānā janayantīḥ agnim  
tataḥ devānām samavartata asuh  
ekaḥ kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema.  
(Hiraṇyagarbha Sūkta, verse 7)*

*Āpaḥ* means the primordial matter. The root of this word means 'that which is spread all over'. The whole meaning is—'the primordial matter (or the nebula) which is spread over the universe in the beginning of creation, containing in itself the seed or generative fire'.

The above two verses bring us close to the initial physical reality of one compact, shining (full of energy) field, i.e., the nebula. Then—

*Tasmāt virāt ajāyata virājaḥ adhi puruṣaḥ  
saḥ jātaḥ ati aricyata paścāt bhūmim  
atho puraḥ.*

*(Puruṣa Sūkta, Verse 5)*

*From the (one fourth of) Puruṣa was born the Virāt (same as Hiraṇyagarbha). When the Virāt came into being, it expanded, and later the earth was born.*

The principle of conversion of energy into matter is delineated in the following verse—

*Tam yajñam barhiṣi praukṣan puruṣam  
jātamaḡrataḥ  
tena devāḥ ayajanta sādhyāḥ  
ṛṣayaḥ ca ye.*

*(Puruṣa Sūkta, Verse 7)*

The heart of this verse is the word *Yajña*, which is best and usually described as 'sacrifice', but signifies also surrender, dissolution (or death) and re-creation, which is what actually happens during the involution and evolution of the universe.

*Tiraścīnaḥ vitataḥ raśmiḥ eṣām  
adhahsvit āsīt uparivrit āsīt  
retodhāḥ āsan mahimānaḥ āsan svadhā  
avastāt prayatiḥ parastāt.  
(Nāsadiya Sūkta, Verse 5)*

*The rays (or desire of the Creator) spread across (the whole world). The result was that the small organisms, bearing seeds (were born) and big organisms (bearing seeds) were born.*

And thus, life sprang up.

The real mystery occurs before the stage of the 'big bang'. At one stage there was nothing, and suddenly, WHAM! The inky blackness of the universe was filled with red hot gases which in time converted into millions of galaxies. How did this happen?

Let us know what modern physicists say about it. According to them, the universe

in its first stages was 'a false vacuum'—a nothingness which actually contained something. This was a vacuum in which no particles existed, but which was permeated by energy, out of which particles eventually congealed like raindrops from a cloud.

Today, when the concept of existence itself is questioned, particles of matter are imagined as invisible energy clouds one moment, and real visible matter the next. Thus, the stage of 'nothingness' before the big bang is really a silence pregnant with activity. From this intermediate stage, the emergence of galaxies in their hot nascent stage is easily explainable.

Consider, on the other hand, some verses of the *Veda* predicting this mysterious intermediate stage, at the time of their writing thousands of years ago—

*Yah cit āpaḥ mahinā paryapaśyat dakṣam  
dadhānāḥ janayaṅtiḥ yajñam  
yah deveṣu adhi devaḥ ekah āsīt kasmāi  
devāya haviṣā vidhema  
(Hiraṇyagarbha Sūkta, Verse 8)*

*(One who) by his might held primordial material which contained in itself the dexterity (and potency) to create sacrifice (to bring forth the Primeval Creation.)*

Once again, the verse already quoted, no. seven of the *Hiraṇyagarbha Sūkta*—"The primordial matter contains in itself the seed of generating fire."

And finally—

*Sataḥ bandhum asati niravindan hr̥di  
pratīsyā kavayaḥ manīṣā.  
(Nāsadīya Sūkta, Verse 4)*

*They find that bond of existence in non-existence by seeking it within their heart. The link, the intermediate position connec-*

ting the existent with the non-existent was there in the non-existent all the time. It only needed someone to see it. This is why the verse emphasises on *those who seek (that mystery) within the heart of things...*

Who were the early *Rṣis* (Seers) who explained the nature of creation of the universe, and how? It is obvious that they were men of profound learning, acquired not through experimentation, for sophisticated means of such experimenting were not in their possession then. These men acquired their knowledge through deep meditation and pure reasoning, a method adopted by much acclaimed Greek philosophers later.

Have we reached the end of the mystery? Once, scientists postulated the existence of a molecule as the smallest particle in the universe, but they were later overtaken by the atom, and further by the electron, proton and neutron. Today, mischievously, a large number of still smaller, subatomic particles keep proliferating with impunity, thus questioning the very concept of 'smallest' or 'basic'. Among these are neutrinos, mesons, and pi-mesons, to name only a few out of the two-hundred odd. And whether they are particles or clouds or probabilities in energy, only God knows.

Perhaps, the clincher is still in the word 'God'. However, the *Veda* seem to be having the last word on even this question—

*Iyam viṣṭiḥi yataḥ āvabhūva yadi va  
dadhe, yadi va na  
yah asya adhyakṣaḥ parame vyoman  
saḥ anga veda yadi vā na veda  
(Nāsadīya Sūkta, Verse 7)*

*Whence this creation has come; who holds or does not hold? He who is its surveyor in the highest Heaven; He alone knoweth—and yet doth He know?*

# The Mother of All

SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

*Sri Sarada Devi is often called the Mother of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Atmasthanandaji describes how the Holy Mother through Divine Love and her innate acumen nursed the fledgling Order to grow to its present proportions with branches spread all over the world.*

ONCE Girish had an intense desire to have the presence of the Holy Mother in his home during the worship of Durgā. The Mother acceded to his wish, and left Jayarambati for Calcutta. She stayed at Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. During the first two days of the worship she remained at Girish's home from morning till evening accepting the salutations of hundreds of people. She was not feeling well, and the strain of the two days made her very ill. So it was decided that she could not be present during the most auspicious *sandhi-pūjā* (worship done at the juncture of the eighth and ninth lunar days) at night. Hearing it, Girish felt so much depressed that he refused to go to the worship hall. But when the sacred moment approached, the Holy Mother suddenly appeared, having walked all the way with a woman companion from Balaram's house at night. Girish's joy knew no bounds. With a voice choked with emotion and gasping breath he began to tell everybody present there: "I thought my worship was in vain, but just now Mother has come, herself knocking at the door and announcing, 'Here I am.'" Thus Girish was blessed with the privilege of worshipping the Living Durga as his own mother.

Sri Sarada Devi was looked upon as the true Mother by Sri Ramakrishna's women disciples as well. Among them was the saintly orthodox widow known as Gopala's Mother. She saw in Sri Ramakrishna her Chosen Deity the child Krishna (Gopala). To her the Holy Mother was the manifesta-

tion on earth of the Primal Power, and spiritual complement to her (*Iṣṭa*) Gopala. She used to say to Holy Mother: "Unless I see both of you as inseparable, my mind doesn't feel satisfied." When Gopala's Mother lay on her deathbed the Holy Mother came to see her. When she was informed of the Mother's presence the old lady said, "Gopala, you have come?... Today you should take me on your lap." The Holy Mother lifted the head of Gopala's Mother on her lap. The dying saint wanted to touch the feet of the Mother as a mark of respect. Someone took the dust of the Mother's feet and put it on her head. For Gopala's Mother, Holy Mother was inseparable from her Gopala-Krishna.

Another woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was known to all the devotees as Gauri-Ma, but the Holy Mother used to call her Gaur-Dasi. She used to speak of the Mother as "the Living Divine Mother of the Universe", the Goddess Lakṣmi, herself; the Power of Brahman, and so on. In the name of the Holy Mother, Gauri-Ma established an ashrama for women and girls and gave it the name *Sāradeśwarī Āshrama*. She was instrumental in spreading public awareness of the true greatness of the Mother. The Holy Mother's closest attendant for thirty years was Golap-Ma. She managed the Mother's household when the Mother used to stay in Calcutta, and was convinced that the Holy Mother was Mahā-Māyā, born to give liberation to people. Another close associate of the Mother was Yogin-Ma. From a vision

granted to her by Sri Ramakrishna, Yogin-Ma gained the realization that the Holy Mother was utterly pure, undefiled by the evils of the world. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma were to the Holy Mother what Jayā and Vijayā are to the Divine Mother Durgā.

Sri Sarada Devi is the Mother of the entire Ramakrishna Order. She began playing this role even during her Dakshineswar days during the Master's lifetime. Sri Ramakrishna was a strict disciplinarian and had instructed the Holy Mother to give Rakhal, Baburam, Latu and other young disciples only two or three pieces of bread (*chapatis*) at night. But how can a mother put such restrictions upon her children's food? So the Holy Mother gave the boys as many *chapatis* as they wanted. When Sri Ramakrishna objected to this on the ground that overeating would spoil their midnight meditation, the Mother replied: "Simply because they have eaten two more pieces of bread, why do you worry? I shall take care of their future welfare." The reply pleased the Master, for it assured that the responsibility of the future Monastic Order was in competent hands. Thus Sri Ramakrishna himself was the first to recognize the Holy Mother as the *Saṅgha-Janani*, the Mother of the Order.

However, it was Swami Vivekananda who actually coined the term *Saṅgha-Janani* and gave currency to it. He said: "*This Order of ours—she (the Holy Mother) is its Guardian, Protectress; she indeed is the Mother of our Order.*" In fact, the establishment of the Ramakrishna Order was in response to her earnest prayer. It is her boundless love that is circulating in the Order, holding together all its members. Right from the very inception of the Order the Holy Mother had firm faith in its greatness and future possibilities. Any utterance of hers was regarded as a command by the founding fathers. Everyone, from Swami Vivekananda

to the juniormost monk was always eager to follow Mother's instructions. Once there was a financial difficulty while conducting plague-relief work in Calcutta. Swamiji even thought of selling the Belur Math, but gave up the idea as the Mother disapproved of it. It was with the Holy Mother's permission and in her name that Swamiji celebrated the worship of Durgā in the image for the first time at Belur Math. And although Swamiji wanted to include the customary animal sacrifice, this too was given up as the Mother disapproved of it.

The Holy Mother took a lively interest in the day-to-day activities of the various centres of the Ramakrishna Order. She reproved the head of the Koalpara Ashrama for being too authoritarian and calculating in his management for the inmates, and advised him to be loving to all. She stressed the importance of love as the binding force in the monastic community. When three of her disciples received Sannyāsa from her she prayed to Sri Ramakrishna: "Master, protect their vow of Sannyāsa. Wherever they may be—in the hills, on the mountains, in the forest or in wilderness—provide them food."

Holy Mother fully approved of Swami Vivekananda's introduction of work and social service as an essential part of monastic life. When a monk once raised the subject that in the view of some people it was against the ideal of Sannyāsa to run hospitals, keep accounts, etc. the Mother said in clear terms: "If you don't work, with what will you occupy yourselves day and night? Is it possible to meditate all the twenty-four hours? ...Everything shall go on as the Master ordains. The Math will continue as it is doing now. Those who can't put up with this will clear out." When the head of a centre complained to her that even well-to-do people came to their charitable dispensary, the Holy Mother advised him to keep

the door of the dispensary open to all without any restrictions.

How much the welfare of the children of Sri Ramakrishna was in her mind was made clear from another incident. Once during the worship of Durgā at Jayrambati, when all had departed after offering flowers at her feet, the Mother said to a Brahmacharin, "Bring more flowers, and offer them on behalf of Rakhal, Tarak, Sarada, Khoka, Yogen, and Gopal. Offer flowers in the names of all my known and unknown children." It so happened that one of her monastic sons had to leave the Order. She gave him this consoling assurance: "Can a mother ever forget her child? Know for certain; I am always at your side. Don't fear." She always held high the ideal of Sannyāsa before her sons. About a monk she said one day, "Why should he live with a householder just because he is ill? There are Maths and Ashramas. A monk is a model of renunciation." In all her decisions she kept in view the all-round welfare of the Monastic Order. She herself arranged for the transfer of ownership of Sri Ramakrishna's birthplace (Kamarpukur) and her own (Jayrambati) to the Belur Math. When Swami Vivekananda established an Ashrama at Mayavati in the Himalayas for the practice and propagation of Advaita, he made the rule that no external worship of any kind should be performed there. When one of her disciples wrote to the Holy Mother seeking her view on the above rule, she replied to him: "He who is our Guru (Sri Ramakrishna) is all Advaita. Since you are all his disciples, you too are Advaitins. I can emphatically say, you are all surely upholders of Advaita." After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, the Holy Mother guided the Saṅgha through its formative period for thirty-four long years.

The Mother had equal love for both monks and the laity. Even for those who were not

her initiated disciples she had the same motherly love. She used to keep in mind the individual preferences and needs of her children. When preparing food she always took care to give each person his favourite dish. Everyone felt that it was him or her that the Mother loved most. She used to pray for her initiated disciples in this way: "O Lord, awaken their spiritual consciousness; grant them liberation; take care of their welfare both here and hereafter. This world is full of sorrow and suffering. Please see that they won't have to come back to this world again." Again, "O Lord, I have so many children in different places. Please look after those whom I can't remember. Do all that is good for them."

Being a mother, she could take food only after all her children were fed. Once on her birthday her attendants somehow persuaded her to take her own food first, but she could not eat more than a morsel. She said, "Unless my children are fed, food won't go down my throat." She observed no caste or class distinctions at the time of giving initiation. Brahmins, non-Brahmins, weavers, hunters, railway porters, fallen women, Christians, Parsees—for all she kept the door to spirituality open.

Her monastic disciples were special objects of her selfless love. What Swami Virajanda felt after he had been acquainted with her only for a short time he recorded: "...In this way she would snatch away one's mind and heart and make herself dearer than one's own self. At home I used to love my mother very much, and she too loved me so much. But the Holy Mother is my mother not for this birth alone; she is my eternal Mother." After her Sannyāsi-disciples had finished their meal, she herself would remove their plates and clean the place. If any of them tried to dissuade her she would reply with disarming simplicity, "I am their mother. If a mother did not do

such things for her children, who else would ?”

Once when the Mother was staying at Koalpara, a Brahmacharin fell ill at Jayrambati. He became indifferent to food. Mother sent for him. For fear of passing the infection on to her, he stood at a distance and talked to her. But the Mother made him sit near her and affectionately stroked his body. She never called any of her sannyāsin children by their monastic names. “That is because I am their mother; it breaks my heart to think of their renouncing all,” she would explain. A monk once asked the Mother how she looked upon them. She answered: “I look upon you as Nārāyaṇa (God in the form of human beings) and also as my sons.”

She was in no way less a mother to householders. One householder devotee asked her: “I call you ‘Mother’, but I want to know whether you are really my own mother.” The Holy Mother replied, “Am I not your own mother? Certainly I am your own mother.” A woman once saw that her son was eating his meal with much enthusiasm in the Holy Mother’s presence, whereas he never did so at home. When the lady mentioned this, Holy Mother said with a mother’s pride, “Don’t you cast aspersions on my son. I am a mendicant woman. Whatever food I give my children they eat it with relish.”

One day a lady devotee came to see her, walking a long way in the hot sun. The Holy Mother, with great tenderness, started fanning her. Another lady who was of low caste brought one day some dishes cooked by herself. It was not customary in those days for Brahmins to eat food cooked by non-Brahmins. So one of the Mother’s nieces blurted out, “You ask for such things, that is why she brings them.” To this the Holy Mother replied, “She is my daughter; should I not ask her for such things?” A baby of a

certain woman devotee once soiled the floor and Holy Mother cleaned it up with her own hands. “Why should I not do it?” remarked the Mother. “Is she a stranger?” A young man with a blot on his character used to visit the Holy Mother at Jayrambati. Everybody requested the Mother to forbid his coming to the village. The Mother’s sorrowful response was: “Being a mother, how can I ask him not to come? Such an injunction will never come out of my mouth.”

In 1911 the Holy Mother visited Madras in response to the earnest request of Swami Ramakrishnananda. The people there could not understand Bengali, nor could the Mother follow their language, Tamil. But when she gave initiation to them there was no need for an interpreter. The Mother herself taught them the Mantra, how to do *Japam* and meditation, and so on, and they understood everything. It was as if there was an eternal relationship between them. From Madras the Holy Mother went to Bangalore. One day Swami Vishuddhananda took her out to visit a nearby temple. When they returned to the Ashrama they found the courtyard filled with devotees. As the Holy Mother got down from the carriage, they all prostrated before her *en masse*. Moved by the sight, the Mother stood in silence for a few minutes with her right arm extended in benediction. The whole atmosphere was charged with a mystic silence. Then the Mother walked into the prayer hall of the Ashrama and sat there. The devotees also sat all around her. There was complete silence. Mother then expressed her sorrow at not being able to speak with them in Kannada. But the devotees replied in one voice, “No, no, this is all right. Our hearts are full. No words are needed on such an occasion.” The communication barrier between the Mother and her children had been overcome through the universal language of the heart.



The Holy Mother's all-embracing love was not confined to the people of India alone. Her great heart knew no geographical barriers and in its universal embrace included all people of all nations, races and cultures. During India's freedom struggle when anti-British feeling ran high, the Holy Mother said, spontaneously revealing her breadth of vision: "They (the British people) also are my children." And she made this remark in spite of the fact that quite a number of her disciples were engaged in anti-government and even revolutionary activities. When Swami Vivekananda's western disciples, Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss MacLeod, Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine, came to Calcutta, the Holy Mother immediately accepted them as her own daughters and made them feel at home in their new environment. Sister Devamata and another lady (from Poland) coming to her later on felt the same maternal affection. Even at the very first meeting with Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss MacLeod and Nivedita, the Holy Mother made them feel that they had their place in her lap. In order to remove from their minds any hesitation, she ate with them. This evidently gave much relief and joy to Swamiji who exclaimed, "Isn't that wonderful! Mother ate with them." Sister Christine and Sister Devamata also had an equal share of Mother's love. It was at the earnest request of Mrs. Bull that the Holy Mother allowed her photo to be taken at Nivedita's Bose Para house. Mother at first did not agree to the proposal. But when she said, "Mother, I will take it (the photo) to America and worship it," the Mother could not refuse her daughter's sincere wish. This photo, which is now being worshipped everywhere, was the first photo ever taken of Holy Mother. Josephine MacLeod was overwhelmed by the Mother's love. She used to say, "Sarada Devi is endowed with divine insight," and "Sarada Devi is the Madonna, Mother Mary, of this new religious community."

One night, Miss MacLeod was returning to her dwelling after visiting the Holy Mother at the Udbodhan. With her was a Brahmacharin carrying a lantern to show the way. Miss MacLeod was wrapt in thought and muttering to herself, "I have seen her, I have seen her." Suddenly she became aware of the Brahmacharin's presence and, in a mood of exultation, whispered to him, "The Holy Mother! I have seen her." Among the Western women devotees it was Sister Nivedita who had the closest contact with the Holy Mother. Once she wrote to the Mother that when she prayed to the Virgin Mary, Sri Sarada Devi's form flashed in her mind. In the same letter she added, "Surely, you are the most wonderful thing of God—Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of his love for the world—a token left with his children, in these lonely days, and we should be very still and quiet before you." In her great work, *The Master as I Saw Him*, Sister Nivedita wrote: "She really is, under the simplest, most unassuming guise, one of the strongest and greatest of women." Sister Christine who worked with Nivedita at the latter's school, was also equally fortunate to have the Mother's love. When, a few days after Nivedita's untimely death, Sister Christine visited the Holy Mother, the Mother remarked that they two had lived together. Now it would be so sad for her to live alone. Sister Devamata, who was a disciple of Swami Paramananda, was another favoured Western daughter of the Holy Mother. She wrote about her first meeting with the Mother: "I...found Holy Mother alone in a room behind the Shrine and laid myself and my offerings at her feet. She repeated my name twice with tender surprise. Then she placed her hand in blessing on my head. At her touch a spring of new life seemed to bubble up from my innermost heart and flood my being." There was no need for an interpreter, for Mother communicated in the language of the heart. Deva-

mata had the capacity to understand the unique greatness of the Holy Mother. She wrote: "Unbounded was her tender concern for every living thing. No human measure could contain it...All alike were her children. Hers was an all-embracing mother-heart which wrapped itself in love about every child born of woman, and her family was the human race."

Holy Mother could adapt herself to the manners and customs of different people. One summer afternoon an European lady came to see her. Saying, "*Esho*"—come in, the Holy Mother stretched her hand in the European manner and caught hold of the woman's hand. Then according to Bengali custom, she touched the woman's chin with her hand, which is the same as a mother's kiss. The woman's daughter was ill, and so she had come to seek the Mother's benediction. Holy Mother blessed her wholeheartedly, and her daughter soon recovered. Later on, the lady took initiation from the Mother. To Sri Sarada Devi no one was a foreigner.

She was the Mother of doctors as well. At different times during her life and at different places—Jayarambati, Koalpara, Calcutta—she had been treated by at least a dozen doctors who followed different systems of medicine—allopathic, homeopathic and ayurvedic. Among them Dr. Bipin Behari Ghosh and Dr. Satish Chakravarti (a brother of Swami Saradananda) were devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Some others like Drs. Kanjilal, Sajani Babu, Lalbihari Sen and Swami Maheswarananda were initiated

disciples of the Holy Mother. That the Mother should have love for them all as her own children was only natural to her. But it is indeed remarkable that she should extend the same love to a stranger, Dr. Prandhan Bose, who was a Christian and one of the most distinguished physicians in Calcutta in those days. His coming was during the Mother's last illness. Dr. Prandhan Bose had to be brought by taxi and paid sixteen rupees per visit. He accepted the amount from the Mother's household for the first few days. But after his visits when he came downstairs he always found plenty of sweets, fruits and flowers in the cab, which had been kept there by the Mother's instructions. The doctor was touched by the love and kindness shown by the Mother. One day he asked Swami Saradananda, "Whom have I been treating all these days?" When the Swami informed him about the Mother, he was completely changed. From that day the doctor stopped charging fees, and even when the treatment was changed after a few days, he continued to make his call every day paying the cab fares himself. The renowned physician Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, and Dr. Sureshchandra Bhattacharya also, had occasion to experience the Holy Mother's love. Kaviraj Rajendranath Sen, Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati and Kaviraj Kalibhushan Sen were some of the well known ayurvedic physicians who also had the privilege of treating the Mother. Whenever they came Holy Mother would always see that they were given plenty of mangoes, sweets, etc. as gifts.

(to be concluded)

# Spinoza's Conception of God

DR. V. GOPALAKRISHNAIAH

*This thoughtful essay delineates the transcendental and immanent nature of God, as conceived by the famous philosopher. The author is Reader in the Department of Philosophy at Andhra University, Waltair, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.*

BENEDICT SPINOZA (1632-1677) was a rationalist in spirit. He held that knowledge comes through Reason. The knowledge which comes through opinion is not valid. There is yet another source of knowledge, intuition. Religious thinkers depend upon intuition as a source of knowledge. As a philosopher Spinoza depends upon rational understanding, reflection and speculation for solving problems. He was very much influenced by Bruno and Descartes. Descartes developed his system by mathematical method. Self-evident and valid knowledge can be seen in mathematics. Spinoza followed the geometrical method in developing his philosophy. He started from definitions and then proceeded to propositions, axioms and corollaries. Basing upon all these aids he developed his system. Spinoza was very much influenced by Euclid too. An examination of Spinoza's chief and acclaimed work *Ethics* reveals that Spinoza endeavoured hard to keep up mathematical and geometrical vigour in his philosophy.

He held that God was substance. In the words of Spinoza,..."By substance, I mean that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself; In other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception." By God Spinoza means "a being absolutely infinite—that is, a substance consisting in infinite essentiality." Spinoza understands God in a philosophic way. God is infinite, eternal and all pervading being. He is the First cause and the

Uncaused cause. No human characteristics can be attributed to him. He is a great thinking being. It is unwise to attribute such words as fate to God. He is an infinite and omnipotent being. The universe is embedded in Him. In Spinoza's conception of God there is no scope for evolution. All are interlinked closely. All physical acts and mental acts are connected with one another. It is not possible to determine God with some features. All determination is negation.

In this way we find Spinoza's system a closed one. Spinoza is regarded as a pantheist. Pantheism is a doctrine which holds that God is immanent in the universe. It also holds that universe is God and God is universe. Pantheism is an evolved theory of God. It differs from monotheism and polytheism. When a single deity or principle is regarded as God, it is called monotheism, whereas if different deities or principles are regarded as God, it is called polytheism. In ancient Vedic thought of India we can find both monotheism and polytheism. Spinoza may be regarded as a monist in spirit. He holds a single principle, designated 'substance', as God. In this way he differs from theologians and presents his understanding of God. His interpretation is free from religious bias. It is purely philosophical in nature. Some people, feeling difficulty in understanding his conception of God, branded him as an atheist. But Spinoza was not an atheist. He believed in the existence

of God. Spinoza is also anteteleological in nature.

Spinoza's God has infinite attributes. By attribute he means "that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance." Of these infinite number of attributes the human intellect can perceive only thought and extension. Thought will be represented by mind and extension will be represented by body. God's mind is infinite in nature. Human mind is finite in nature. Moreover human mind cannot comprehend all the things. Body and mind are parallel in Spinoza's philosophy. They never interact with one another. Descartes holds that body and mind are interacting in nature. In Descartes we will find dualism. But Spinoza is a monist. Body and mind are not independent in Spinoza's system. They depend upon substance for their existence. Mind will have ideas in number. Body will be represented by actions. All ideas of mind are interconnected. Similarly all actions are interrelated. In a rational way he explains the relationship between mind and body.

These attributes will have infinite number of modes. By mode Spinoza means "the modifications of substance, or that which exists in, and is conceived through, something other than itself." The mode of mind is understanding or will. Whereas the mode of body is motion or rest. Human understanding has some powers such as thinking, reasoning, perceiving and imagining. Spinoza holds that because of these powers man is able to grasp something about reality. But human understanding is finite in nature. God's understanding is infinite in nature. Human being has no free will in Spinoza's thought. God alone is free and he can act like that. Spinoza's circumstances led him to hold views like this. Those were the days of religious persecution. The church authorities assumed dominance over all matters. Individual men could not interpret religious

matters. That is why Spinoza argued for freedom of thought and speech in his politico-theological treatise. He modified his views in this work and argued for such a condition.

Hegel compares Spinoza's ideas with those of others. His conception of substance may be compared to the Being of Parmenides. We can also find an answer to the problem of universals and particulars in Spinoza's philosophy. The substance may be regarded as the universal of Plato's system. Attributes may be regarded as individuals. In this way a comparison can be made with the other systems. Spinoza develops his philosophy in a geometrical way. He propounds philosophic infinity in his system which is the negation of negation. Here he employs geometrical figures as illustrations of motion of infinity. In his *opera postuma* preceding his *Ethics* he has two circles, one of which lies within the other but are not concentric. The inequalities between substance and attributes with modes cannot be explained. Hegel tells that to philosophize one must be Spinozistic in the beginning. Spinoza's philosophy is more systematic and consistent when compared with Descartes'.

Now about the ideas of Spinoza on human soul. According to Spinoza there is but one substance or principle, on which all processes, both physical and mental depend and from which they proceed. In his opinion there can be no such thing as soul or ego, a spiritual substance that has thoughts, feelings and volitions, the mind exists as a complex mode consisting of its thoughts, feelings and volitions—and these states of mind are themselves not effects of body or of bodily processes; mind and body do not influence one another, there is no interaction between them. Ideas or states of mind correspond to bodily processes—the two series are

(Continued on page 312)

# Swami Vivekananda and the Imitation of Christ

## PRAVRAJIKA BRAHMAPRANA

*A little book by a Catholic monk was the constant companion of Swami Vivekananda and great was his regard for it. Why? In this article the mystique of it is unveiled. The author is a nun of the Sarada Convent, Vedanta Society of Southern California at Santa Barbara, U.S.A.*

IT was after a large religious gathering at Ganges, Michigan. All other dignitaries and monastics had dispersed, except for two shaven-headed, long-robed silhouettes and a lone figure—a senior swami of the Ramakrishna Order and disciple of Holy Mother, who remained seated. After a heartbeat of hesitation, one of the Dominican monks came forward to sit at the swami's feet. Moments passed until the seated monk, his face shining with wonder, dared to break the stillness. "Swami?" he queried.

"Yes?" The swami lifted his head to see who was speaking. "Swami," the young cloistered monk resumed, "I have to know: is what you are practicing better in any way than the path I am practicing? Will your path bring greater reward?"

The swami listened intently to the sincerity in the young monk's voice, then shook his head, his right hand raised in benediction, "No, no," he assured. "They are two paths that both lead to the same goal."

"Truly?" asked the monk in joy.

"Yes," the swami replied emphatically. "They are two paths, but the goal is the same."

"Then, Swami, there is something more I wish to ask of you," the young monk entreated.

"What is that?" asked the swami gently.

"I keep a special picture on my altar. Will you bless it?"

"Yes, yes."

The Catholic monk then removed from the folds of his cossack a small, framed photo, and held it reverently with both hands for the swami to see. The old swami leaned forward in his chair. But then without a word, he suddenly fell back. The photo was none other than Sri Sarada Devi's. Slowly the old swami lifted the Holy Mother's picture to his head in salutation, as the young Dominican monk, seated at his feet, wept silent tears of joy.

For nearly a hundred years, Westerners have accumulated a rich treasury of Vedanta stories—an oral tradition that began with the advent of Swami Vivekananda at the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions. It was the "Hindoo" Swami whose devotion to Christ first swept across the land and whose Christ-like presence revitalized Christianity.

Shortly after stepping on American soil, Swami Vivekananda disclosed his deep connection with the West and its Christian tradition. In a 20 August 1893 letter to his faithful South Indian disciple Alasinga Perumal, Swamiji wrote from Breezy Meadows: "I am here amongst the children of the Son of Mary, and Lord Jesus will help me." And help, He did, for the Swami soon came to understand that those who were attracted to him, were drawn by "his love for the Prophet of Nazareth and through

that love were able to understand the broadness of Hinduism.”<sup>1</sup>

Cornelius Heijblom, the future Gurudas Maharaj, one of the great swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, experienced this love firsthand. In August 1899, during Swami Vivekananda’s second visit to the West, Gurudas came to the New York centre where Swamiji was staying, with a large picture of Jesus in his hand. “The Swami asked me what I had there,” Gurudas remembered:

I told him that it was a picture of Christ talking to the rich young man. “Oh, let me see,” he said eagerly. I handed him the picture. And never shall I forget the tenderness in his look when he held the picture and looked at it. At last he returned it to me, with the simple words: “How great was Jesus!” And I could not help thinking that there was something in common between these two souls.<sup>2</sup>

What was the special link between Swamiji and Christ that captivated those who experienced it? What made the Swami’s devotion to Christ palpable enough to convert some of the West’s leading intellectuals to an Eastern faith? What, in fact was the power that could topple Church dogma and awaken a new Christ consciousness in the Western world?

Swami Vivekananda’s devotion to Christ is a love-story that has far-reaching effects. It was a love deep enough to endure the bitterest slander of jealous missionaries—Christian and Hindu alike—and broad enough to transcend the confines of religious organization—of even the American Vedanta

Societies which the Swami himself had founded.

This Christ-consciousness sprang from what the Swami called the Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Religion, “the philosophy which can serve as a basis to every possible religion in the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Today, true to Vivekananda’s words, that uncloistered consciousness has penetrated deep into every nook and cranny of American church parishes and monasteries—the unseen power behind the spiritual revolution of the 20th century—a revolution that alone explains how a Ramakrishna parable could be heard by chance from a southern Baptist pulpit, a cloistered Catholic monastic could be initiated by a swami of the Ramakrishna Order, East-West dialogues and Inter-religious councils could spring up nationwide, and Pope John XXIII could issue a recent edict acknowledging Eastern traditions as ancient paths to God—religious traditions from which the Catholic Church could learn.

In the days of Dakshineswar, Narendranath Datta, the future Vivekananda, gathered with other young monks at the feet of his master, Sri Ramakrishna. There Naren first discovered Thomas à Kempis’s little book *The Imitation of Christ*. After reading it from cover to cover, young Naren became inspired, and as was his habit, he then tried to inspire others by quoting passages from it, saying: “The life of anybody who truly loves the Lord will be perfectly molded in His pattern. Therefore, whether we truly love the Master or not will be proved by this fact.”<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after Sri Ramakrishna’s passing, Matangini Devi, the mother of Baburam, one

1. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*; Advaita Ashrama, ed.; Fifth Edition, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981), vol. I, pp. 404-5.

2. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries: A New Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1987), vol. 5, p. 159.

3. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries: A New Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1987), vol 6, p. 257.

4. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. I, p. 157.

of Naren's brother-disciples, invited Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples to Antpur, her native village. In December 1886, Naren, Baburam and seven other young monks arrived. Inspired by Naren who was suffused with their master's spirit, the young monks felt themselves linked to one another by a great spiritual power and resolved to formalize this sense of brotherhood by taking the vows of renunciation in each other's presence.

It all found expression one night before a huge Dhuni (sacred fire) in the compound. Overhead was the clear night sky, and all around was quiet. Meditation lasted a long time. When a break was made Narendra began to tell the story of Jesus, beginning with the mystery of his birth, through to his death and resurrection. Through his eloquence, the brother-disciples could catch something of the apostolic fervour that had impelled Paul to spread the Christian gospel far and wide in the face of adversity. Narendra charged them to become Christs themselves, and so aid in the redemption of the world; to realize God and to deny themselves as Jesus had done. Standing there before the sacred fire, their faces lit up by the flames, the crackling of the wood the sole disturbing sound, they took the vows of renunciation before God and one another. The very air was vibrant with their ecstatic fervour. Strangely, the monks discovered afterwards that all this had happened on Christmas-eve!<sup>5</sup>

This unplanned event marked the inception of the Ramakrishna Order. It had been annointed by Swami Vivekananda with the spirit of Christ—the spirit of renunciation, a quality which Swamiji was later to extoll to the world.

To become Christ was not only Swami Vivekananda's special teaching to his brother-

5. Ibid, p. 196.

disciples, but it was also his message to future Western disciples.

"Become Christ" was a battle-cry that surfaced again and again throughout Swamiji's life—in his conversations, his lectures, and in his writings. It was to become part of the Swami's divine message to the Western world.

When Sri Ramakrishna's young monastic disciples later took up residence in the Baranagore Math, they were occasionally plagued by Christian missionaries who tried to convert them. But Narendra did not hesitate to challenge the missionaries point-by-point, until victorious. He would then expound to them the greatness of Christ.<sup>6</sup> According to Swami Sadananda, who was with Swamiji at Baranagore Math days, in spite of extreme hardship and deprivation, Sri Ramakrishna's disciples begged funds "to buy and distribute some hundreds of copies of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Imitation*, the two favourite books of the Order at that time."<sup>7</sup>

In mid-1890, twenty-seven-year-old Narendra left the Baranagore Math as a wandering sannyasin—to return not until February 1897, as the world-renowned Vivekananda. For three years the Swami travelled anonymously throughout India, accumulating spiritual power, and, at the same time, gathering knowledge of India and its vast spiritual tradition as well as that of the Western world.

Once the Swami stopped at Belgaum, and there met a prominent citizen who fulfilled his desire to visit Goa. According to Swami Vivekananda's authoritative biography, "This was no ordinary visit, for [Swamiji] had a special purpose in mind."<sup>8</sup> The Swami's

6. Ibid, p. 206.

7. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1953), p. 71.

8. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. I, p. 319.

host, Subrai Naik, a Sanskrit scholar well-versed in the Hindu scriptures, was deeply impressed with the extraordinary intellect and spiritual knowledge of his guest. The Swami's reason for visiting Goa "was to study Christian theology from old Latin texts and manuscripts which were unavailable elsewhere in India". A 19 January 1964 report in the *Hindu* noted:

Subrai Naik invited a learned Christian friend, J. P. Alvares, and introduced him to Swamiji who had a talk with him on this subject in Latin (?). Alvares, who was greatly impressed by Swamiji's erudition, immediately made special arrangements for him to stay at the Rachol Seminary, the oldest convent-college of theology in Goa, four miles away from Margoa, where rare religious literature in manuscripts and printed works in Latin [are] preserved.

Swamiji spent three days in this seminary assiduously perusing all the important theological works that he found there. His gigantic intellect and original views about Christianity based on sound knowledge were indeed a marvel to the Father Superior and to other Padres and also to all students of this seminary.<sup>9</sup>

During this three-year period of wandering, experiences such as these were preparing Swami Vivekananda for his future impact on the Western world.

At this time the Swami's "very appearance was striking; indeed it was regal," wrote his disciples in *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*:

His body and bodily movements were instinct with grace. His luminous eyes and imperious personality, together with the suggestion of greatness that there was about him, made him conspicuous wher-

ever he went. Staff and monk's water-pot in hand, a copy of the *Gita* and of *The Imitation of Christ* in his bundle, and ochre-clothed, he journeyed on in silence, joyful at heart.<sup>10</sup>

At Junagadh, the Swami was the guest of Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Dewan of the State, who became one of the Swami's staunchest admirers. At Junagadh the Swami often spoke of Jesus Christ. According to Swami Vivekananda's biography:

[The Swami] said that he had long since come to understand the influence of Christ in regenerating the ethics of the Western world. Becoming fervent in his eloquence, he went on to relate how all the medieval greatness of Europe—the paintings of Raphael, the devotion of Saint Francis of Assisi, the Gothic cathedrals, the Crusades, the political systems of the west, its monastic orders and its religious life—all were interwoven in one way or another with the teachings of the sannyasi Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Years later, the Swami confided to an American devotee Mrs. Wright that "he cared for Thomas à Kempis more than any other writer."<sup>12</sup> So great was Swamiji's regard for this Roman Catholic monk, that in 1889, he translated into Bengali selections from the first six chapters of *The Imitation of Christ*, which he sent along with a preface and parallel quotations from Hindu scriptures, to a now-defunct Bengali monthly, *Sāhitya Kalpadruma*. The quotations Swamiji submitted for publication emphasize the need for direct experience of God—not merely vain argumentation—along with the tools of one-pointed devotion, renunciation, dispassion, and real study.

In these seventeen verses we do not find a revolutionary spiritual message, but rather

9. Loc. cit.

10. Ibid; p. 212.

11. Ibid, p. 290.

12. Ibid, p. 408.



a foretaste of à Kempis's unique and haunting ability to infuse each stanza with layer upon layer of meaning. This genius gives his work the unmistakable stamp of a spiritual classic.

On every page there are spiritual slogans that, like sages, draw the mind inward through guided meditations. And through their holy company, they work (1) as a tonic of religious inspiration; (2) to remind us of the pitfalls of our human nature; (3) by exposing the conscious, sub-conscious or unconscious and, in so doing, to unsheath the power of the mind to sense the proximity of the Atman; and (4) to instruct us in external observances that, when practiced, become deep inner realizations.

Thomas à Kempis presents our potential pitfalls with such sensitivity and dignity, that the spiritual seeker is never left with the feeling of incompetency in making an independent spiritual assessment. "The man that is not yet perfectly dead to himself," à Kempis, calmly explains, "is quickly tempted and overcome in small and trifling things (I: 6.1)." Without rebuke, à Kempis, the psychologist, simply discloses our ego nature—a clear, uncoloured vision that naturally prods us, of its own accord, to take the posture of egolessness. And with his verse—"Call often to mind that proverb, 'The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing (I:1.5)'"—à Kempis, the teacher, charms us into enacting what it is we are actually to feel. With this simple verse, he reveals how to draw on one's inner resources in order to channel the mind Godward. Finally we come face-to-face with à Kempis, the visionary: "Each part of the scripture," he writes, "is to be read with the same Spirit wherewith it was written (I: 5.1)"—a verse that both entreats us to practice and extolls us to realize what it is, in truth, saying.

From this small collection of verses, we can begin to grasp why this Christian classic compelled a Vivekananda to carry it with him throughout India, and how its message later inspired one of India's greatest teachers to preach the essence of Christianity to the Western world.

Born at a time when India was subject to the British Raj, Swami Vivekananda disclosed his own unembittered perspective of a devotion to Christ that grew in spite of the Christianity he witnessed. "We happen to be the subjects of a Christian government now," the Swami candidly wrote in his "Preface to the Imitation of Christ":

Through its favour it has been our lot to meet Christians of so many sects, native as well as foreign. How startling the divergence between their profession and practice! Here stands the Christian missionary preaching: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Take no thought for the morrow"—and then busy soon after, making his pile and framing his budget for ten years in advance! There he says that he follows him who "hath not where to lay his head", glibly talking of the glorious sacrifice and burning renunciation of the Master, but in practice going about like a gay bridegroom fully enjoying all the comforts the world can bestow! Look where we may, a true Christian nowhere do we see. The ugly impression left on our mind by the ultra-luxurious, insolent, despotic, barouche-and-brougham-driving Christians of the Protestant sects will be completely removed if we but once read this great book with the attention it deserves.<sup>13</sup>

Although written anonymously, *The Imita-*

13. Advaita Ashrama, ed. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, "Preface to the Imitation of Christ," Mayavati Memorial Edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971), vol. VIII, p. 160.

*tion of Christ* and the name of Thomas à Kempis are inseparably linked. Thomas Hammerken was born in 1380, in Kempen, Germany. At the age of twelve, young Thomas was sent by his poor, hard-working parents to the famous Deventer school of theology, founded by Gerhard Groot under the influence of the Flemish mystic John of Ruysbroeck. As was the school's custom, Thomas was soon called Thomas from Kempen—the name by which he was to become known to the entire Christian world.

Thomas's natural bookishness and love for solitude were balanced by a deep devotion to the Virgin. It was a dream of her compassion and power that ultimately convinced Thomas of his monastic vocation. In 1399, at the age of nineteen, Thomas à Kempis joined the Augustinian Order, at Mount St. Agnes, and fourteen years later entered the Catholic priesthood.

Mount St. Agnes was a poor monastery, supported by the income made from copying manuscripts. This line of work suited Thomas, who was one of the monastery's most prolific copiers, as well as original writers.

Today, Thomas à Kempis is accredited with numerous literary works: a chronicle of his monastery, several hagiographies, innumerable tracts on monastic life, several collections of sermons, some letters, hymns, and *The Imitation of Christ*. On August 8, 1471, at the age of ninety-one, Thomas à Kempis died, one year after the first Latin edition of his book appeared in print. Twenty-eight years later it was published in English, a work which has since been translated into more languages than any other book, except the Bible.<sup>14</sup>

Thomas à Kempis's outer life was as austere and uneventful as his interior life

14. *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton Publishers, 1959), p. 147.

was rich in self-discovery. Thomas, the monk, left no stone unturned in uncovering and confronting the subtle workings of the human psyche or in revealing higher levels of consciousness and the most exalted states of divine communion. Only a mystic could make this late medieval work breathe with the spirituality that has made it a masterpiece. "‘Written’, perhaps," Swami Vivekananda aptly described, "is not the proper word."

It would be more appropriate to say that each letter of the book is marked deep with the heart's blood of the great soul who had renounced all for his love of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis laid bare his struggle Godward with bold truths that could make even the staunchest aspirant squirm. In his famous chapter on death, à Kempis divulged a deep meditation—each aphorism tearing away veil after veil of this world's illusion with a force that could either plunge the mind deep within to centre itself on the only true reality, or compel its reader to close the book in fear. "How often dost thou hear these reports" à Kempis asks his reader:

Such a man is slain, another man is drowned, a third breaks his neck with a fall from some high place, this man died eating, and that man playing!

One man perished by fire, another by the sword, another of the plague, another was slain by thieves. Thus death is the end of all, and man's life suddenly passeth away like a shadow.<sup>16</sup>

Trust not to friends and kindred, neither do thy put off the care of thy soul's wel-

15. *The Complete Works*, vol. VIII, p. 159.

16. A Kempis, Thomas, *The Imitation of Christ*, "Of Meditation on Death" (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), I: 22.7.

fare till hereafter; for men will forget thee, sooner than thou art aware of.<sup>17</sup>

Thomas à Kempis reminds his reader:

When it is morning, think that thou mayest die before night; And when evening comes, dare not to promise thyself the next morning.

Be thou therefore always in a readiness, and so lead thy life that death may never take thee unprepared.<sup>18</sup>

For a Vivekananda, during his three-year period as a wandering sannyasin, passages such as these were like welcome companions. "That great soul," Swamiji later wrote:

Whose words, living and burning, have cast such a spell...over the hearts of myriads of men and women; whose influence today remains as strong as ever, and is destined to endure for all time to come; before whose genius and Sadhana (spiritual effort) hundreds of crowned heads have bent down in reverence, and before whose matchless purity the jarring sects of Christendom, whose name is legion, have sunk their differences of centuries of common veneration to a common principle—that great soul, strange to say, has not thought fit to put his name to a book such as this.<sup>19</sup>

"To obtain Bhakti," the Swami once told his Madras students before departing for the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions, "seek the company of holy men who have Bhakti, and read books like the Gita and *The Imitation of Christ*."<sup>20</sup>

*The Imitation of Christ* is divided into four books: (1) "Admonitions Useful for a Spiritual Life," (2) "Admonitions Tending to Things Internal," (3) "Internal Consola-

tion," and (4) "Concerning the Sacrament." Altogether, the entire work contains over a thousand Biblical references as well as the strong influence of such great masters as St. Bernard of Clairvaux and others whose manuscripts Thomas à Kempis had copied while in the monastery.<sup>21</sup>

The first book of *The Imitation of Christ* shows the means to overcome worldly tendencies in order to prepare for conversation with Christ. It encompasses preparatory subjects such as cultivating humility, truthfulness, scriptural study, resisting temptation, obtaining peace, the profit of adversity, the importance of solitude and silence, along with the meditation on death.

The second book emphasizes the inward life: self-surrender, purity, contentment, righteous conduct, and devotion to Jesus Christ. Both the first and second book strongly resemble the abstentions and observances (*yamas* and *niyamas*) found in Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms.

The third book discloses the nature of communion with God "without the noise of words" and the more advanced milestones along the path to God, including such random topics as "The Different Motions of Nature and Grace," "The Proof of a True Lover," "Four Things that Bring Inward Peace," "Against the Tongue of Slanderers," and "Of the Excellency of a Free Mind." Though Swami Vivekananda extolled Thomas à Kempis most for his *dasya* bhakti, or attitude as the servant of God, there are passages from this book that unmistakably border on *madhura bhava*, or the attitude of the lover towards the Beloved. So intense was à Kempis's divine love, that it culminated in the highest: "Enlarge Thou me in love," he wrote:

(Continued on page 313)

17. Ibid, I: 22.5.

18. Ibid, I: 22.3.

19. *The Complete Works*, vol. VIII, p. 159.

20. *The Complete Works*, vol. VI, p. 123.

21. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, O'Brien, Thomas C., Exec. ed., vol. 7 (Palatine: Jack Heraty & Associates, Inc., 1981), p. 376.

# Unpublished Letters

*These unpublished letters are being brought to the light for the first time. Some letters of this series have appeared in previous issues of Prabuddha Bharata.*

*From Miss Josephine MacLeod to Sister Nivedita*

December 20, 1899

Dearest Child,

A line to tell you that Swami was most successful last night on "Applied Psychology", there being much enthusiasm, and the best is that he slept soundly afterwards! to his astonishment.

He is still wondering if Miss Melton is equal to restoring his health. The *least* symptoms of ill ease being a sure proof to the contrary!!

December 21

\* \* \*

"Happy New Year"—I called out to Swamiji this morning and his face broke into a smile as he said "Happy New Year to you and to me." I then made him greet the sun and gave him a gold coin! as emblematic of the new year's gifts to him.

He is quiet like a child—goes daily to Mrs. Melton—walks 2 or 3 miles, scarcely talks a word—in fact, he is so much quieter than I have ever seen him that I am watching to see the slightest new mood or moves that may come. For his physical health a month of this quiet would be of great service, but you know how uncertain he is and how quick the changes are made when he is ready.

Heart's love to you, always. I haven't had any letters for days from anybody. Except a cordial one from Mrs. Hearst whom I shall see on my way home.

Merry Xmas to you.

Love,  
Jojo

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*From Josephine MacLeod to Sara Bull in Brittany*

P.S. From Swami Vivekananda

6, Place Des Etats Unis  
Saturday

August 4, 1900

Dearest II,

Swamiji arrived at 9 looking like a boy, he has lost 30 pounds and is vigorous. The Geddes come to lunch today to meet him. Fun?

He stayed at Gerald's last night, but comes to us today—having the nursery. He, Gerald, Margot, and I are to dine on the Eiffel Tower. I have invited Robert Patterson for Aug. 10—Francy & Betty go the 8th. Berta & Hol return the 6th.

Swami asked immediately after the "Sacred Cow of India." He thinks he would like to go to Lady Cunard's & he & I may run over to stay at Nevill Holy a few days.

This is but a line to tell you of our Prophet's well being.

Lovingly,  
Jojo

Hello—Sacred Cow—

What are you doing in the forest meditating or counting how many palpitations Mrs. Brigg's heart gets a day?

V.

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*From Sister Christine to Josephine MacLeod*

July ? 1902

Dearest Yum,

Your letter has just come and what can I say? I seem at times to lose all power of thought and the mind becomes a blank—no pain even.

They tell me that we sorrow only for ourselves and that it is all selfishness however refined it may be. Perhaps so—yet the human cries out.

For years I have prayed that this cup might be taken from me but now I have had to drain it to its dregs.

Yet while for us life is finished, for him this is Freedom Absolute. I try to think of that and that alone. And after all this life is but a little thing and short, thank God.

We would not have him back suffering in body, tortured in mind—no, not even for one hour would we? We would rather gladly suffer the pains and bear the sense of loss.

How beautiful it all came at the end! Just as he always hoped it would—"as it should be with a Yogi." And now I love to think of him "sitting in Eternal Meditation." Swami S—writes, "Never did we see him so sublimely beautiful, never was there such a look of joy on his face," as when he lay there on that Saturday morning. Shiva, Shiva, Shiva!

Christina

Footnote: A part of this letter has appeared in *Vedanta Kesari* May-1990 issue.

*From Sister Christine to Mrs. Sara Bull in Bergen, Norway*

Calcutta

July 13, 1902

Dearest Sin Sara,

You who have passed through this can understand.

There is nothing to regret, nothing, I tell myself. The exaltation that comes to me at times should be constant "yet this human nature speaks within."

Before that last parting in Calcutta the renunciation was complete and on my part it was a renunciation of the life itself, if only the ideal might be kept. And how it was kept! All that great, great energy turned to the very highest and triumphant over everything. How I prayed it might be so and his own deepest wish might be fulfilled, that he might reach the Great Peace through meditation, that all the delusions of Maya might be dispelled, that all bonds might be burst and he realize himself as a Great Free Soul. And so it was.

There are three letters from you Dear. I could not bring myself to write these last three weeks. I thank you for them.

Lovingly,  
Christina

*From Mrs. C. S. Sevier to Josephine MacLeod*

Mayavati  
(via Almora)  
August 23, 1902

My dearest Miss MacLeod,

I hasten to reply to your affectionate letter received by the last mail. The passing away of our dearly loved Swamiji was indeed a terrible shock to us all, and of course especially to Christine, who nevertheless bore up bravely, and after the first week resumed her ordinary demeanour, though I can see, at times what restraint she has to put upon her feelings. I am so glad she happened to be here, so as to have the advice of a strong man like Swami Swarupananda! She has long talks with him about Swamiji and Advaita philosophy. When we think of

Swamiji, we try not to recall the fact of his *death*: we think of his *life*, his love, tenderness, devotion, and endurance to the cause of humanity, and honour him who served it with such abiding power, and such far-reaching genius: we owe him undying gratitude and reverence for what he taught us, and feel he was part of the living God who permitted him to do the world's work, and fight its battle for righteousness and truth. He certainly was the greatest man I have ever met, or am likely to meet: to you, who knew and loved him so well and truly, I need say no more! I understand the workings of your heart in respect to him, and deeply sympathize, I assure you, dear Miss MacLeod.

Christine is very quiet, and we get on famously together; she seems to enjoy the monotonous, quiet life we lead here, and I am certain, *rest* was what she greatly needed, she looked so pale and wan when she came first; the climate is equable and pleasant, and the natural beauties great—Christine, like me, is rapturous over mountain scenery, and its ever-varying beauties.

The Swamis hope to erect a temple and rest-house over the site where Swamiji's body was cremated in the Math grounds; a meeting was convened at the Town Hall, in Memoriam, last Saturday; I have not yet heard the results.

Swami Trigunatita will start for California in about a month's time; the friends at San Francisco have sent the money for his passage. Swami Turiyananda had a sad home-coming, and it was in the Bay of Bengal, from a fellow-passenger that he first heard of Swamiji's death. In his weak state of health, it must have been a crushing blow, and he is still far from well. I wrote and asked him to pay us a visit with Swami Brahmananda, but at present it is not to be.

Swami Saradananda told me that Swamiji left his personal money amounting to Rs 3700 in G.P. notes, and Rs. 900 in cash to his Mother. He had been in the habit of giving her Rs 50 per month and Swami seemed to think it would not bring her in much income. I yesterday had a letter from Swami Ramakrishnananda, in which he wrote that perhaps the admirers of Swamiji at Madras were going to build a Math in commemoration of him. I hope you had a good passage home, and that the voyage benefitted your health. I know how a sudden shock affects one's health for a long time after the occurrence.

Nivedita has had a little fever, but I believe is well again; she does not often write, but of course you hear regularly. Mr. Okakura is making a little tour in India, but I presume will return to Japan in time for the Congress. Christine sends love and sympathy to you in your mutual loss; she appreciates greatly your kind and friendly feelings towards her and often regrets she had not the pleasure of meeting you. Swami Swarupananda will answer your letter to him shortly; he is waiting to ascertain about the book you required, *Yoga Vasistha*; he has instituted inquiries in Calcutta about it, but apparently it is rather difficult to get; if it is not procurable, we shall send you an abbreviated copy, similar to the one I have. He sends his best wishes, sympathy and love to you. As you write, our beloved Swami was so broad, so loving in embracing all his disciples in their special way; & he was so strong in capacity for work; in fact it was a rest to him compared with standing still, which was a weary toil to him. Well, dear, I bid you adieu for the present. Wishing you peace of mind, and the blessings of an abiding love—from lovingly.

C. S. Sevier

# From Compassion to Service

MANJU GOEL

*The rendering of help to others in any form is a blessing in disguise. The perceptive writer is an additional District and Sessions Court Judge, New Delhi.*

SHOULD we be kind to the poor and the suffering? Does the world depend on our kindness and benevolence? Or should we feel more humble and offer others our service or 'Sevā'? One may say that people having compassion, that is 'Dayā' for the poor; as well as those who seek to serve, both work to ameliorate sufferings. Hence, there is no distinction between compassion and service. However, considered, there is a vast difference in our attitude when we confer compassion and when we proceed to serve. There is also a difference in the satisfaction derived from work done for 'Seva' and the mere expression of 'Daya'.

About a hundred years back Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was explaining three principles of the doctrine of the Vaiṣṇavas. One should always take the name of God with love and devotion, knowing the identity of the devotee and the divine, that is, the Vaiṣṇava and Krishna; one should respect the holy-men; and one should have the conviction in one's heart that the whole universe belongs to Krishna, and therefore one should have compassion for all beings. No sooner had he uttered the words "Compassion for all beings," than he suddenly went into *Samādhi*, an ecstatic state in which he used to be conscious only of the undifferentiated Brahman, losing all consciousness of the phenomenal world. Regaining partial and normal consciousness in a short while he continued, saying, "Talk of compassion for beings! Insignificant creatures that you are, how can you show compassion to beings? Who are you to show compassion? You wretch, who

are you to bestow it? No, no, it is not compassion to *Jīvas*, but service to them as Śiva."

Swami Vivekananda found these words of the Master pregnant with meaning and offering a synthesis between two apparently conflicting paths—of devotion and knowledge. According to the theory of non-dualism, or Advaita Vedānta, everything in the universe is the manifestation of Brahman, Brahman which is impersonal, indeterminate and absolute. To attain this knowledge of non-dualism, people renounced society and retired to forests where they could find absolute seclusion. The *Sādhana* with austerity would continue till one would achieve the stage of "*Aham Brahmāsmi*," the knowledge of "I am Brahman," or "*Soham*—I am That." The path of love or devotion is much softer and sweeter. Devotion or *Bhakti* means intense and pure love for God, a personal God to start with. Devotion calls for no rewards. It does not know any fear. Devotion itself becomes the highest ideal for the devotee. The devotee, as it were, approaches God through devotion and at the end merges with Him. In intense *Bhakti*, the *Bhakta* seeks his '*Iṣṭa*' or beloved God in all beings and things around him. It is in Him that the whole universe rests. All the churches and temples are in Him.

The Instiller of compassion must be superior to its receiver. If all the universe is but Brahman or the manifestation of the Supreme, can the '*Jnāni*', the realized one, find himself superior to any being in this world? Similarly, the *Bhakta* who sees his

Lord in every being can only feel humble before all beings. Can either the 'Jnāni' or the 'Bhakta' entertain any feeling of anger or hatred towards any being or can he even be kind to them? Since he is the worshipper and his worshipped lives in every being, his only attitude has to be one of humility and devotion. Can he be kind to his own Lord? He can only serve or worship Him and feel blessed for having been able to do so. Serving the *Jīva as Śiva* he will have his heart purified and experience the *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*, the eternally blissful state.

Again if one adopts the path of Karma Yoga, that is, doing action without seeking the fruits thereof, one finds oneself in the same situation. On this path one must work selflessly but incessantly leaving, or rather offering, all rewards of his actions to God. The motive behind the work should be only to do good. If this is so, an opportunity to do good work is looked upon as a privilege. The world is not waiting for our benevolence. Even without our efforts the world will go on. The results of all good works—all temples, hospitals, orphanages and shelters built with enormous pious efforts may vanish due to natural calamities like hurricanes or earthquakes. Then why do we do good work? Because it is a blessing to ourselves. Swami Vivekananda calls upon us to serve God in man, and gives the key to blessedness in the following words:

We may all be perfectly sure that it will go on beautifully well without us, and we need not bother our heads wishing to help it. Yet we must do good; the desire

to do good is the highest motive power we have, if we know all the time that it is a privilege to help others. Do not stand on a high pedestal and take five cents in your hand and say, "Here, my poor man," but be grateful that the poor man is there, so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world and thus become pure and perfect...

Further, he emphasizes:

No beggar whom we have helped has ever owed a single cent to us: we owe everything to him because he has allowed us to exercise our charity on him. It is entirely wrong to think that we have done, or can do, good to the world, to think that we have helped such and such people. It is a foolish thought, and all foolish thoughts bring misery. We think that we have helped some man and expect him to thank us, and because he does not, unhappiness comes to us. Why should we expect anything in return for what we do? Be grateful to the man you help, think of him as God. Is it not a great privilege to be allowed to worship God by helping our fellow men? If we were really unattached, we should escape all this pain of vain expectation, and could cheerfully do good work in the world.<sup>1</sup>

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) vol. I, pp. 76-77.



# Communal Harmony

NABANIHARAN MUKHOPADHYAY

*The vision of global family can only be realized when human beings step out of their constricting conceptions of caste, colour, religious affiliation and nationality, says the author who is a freelance writer and the Secretary of Akhil Bharata Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal, West Bengal.*

It is unfortunate that so soon after Sri Ramakrishna's unique advent in the world of religions, in whose life people saw with their open eyes great but diverse religions lived and realized, giving practical verification of the sameness as to their common ends—namely love, service to mankind, and renunciation—there is a new spate of dissension, hatred, anger and violence in the name of religion today, spilling human blood on the bosom of our common motherland.

Such verification as we find in the life of Sri Ramakrishna has no second in human history and may not be repeated in our lives, but can we not even study, listen, and contemplate on what is said in the treatises of all religions? Can we not remember the picture in a rural setting depicted by Rama Krishna, of the same water taken by Hindus Christians, Mohammedans, and others, who use only different flights of stairs? Did Jesus not command, "Love thy neighbour as thyself"? Did not Prophet Mohammed say, "A perfect Muslim is he from whose tongue and hands mankind is safe"? Have not all religions proclaimed that God is One and all men and women are His children? Did not Nanak say that God is One and He is the creator of all? Did not the old prophets moving Westward say: "All of you are children of the Most High"? According to Vivekananda, "In the Vedantic ocean, the Hindu, Mohammedan, Christian, and Parsee are all one, all children of the

Almighty God." (*Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 286).

Swami Vivekananda said, "To fight, to assume the antagonistic attitude, is the exact contrary to his (Ramakrishna's) teaching, which dwells on the truth that the world is moved by love." (*Vol. V, p. 190*) Yet some people ignorantly take the name of Swami Vivekananda when they intend to fight and assume an antagonistic attitude in matters of religions. Swami Vivekananda never advocated the idea of a Hindu State. He says, "I do not care whether they are Hindus or Mohammedans or Christians, but those who love the Lord will always command my service." (*Vol. V, p. 65*) Tracing the history of coining by Persians, and currency in India, of the word 'Hindu', more clearly he says, "Thus this word has come down to us; and during the Mohammedan rule we took up the word ourselves...As I have said, it has lost its significance, for you may mark that all the people who live on this side of the Indus in modern times do not follow the same religion as they did in ancient times. The word, therefore, covers not only Hindus proper, but Mohammedans, Christians, Jains and other people who live in India. I, therefore, would not use the word Hindu." (*Vol. III, p. 118*). He said, "No civilization can begin to lift up its head until we look charitably upon one another; and the first step towards that much-needed charity is to look charitably and kindly upon the religious

convictions of others. Nay more, to understand that not only should we be charitable but positively helpful, to each other, how ever different our religious ideas and convictions may be." (*Vol III, pp. 187-88*)... "Religion must be studied on a broader basis than formerly. All narrow, fighting ideas of religion have to go." (*Vol. II, p. 67*).

He went a step further: "It is here in India that Hindus have built...churches for Christians and mosques for Mohammedans That is the thing to do ...until we conquer through love, until we have demonstrated to the world that love alone is the fittest thing to survive and not hatred, that it is gentleness that has the strength to live on and to fructify, and not mere brutality and physical force." (*Vol. III, p. 188*).

Swami Vivekananda held: "The *Bible*, the *Vedas*, the *Koran*, and all the other sacred books are but so many pages, and an

infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded....We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutations to the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future." (*Vol. II, p. 374*).

Citizens of India, followers of *all religions*, are to learn this to get rid of the odious bogey of communalism. National integration can be achieved through proper education of the mind, which is very much lacking today among the so-called followers of all religions. This integration can come neither through deliberations and resolutions of Councils, nor by statements of the so-called intelligentsia, nor through legislation or slogans of so-called secularism, nor by application of state or communal forces.

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## SPINOZA'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

(Continued from page 298)

parallel—indeed they are modally identical. The mind and body are processes of one and the same substance expressed in two different forms. The goal of human life is the intellectual love of God, which is eternal like Reason itself. We feel and know by experience that we are eternal, and this existence of mind cannot be limited by time

nor manifested through duration. The term God is variously employed in Spinoza's system. He is identified with his attributes or he is the absolute unified substance with its attributes, or he is the unified substance itself, higher than these attributes. His real meaning probably is the universe conceived as eternal and necessary unity.

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# News and Reports

*Report of activities of the Vedanta Society, 34 West 71st Street, New York, New York, 10023 (Phone: 212-877-9197).*

This is the first Vedanta Centre in the United States of America, having been started by Swami Vivekananda in 1894. Swami Tathagatananda has been in charge of the Centre since 1977.

The Swami conducted Sunday morning services; Tuesday evening classes on the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna; and Friday evening classes on the Bhagavad-Gita. Group devotional singing, open to the public, was held every Saturday and Sunday evening.

Birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, Lord Buddha and Sri Krishna were celebrated, as well as Easter, Durga Puja and Christmas. The

annual Vivekananda Fourth of July Festival took place as usual at the country home of one of the members.

On invitation Swami Tathagatananda has been conducting Seminars on Hinduism in a Protestant Seminary near New York for the last ten years, as well as in S. Connecticut State University for the last six years. He accepted a number of invitations to give outside talks at schools, colleges and other Vedanta Societies in the United States, Canada, Japan and India. Special guest lectures were given at the Vedanta Society by three visiting Swamis.

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## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA & THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

*(Continued from page 305)*

that with the inward palate of my heart I may taste how sweet it is to love, and to be dissolved, and as it were to bathe myself in Thy Love.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the fourth book exhorts the spiritual aspirant to cultivate a devotional attitude before receiving Holy Communion.

*(To be concluded)*

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<sup>22</sup>. *The Imitation of Christ*, III: 5.6.

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# REVIEWS & NOTICES

**EPISTLES OF SAMKHYA-YOGIN** By SWAMI DHARMAMEGHA ARANYA. Published by Adinath Chatterjee, Kapil Math, Madhupur, Bihar, 1989. 230 pages plus xvi. Rs. 50/-.

According to Sāmkhya-yoga, man can rise above all pain only by arriving at right knowledge, arising from right discrimination between the Self and the non-self—between Purusha and Prakriti. The above book will show the sincere aspirant in a simple way how to gain this right knowledge. As one reads this work, one will come to agree with Richard Garbe who says: “In Kapila’s doctrine for the first time in the history of the world, the complete independence and freedom of the human mind, its full confidence in its own powers, was exhibited.”

The book under review is a good collection of essays and letters written by the author to sincere aspirants treading the path of Sāmkhya-yoga. It is that rare combination of profound scholastic knowledge and deep spiritual insight which is seen only in really evolved souls. Such mature wisdom, presented in a style so clear and concise, derives its authenticity from first-hand experience gained after several long years of spiritual practice. Reflecting as it does the author’s own life as a sadhaka of high attainments, and his breadth of outlook, there is no doubt that the book will prove to be an unfailing source of inspiration, guidance and solace to all spiritual aspirants in their journey towards the Goal.

Great stress has been laid on mental compliance to discipline. Ethical culture, introspection and detachment, awareness, renunciation and prayer are some of the important topics dealt with in the book. Throughout, the author has emphasized actual spiritual practice. The advice found in the book contains words of caution as well as words of encouragement, which can otherwise be gained only through close contact with a spiritually advanced soul. However, the analysis of one or two points mentioned in the chapter, “Pūjā or Worship” may have to be revised. The work would have been still more helpful to beginners if the contents had been arranged to show the graded path.

The book will be of great interest to the student and the scholar as well. The author has discussed the abstruse principles of Sāmkhya and explained the intricate technicalities of Yoga in a strikingly original form, drawing his material from the highest authorities. Useful cross-references are also cited all along.

As Sri Ram Shankar Bhattacharya writes in his Foreword: “A careful study of the present work will show that Sāmkhya-yoga, whose true meaning and significance have practically been lost, has every possibility and fitness to deliver a message of hope to suffering humanity.” (p. ix).

The publication of this book has been made possible through the devoted care with which some of the author’s students have preserved his letters and instructions. The gratitude of the readers of this work naturally goes to them in the first place. The publisher has to be congratulated for presenting the book in such beautiful format and neat printing.

*Swami Jagadatmananda  
Belur Math*

**ESSAYS ON RELIGION**, EDITED BY DR. BHABAGRAHI MISHRA & DR. BISHNUPADA PANDA. Published by Institute of Comparative Studies & Mayur Publications, Bhubaneswar, 1989. 144 pages, Rs. 100/-.

Religion has always been a challenging subject for human interest and understanding. In course of time the nature and understanding of religion changes and it is essential for every age and society to understand the phenomenon afresh. Not doing so may lead the social beings to a blind alley.

The understanding of a single individual might be questioned in many respects, but a combined understanding is likely to be more free from obvious drawbacks. The present effort of a Bhubaneswar group of scholars is a result of their collective attempt to present in print a new appraisal of religion in its various dimensions. The title is dedicated to the memory of late Prahlad Pradhan, who was one of the founder-directors of the Institute of Comparative Studies,

Bhubaneswar. Prof. Pradhan was a professor of Sanskrit at Utkal University, and later the first Vice-Chancellor of Sri Jagannath Sanskrit University, Puri.

The anthology includes eleven essays from various authors in different walks of life. It includes essays on "Religion in the Service of Humanity"; "Radhakrishnan and the Harmonization of Texts"; "Trend of Religious Consciousness in India"; "Bairagi Mishra and His Gita"; "Religion Resounds Reasoning"; "Pdt. Nilkantha Das and His Conception of Religion"; "Religion and Fundamentalism"; "Hindu Sacred Image: Its Creation and Destruction"; "Bhagavad Gita and Modern Management"; and "Jagannath: A Unique Facet of Hindu Religion".

Most of the essays emphasize the role of reason in religion. A critical evaluation of various religious tendencies is essential for the proper growth of human society. Dr. G. C. Nayak, the present Vice-Chancellor of Sri Jagannath University, while discussing Bairagi Mishra's understanding of the Gita, stresses on the need of search for truth through pure reason. He applauds the originality in Sri Mishra's interpretation of the Gita because of the freedom of intellect underlined by him. In the line of Kathopanishad, Krishna is the charioteer in the form of intellect (*Buddhim tu sārathim viddhi*). Once we dedicate ourselves to Buddhi, we become free from ignorance and get the key to salvation. Similarly, Dr. B. Kar, in his essay on Pdt. Nilkantha Das and His Conception of Religion, holds that the real form of religion is *Yukti dharma*; unless we apply *yukti* and *buddhi* (reason and intellect) to experience, we cannot realize the true nature of man's religion. Only through reason can we reach true religion, or the religion of man. All other essays in the anthology are worth reading, and throw sufficient light to understand the nature of religion and society.

Sri S. P. Dubey  
Jabalpur

SACRED CENTERS (DEVELOPMENT OF A CLASSIFICATORY SCHEME), BY JAMES J. PRESTON. Published by Mayur Publications, C-5, Unit-3, Bhubaneswar, 751-001, India 1987. 78 pages. Rs. 60/-.

The book under review is the outcome of the author's untiring research work. In this book he has beautifully presented a classification study of South-Asian Hindu sacred centres, especially the temples. This facilitates a comprehensive study of All-South-Asian Hindu temple network.

The religious network of Hinduism consists of festivals, deities and sacred centres. Temples are key elements in this network. Sacred centres represent an elaborate network which operates at social, economic and religious levels to help integrate the human experience of the sacred. It is most complex due to the diversity in Hindu religious life.

In this sacred centres' scheme of classification, the author has classified South-Asian Hindu temples into six different levels: All-South-Asian, Regional, District sub-regional, Local, Domestic and Multi-level. Each level has been further sub-divided into subcategories and has been well-defined and characterized with ample numbers of examples. All have been beautifully arranged in seven different tables.

The author has not only classified the temples in different levels, but also has discussed the *horizontal bonds* (connections between the sub-categories of the same level) and the *vertical bonds* (connections between the different levels) among them. According to the author: "No temple stands alone: each forms a mode in a vast multifaced web."

To illustrate the utility of the temple scheme presented, the author has applied this scheme in a particular case. For this purpose he has selected Sarala Temple, fitting the middle range of the scheme.

While defining All-South-Asian level of Hindu shrines, the author has given a footnote (page 15) that unlike in Christianity, there is no universal level shrine in the Hindu System. But this is not true. Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math (West Bengal, India) can undoubtedly be classed at the universal level because it attracts devout people from all over the world. Impressed by the universal message of Sri Ramakrishna, not only Hindus, but followers of other faiths visit in large numbers.

The temple scheme presented in Mr. Preston's study will help South-Asian specialists carry on more discussion and research on South-Asian religious life.

In the end of the Book, the author has added a Bibliography and an Index which surely increases its ease of use. A photograph of the Mukteshwar Temple in Orissa on the frontcover enhances the beauty of the volume.

Overall, the book is a good piece of work. We hope that it will be cordially received by Eastern and Western scholars, add to their knowledge and facilitate their research.

Sri Ishwara. R.

MAJOR POETICAL UPANISADS, BY SWAMI GABHIRANANDA, published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Trichur, Kerala, 179 pages plus xxxii. Rs. 22/-.

The book under review presents the four *Upanisads*—*Īśa*, *Kena*, *Katha* and *Muṇḍaka* in original Sanskrit along with an English rendering. It has two appendices, a Concordance and a Conclusion. Swami Bhuteshananda, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has given a benediction, and a scholarly Foreword has been written by Swami Tapasyananda.

In the first verse of the *Īśavāsyā Upaniṣad* we find the transcendent and immanent aspects of Brahman. The second verse which was a favourite of Mahatma Gandhi, asks us not to crave for worldly riches. The *Kena Upaniṣad* points out that Brahman cannot be known by the five senses, but it is to be understood by intuition. The story of the gods trying to find who was greatest among them, brings out the need for humility, devotion and self-control for the realization of the Supreme.

The *Kāthopaniṣad* is longer than the previous two mentioned *Upaniṣads*. It embodies the famous dialogue between Naciketas and King Yama, the god of Death, about the immortality of the soul. It draws the distinction between *Śreyas*, the Path of the Good, and *Preyas*, the Path of the pleasant, which present themselves to every

man. Nachiketas chooses the former. This *Upaniṣad* is highly poetical.

In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, in course of the conversation between Saunaka and Angirasa, a distinction is drawn between *parā* and *Aparā* knowledge. The former is concerned with the Knowledge of Brahman, whereas the latter deals with secular knowledge.

Appendix I has two sections: the first dealing with the great utterance 'I am Brahman', and the second 'Meditation on the Self', taken from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, respectively. 'I am Brahman' shows the identity between the Individual Self and the Universal Self. Verse 13 (page 116) reads: "He who considers himself to be differentiated and different from the Un-differentiated Brahman goes from death to death." The section on 'Meditation on the Self' asks the spiritual aspirant to set his mind mainly on the Self, sacrificing all other pursuits.

Appendix II is entitled: 'Vedic Religious Ideals'. It is a lecture delivered by Swami Vivekananda in 1896.

The Concordance consists of parallel passages from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. The all-pervasiveness of God is emphasized in the *Upaniṣads*. Sri Ramakrishna says: "It is God Himself who has become all this—the Universe, *māyā*, and the living beings..." (page 141).

The Conclusion contains passages from the *Aitareya* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads*. The essence of man is Supreme Consciousness. It is named sometimes the heart or the mind. It is Brahman. It is the foundation and support of the universe. We should practise self-control. We should live in accordance with the injunctions of the Vedas. Thus living we shall merge in Brahman, and never return to *samsāra*, the plane of relative existence.

As already mentioned, the book is a simple translation of the above named *Upaniṣads*, written from the standpoint of Advaita. It does not contain technical, philosophical discussion on the Upaniṣadic teachings, but is meant to popularize the immortal verses.

It definitely serves the purpose of helping the reader "delve deeper into the mysteries of the absolute Truth"—as Swami Bhuteshanda has expressed in his Benediction.

*Dr. G. N. Kundargi*

FRAGRANCE OF ETERNITY, BY J. S. DESHPANDE, published by Kusummala Kolarkar, Congress Nagar, Nagpur, 440-012, 1988. 142 pages, Rs. 60/-.

The book is essentially a soliloquy of a spiritual mind. An advocate and criminal defense lawyer, the author, the Late Sri Janardan Shrikrishna, alias Tatyasaheb Deshpande, was a poet and philosopher at heart. The eighty-eight pieces of his musings in one hundred and thirty-four pages of this book are essentially of the nature of meditations, describing and depicting an inward journey of a mind possessed of spiritual longing.

Like the author himself, who avoided all publicity living a simple life in a small but beautiful hill-station of Vidarbha, his realizations are simple and straight to the mark. What is God? God is the ultimate Truth. How is He manifest? He is manifest to us through the rich consciousness that He has bestowed on us. Pure consciousness is the very substance of the Divine. "We only see 'things.' We never see through things, that is the whole trouble. As soon as we learn a little to see through things we do gain the power to see through life the Beyond." (page 43) The progressive evolution of our life consists of an onward march through the multiple phases of this fundamental Consciousness. "The most unique thing of evolution is there within us and that is consciousness." (page 55) "All spiritual progress consists in complete transformation of our personality from the physical to the innermost layer of the being." (page 57) All progressive evolution, so to say, is evolution from 'clod to God'. The author's philosophy of life comes beautifully through to us in the following poetic lines:

Between the outer world and the inner world there is this wall of our body with only a small window of our waking consciousness which opens both ways. We are in the habit of sitting in that window the

whole of our life—our face towards the outer world all through and gazing upon the outward things and happenings—our back upon the inner world. But if we only sit sideways in that window we can look to both the worlds...Those who can thus look at and experience both the sides... have the supreme satisfaction of leading the total life which is the final realization and fruitful perfection of life. (page 92)

And does not Tagore, the poet singing the supreme songs of the Upanishadic universal consciousness, ring to us unmistakable when the author of the book under review (which might appropriately be called a journal on the lines of *Amiel's Journal*) writes: "What Divine Play is being enacted within me, only you know, my Lord! Are you yourself watching your own play through me, my Lord? That thought gives me such a thrill of delight that I forget everything including happiness and sorrow, loss or gain, life and death, the 'I' itself and everything that 'I' has gathered through innumerable lives!" (page 48)

Miss Kusummala Kolarkar has done a service to all who feel the longing within themselves for the Divine and the Eternal by publishing the book. We sincerely hope that some of the misprints and, specially, the misordering of the *contents* will be taken care of in the next edition.

*Smt. Mamata Ray*

THE END OF AN AGE? BY SHIBA PRASAD MITRA, 129 pages plus ix, Rs. 95/- Published by Shiba Prasad Mitra, K-57 Jangpura Extension, New Delhi 110-014, 1989.

A little over sixty years ago, Oswald Spengler in his *Decline of the West* prophesized that the Western civilization which had started declining after Napoleon, would come to an end around 2000 A.D. Writing *The Study of History* a generation later, Arnold Toynbee was not so pessimistic. He believed that the Western civilization, unlike other civilizations, would after all, last. In *The End of An Age?*, Shiba Prasad Mitra puts forward the thesis that Spengler "was nearer the mark, and what he had said may be coming to pass. The Western civilization

may die about 2000 A.D. And if it dies, it would die really by its own hand." (page 8)

How is it that a civilization which put mankind for the first time in history above want and which made tremendous strides in scientific advancement, organizational efficiency and material progress, would die by its own hand? Mitra's answer is that the self-annihilation would come out of self-aggrandizement. He traces the history of Western civilization, the history especially of its major powers, to show that all that they have minded most and pursued most at the cost of other peoples and other nations, is *possession and power*. In order to cover up their arrogance, they have put forward the theses of 'Chosen People' (the British), or the 'Master Race' (the Germans), or 'Manifest Destiny' (the Americans). The Russians have been no less expansionists and no less cruel to their subject peoples, but in fairness it must be acknowledged that they have not, unlike their other Western counterparts, been as racially arrogant.

The arrogance, be that of possession, of power, or of race, cannot but lead to the annihilation of those who are guilty of such gross abuse of human and moral values. After all, Mitra emphatically asserts, there is a positive "correlation between the fall of nations and the violation of moral law and no nation, however great, can go on flouting with impunity basic moral principles. If it does, disaster will follow. ...Such seems to be the lesson of history." (page 33) Mitra firmly believes that peace, cooperation, toleration and moderation are more conducive to the long life and continuity of a society and civilization than intolerance, cruelty, war and exploitation. Unfortunately for mankind, the Western civilization in recent times wrought these evils on the human race.

Therefore, Mitra pleads for the realization on the part of nations, particularly the superpowers, that the stoppage of the arms race is the prime foreign policy imperative in the world today, along with consequent abolition of thermo-nuclear weapons, elimination of other dangerous armaments, and establishing 'peaceful coexistence' and cooperation between nations. The importance of moral values in foreign policy and inter-

national relations, and in other aspects of life, cannot be overemphasized.

Mitra pins his last hope, not so much on politicians, but on those dedicated men and women of Western civilization who are working for the cause of peace and abolition of nuclear weapons. A miracle might happen, he asserts, with *Glasnost*, *Perestroika*, and *Demokratizatsiia*. An atmosphere of mutual trust necessary for peaceful coexistence and cooperation might, after all, be generated.

Mitra has written with conviction and his knowledge of history and current affairs cannot but evoke our admiration. He has raised issues whose relevance for the future of mankind cannot be questioned by anybody. A third world war, if it comes, may well end not only Western civilization, but possibly all human life on the planet. Let not any nation or any person draw comfort from any false sense of security. If all nations particularly the Western ones, learn before the end of the century to grapple with their destiny, the labour of Shiba Prasad Mitra (which, I am sure, is a labour of love for him) in writing the book will be fulfilled.

*Dr. Anil Baran Ray*

1. ESSENTIAL ADVICE OF THE KADAMPA MASTERS, TRANS BY GESHE WANGYAL

2. A BUDDHIST VIEW OF ABORTION, BY BIKKHU NYANASOBHANO

3. MATRCETA'S HYMN TO THE BUDDHA, BY VEN. S. DHAMMIKA.

4. A TASTE OF FREEDOM, SELECTED DHAMMA TALKS BY VEN. AJAHN CHAH OF WAT PAH PONG.

5. MASTER OF THE DIVINE EYE, BY HELLMUTH HECKER

(Five Wheel Publication Booklets, Buddhist Publication Society, P.O. Box 61, 54 Sanghaja Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka)

The first small booklet translated under the supervision and guidance of a Mongolian



Lama, Geshe Wangyal, serves as a pocket size mirror in which we see our own image and distortions, sometimes with satisfaction, and sometimes with a feeling of horror. At every step the reader is enabled, with consistency and insistence, to do intense heart searching and introspection to know for himself, and then come to the right conclusion, that practising is not the same as preaching; to desire is to deserve.

A close study of the booklet creates in the reader deep interest in his own transformation. A good amount of advice from the Kadampa Masters has made its way into this small booklet which gives practical solutions to the many knotty problems the reader confronts in his day-to-day life, and goads him to right action.

The second book very interestingly argues and sums up moral, religious and psychological ramifications of resorting (or not resorting) to abortion. The arguments are coherent and logical with the religious touch of the Buddhist faith. Thinking of committing a heinous crime is as grave as committing the crime itself. Knowing fully well that the foetus would one day bloom into a human being, and yet nipping its life in the bud, is an act tantamount to murder and is liable to moral guilt. This small booklet, on an important and controversial topic, should serve as a guide to all those who contemplate such an irreligious course of action. The author's final advice is: "Those of us who have procured or participated in an abortion should face up to the misdeed, acknowledge it, and resolve to live henceforth full of kindness for all beings."

In this third booklet, the voice of Ven. S. Dhammika rises like a fountain of chanting, hymns (152 in number), which are all in admiration and praise of the rare virtues and qualities of Lord Buddha. The hymns are simple and appealing to the common man and are free from scholarly stiffness and archaic or ornamental language.

There are several books on meditation, but very few of them lay down practical steps leading to the truly meditative state of mind. But Ajahna Chah, the author of the fourth book, *A Taste of Freedom*, dispels the deep rooted idea in many that meditation is only for a select few saints. The meditative state of mind, according to him, can be accomplished by any individual, irrespective of his religion, region, caste or creed. The human mind is basically sublime, pure and calm by nature. It is perturbed and distracted by outward agencies. To lift the mind to the meditative condition is a scientific process. The booklet illustrates this process by giving practical suggestions. One feels, after reading, like experimenting with the meditative process immediately. The main aim of the present small volume is to give the reader a taste of freedom. The Buddha said, "What you want, that you will become." The language of the translator is simple, direct and clear.

The last of the listed booklets contains a short biographical sketch of the Anuruddha, a cousin and direct disciple of Buddha. Anuruddha was one of those very few disciples of Buddha who ascended to *arahatship*, which is a state of *Nirvāṇa* during one's lifetime. As an *Arhat*, Anuruddha lived and constantly practised the four foundations of mindfulness which ultimately led to an end of his craving and his attainment of equanimity and serenity.

The booklet describes in brief many facets of the great personality, his ordination as a master of the Divine Eye, attainment of *arahatship* and revelations of his past life, besides various other spiritual experiences which are interesting. Anuruddha's observations on the different states passing through which Buddha finally attained *Nirvāṇa* indicate the insightful knowledge Anuruddha had of higher worlds.

*Br. Yati Chaitanya*

# PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

WHAT is meditation? Meditation is the power which enables us to resist all this [our slavery to nature]. Nature may call us. "Look, there is a beautiful thing." I do not look. Now she says, "There is a beautiful smell; smell it!" I say to my nose, "Do not smell it," and the nose doesn't. "Eyes, do not see!" Nature does such an awful thing—kills one of my children, and says, "Now, rascal, sit down and weep! Go to the depths." I say, "I don't have to." I jump up. I must be free. Try it sometimes. In meditation, for a moment, you can change this nature. Now, if you had that power in yourself, would not that be heaven, freedom? That is the power of meditation.

How is it to be attained? In a dozen different ways. Each temperament has its own way. But this is the general principle: get hold of the mind. The mind is like a lake, and every stone that drops into it raises waves. These waves do not let us see what we are. The full moon is reflected in the water of the lake, but the surface is so disturbed that we do not see the reflection clearly. Let it be calm. Do not let nature raise the wave. Keep quiet, and then after a little while she will give you up. Then we know what we are. God is there already, but the mind is so agitated, always running after the senses. You close the senses and yet you

whirl and whirl about. Just this moment I think I am all right and I will meditate upon God, and then my mind goes to London in one minute. And if I pull it away from there, it goes to New York to think about the things I have done there in the past. These waves are to be stopped by the power of meditation.

Meditation is the gate that opens that [infinite joy] to us. Prayers, ceremonials, and all the other forms of worship are simply kindergartens of meditation. You pray, you offer something. A certain theory existed that everything raised one's spiritual power. The use of certain words, flowers, images, temples, ceremonials like the waving of lights brings the mind to that attitude, but that attitude is always in the human soul, nowhere else. People are all doing it; but what they do without knowing it, do knowingly. That is the power of meditation.

Slowly and gradually we are to train ourselves. It is no joke—not a question of a day, or years, or maybe of births. Never mind. The pull must go on. Knowingly, voluntarily, the pull must go on. Inch by inch we will gain ground. We will begin to feel and get real possessions, which no one can take away from us—the wealth that nobody can destroy, the joy that no misery can hurt any more.

*Swami Vivekananda*