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## **Divine Wisdom**

MANILAL: "What is our duty?"

MASTER: "To remain somehow united with God. There are two ways: karmayoga and manoyoga. Householders practise yoga through karma, the performance of duty. There are four stages of life: brahmacharya, garhasthya, vanaprastha, and sannyas. Sannyasis must renounce those karmas which are performed with special ends in view; but they should perform the daily obligatory karmas, giving up all desire for results. Sannyasis are united with God by such karmas as the acceptance of the staff, the receiving of alms, going on pilgrimage, and the performance of worship and japa."It doesn't matter what kind of action you are engaged in. You can be united with God through any action provided that, performing it, you give up all desire for its result.

"There is the other path: manoyoga. A yogi practising this discipline doesn't show any outward sign. He is inwardly united with God. Take Jadabharata and Sukadeva, for instance. There are many other yogis of this class, but these two are well known. They shave neither hair nor beard.

"All actions drop away when a man reaches the stage of the paramahansa. He always

remembers the ideal and meditates on it. He is always united with God in his mind. If he ever performs an action it is to teach men.

"A man may be united with God either through action or through inwardness of thought, but he can know everything through bhakti. Through bhakti one spontaneously experiences kumbhaka. The nerve currents and breathing calm down when the mind is concentrated. Again, the mind is concentrated when the nerve currents and breathing calm down. Then the buddhi, the discriminating power, becomes steady. The man who achieves this state is not himself aware of it.

"One can attain everything through bhakti yoga. I wept before the Mother and prayed, 'O Mother, please tell me, please reveal to me, what the yogis have realized through yoga and the jnanis through discrimination.' And the Mother has revealed everything to me. She reveals everything if the devotee cries to Her with a yearning heart. She has shown me everything that is in the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Puranas, and the Tantra."

(The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, October 2 1884)

### **Editorial: Saints as Beacon Lights**

Durga Charan Nag, popularly known as Nag Mahashay, was one of the greatest householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Once he went to see Sri Ramakrishna and expressed his agony that he had not yet been able to surrender himself to the Lord. The Master consoled him, saying, "If you love 'this' (pointing to himself), everything will be all right." But that did not satisfy him, so he asked: "Sir, how shall I pass my days at home?"

"You will not have to do anything. Only remain in the company of the holy."

"I am a simple, uneducated man. How shall I recognize the holy men?"

"Listen, you will not have to look for them. You stay at home, and the real holy people will come to you of their own accord."

This advice of Sri Ramakrishna points the way to all sincere spiritual souls who are forced to remain in the world but are longing to advance in spiritual life.

Worldly or spiritual, all people long to attain happiness. The question is whether one knows

how to be happy. Happiness is not a commodity one can buy, borrow or steal: happiness is a condition of the body, mind and environment. When the body and the mind are fit and healthy, and circumstances are peaceful and harmonious one experiences happiness. And our scriptures declare that happiness is attained only when one lives life according to the dictates of Dharma, i.e., a righteous life. This is where the saints can help and guide us. Saints are like beacon lights. According to the dictionary a beacon is a person, act, or thing that warns or guides. A person or thing that illuminates or inspires; and all saints without exception act as beacon lights and help us with their inspiration, example, guidance, and warning.

Just as Nag Mahashay once asked Sri Ramakrishna, so we can ask: Where do we find saints? How do we recognise them? In a way the answer is simple. If we are sincere, earnest and do our best to live a pure life, God himself will arrange the rest. There is a law of which Swami Vivekananda used to say that when the field is ready the seed must come. When we are ready, unfailingly, the guidance and teaching will come. And just at the right time in the right way.

"As I take it, universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked here...the soul of the whole world's history was the history of these." (Thomas Carlyle)

All of us are hero-worshippers, whether we know it or not. For most of us need examples whereby we can set our goals, mould our lives accordingly and thereby make them meaningful and fulfilled. And the greatest of these heroes are the saints.

I think it was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said "There is properly no history, only biography." He meant all of us are influenced for good or evil by powerful people. In other words common people are, at their best, all imitators. So those who are striving to lead an ideal life must exercise discrimination to find an ideal person. This is where saints or even sincere spiritual seekers can help us a great deal.

So who is a saint? Certainly the scriptures enumerate the characteristics of saints in great detail. A saint is one who lives, moves and has his being in God. To him, the whole world appears as a manifestation of God. He remains serene amidst all dualities like pain and

pleasure, praise and censure, heat and cold. He knows nothing but God, speaks of God, and is intoxicated by the thought of God. Instinctively he knows what is right and wrong. Even the greatest suffering cannot unbalance him, for he accepts all circumstances as the will of God. The places where saints live and move become holy and pure. A saint is a blessing on earth. They are the living demonstrations of scriptural teachings. Saints are the true benefactors of humanity. Throughout history, saints have played a great part in preserving spiritual values in the world.

As Swami Sivananda puts it so beautifully: "A saint is a spiritual washerman. He applies the soap of devotion and knowledge, and removes the spots of sin in worldly people. In his presence, man becomes holy.

"The moment the mind thinks of a sage, immediately all evil desires, base passions, are brushed aside. Meditation on the lives of saints is equivalent to holy company. Study of their teachings also provides us with holy company.

"To think of saints, to live in their company, to have the good fortune of receiving their blessings, is to draw forth upon yourself a shower of purity, inspiration and divine consciousness.

"Love is the very breath of a saint. Mercy is his very nature. His heart overflows with compassion. He does not look at the faults of others. He returns good for evil and blesses those who curse him."

What do we gain by studying the lives of saints? In the world we see much discrepancy between profession and practice. We may not ourselves be honest and truthful, yet we would like to see honesty and truthfulness in others. When we look for these in others we are bound to be disappointed most of the time. It is only in a saint that we see perfect honesty and sincerity.

Again even though we may read all the scriptures in the world, we may not feel inspired to put their teachings into practice. As Swami Vivekananda says, religion is not talk but realization. Inspiration can come only from a living soul. A lighted lamp alone can light other lamps. Only a saint can inspire men to lead a holy life. Every true saint inspires numberless

people to tread the spiritual path.

Moreover many are the scriptures and varied are their teachings. One can easily get confused and lost. The lives of saints alone can give us correct understanding and guidance. Again how do we know that the teachings of the scriptures are true? It is only by seeing them carried out in the life of a saint that we can have faith that they are true. The experiences of saints also authenticate the truth of the scriptures.

As mentioned earlier the lives of saints inspire and guide us. When we look at them the first thing that we notice is that the life of every saint is invariably centred on God. They see God everywhere. Their thoughts, actions and dreams are all about God. They know nothing beside God. They are innocent of worldliness. They are the embodiments of purity and holiness.

We cannot but be struck by their simplicity and overflowing joy. Simplicity does not mean merely lacking things. There are enough poor people in this world who are unhappy and unfulfilled. Simplicity is to have a definite goal and live for it joyfully. Every page of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna loudly proclaims the joy of living. And this is in spite of the simple life Sri Ramakrishna led. How could saints be so joyful? Because they live, move and have their being in God who is Ananda-svarupa, bliss embodied

Many of us talk glibly of universal love. We know little of love, not to speak of universal love. But every saint is an embodiment of love. For they have become one with God who is of the nature of supreme love. They look upon all beings with an equal eye as manifestations of God.

Love manifests in joy, knowledge, care and responsibility. Saints do not proclaim their service. Whatever they do becomes the greatest service; for every action of theirs points to God alone.

We may think saints are otherworldly and dreamy visionaries. No. Saints are the most practical people in the world. We become amazed when we find how practical and efficient they could be. It is because their minds are not clogged like ours. They can see and understand everything better than us, and we find no cobwebs in their brains. They perform all actions with great care and concentration.

Saints radiate joy, tranquillity and peace. And yet even saints have their fair share of troubles and trouble-givers. Every saint's life testifies to it; it may be that they have even more suffering than what we experience. But the way they face and react to suffering is what makes them saints. Pain and pleasure, good and evil, praise and censure - all these they accept as part of the process called living. And they react to all events with equanimity. Whatever happens they take to be the will of the divine. They have the capacity to integrate evil, pain and suffering into their lives and enjoy everything.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the study of the lives of saints is of the greatest benefit. As Carlyle puts it: "Great men, taken up in any way, are profitable company. We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something by him."

All of us may not be fortunate in meeting a living saint. But their biographies, which are abundant, can help us as well. We can get their biographies in the form of books. These days we can get them on the Internet (we are fortunate to have the Internet!). We can have Internet or digital Satsang i.e. holy company.

Let us seek the company of sages and evolve. Satsang with sages is unfailing in its results. They alone can show the way to eternal bliss and immortality.

When we study the lives of saints we are inspired at once. When we remember their sayings we are elevated immediately. When we walk in their footsteps we are freed from pain and sorrow.

Let us take all the help we can and become blessed. The very company of sages and saints has a tremendous transforming effect on the lives of all true seekers. It lifts us up to heights of sublimity, purity and spirituality.

**Swami Dayatmananda**

**Saint Namadeva**

**Swami Lokeswarananda**

Centring round the deity Vitthala of Pandharpur, a long succession of saints, headed by Jnaneswara, flourished in Maharashtra for nearly four centuries beginning from the

thirteenth. Of the many strikingly common features which marked their characters was the catholicity of their views as well as the simplicity of their faith. Never allowing themselves to be identified with any particular creed, they would concentrate on what they considered the essence of religion, strictly leaving alone all forms, which they held in great contempt.

Indifferent to all theological disputes, they concerned themselves only with the ultimate goal of God realization, to which they bent all their energy. Love of God was their chief trait which in some of them took on the form of a passion totally eclipsing all other aspects of life. Many of them were gifted poets who wrote short lyrical poems (Abhangas) which in flights of imagination, in the beauty and grandeur of diction, or in the profundity of wisdom remain unexcelled.

One such saint of Maharashtra was Namadeva who claimed all the distinctions mentioned above besides a few others not attained by any other who either preceded or followed after him. Hailed by Jnaneswara as 'the light of the world', he was a contemporary of that great soul and also his peer in many respects. Together they toured many places of India, and though different in temperament, they found much in common between themselves so that a friendship sprang up between them which continued till the last day. Jnaneswara, whose approach to questions of religion was essentially intellectual and analytical, was nevertheless so drawn towards Namadeva (despite the latter's well-known bias towards emotionalism) that he often sought his advice and followed it, sometimes even against his own reasoning. The relation between the two was so close that their difference in outlook was scarcely known outside the narrow circle of intimate associates, and a still more interesting fact is that after the premature passing away of Jnaneswara, his admirers and disciples accepted Namadeva as the natural successor of their leader.

From the evidence furnished by his own writings, Namadeva's date of birth may be placed somewhere around 1270. Unlike Jnaneswara who died very young, he lived to a great age, eighty or more. Son of a tailor, Namadeva's early life gave no indication of the saint that he was to become in later years. Uncontrolled and uncontrollable, he found much delight in mischief-making which ranged from playing relatively innocent pranks on the unwary to

committing violence. As he grew in years, the ferocity of the trait so increased that such crimes as murder, loot, and arson began to figure prominently among his daily doings.

The climax, which proved also the turning-point in his life, occurred when one day he with his accomplices attacked and killed eighty-four horsemen. Visiting the temple of Amvadhya shortly after this, he found there a boy crying from hunger while his mother scolded him for being so unreasonable, for had she not already told him that she had no food to give him? On enquiry he learnt that the father of the boy was one of those unfortunate horsemen who had fallen victim to his cupidity. Stung by conscience he entered the temple and striking his neck with a sharp weapon made an offering of his blood to the deity as a mark of his atonement. He was turned out from the temple and from there he went directly to Pandharpur, determined that he would spend there the remaining years of his life in repentance and prayer. With the same ferocity which marked his earlier misdeeds he now began his new life - a life of utmost poverty, a life of ceaseless prayer and bitter repentance. He continued like this for several years till at the end he had a vision of God.

By now he had won recognition as a religious man and many began to visit him to receive instructions from him in matters relating to spiritual life. About this time a congregation of religious men took place at Pandharpur - it had to be Pandharpur, for, thanks to the influence of Jnaneswara, it had become the centre of attraction to all seekers of truth - and with such eminent men as Jnaneswara, Namadeva also joined it. It so happened that among the leaders of the congregation there was one called Gora who declared that a test should be held to decide the fitness of those present to join a congregation meant for monks of the highest order. The idea was accepted and he undertook to carry out the test. Passing before each monk he pronounced judgment saying whether he was 'baked' or 'unbaked', that is, whether as a spiritual aspirant he had reached his goal or not. Coming to Namadeva he declared that he was entirely 'unbaked' and it would be many years before his 'baking' could be said to be complete.

Utterly dejected, Namadeva left the place and also Pandharpur resolving that he would not return till he could feel sure about his position among the monks of Pandharpur. He felt that

what he needed was the instruction of a competent teacher who would guide his steps to the goal. So he began to look for such a teacher and found him in one called Visoba Khechara. When he first met Visoba, it is said that Visoba was lying and his legs were on a Shiva-linga. Shocked, Namadeva began to scold him for such sacrilegious conduct. In reply Visoba suggested that he (i.e. Namadeva) might take the trouble to put his legs elsewhere, if he so objected to his legs being where they were. Indignant Namadeva removed his legs and as he put them elsewhere, another Shiva-linga sprang up on the spot immediately. He was struck by the extraordinary power of Visoba and decided that he was the teacher he was looking for. He besought him for his guidance which the latter agreed to confer on him, and from then onward he remained with his teacher till he had satisfied himself that he had received spiritual illumination in full measure.

Soon after this he returned to Pandharpur where the brotherhood of monks accorded him a warm welcome; Jnaneswara himself at their head. Although Jnaneswara was the first to draw the attention of the country to the deity Vitthala and the brotherhood of monks which his personality brought into being, none made both more popular than Namadeva.

Namadeva in one place describes what he experienced when he had his first vision of God. He says he saw a flood of light suddenly coming out from the skies - light as brilliant as that of a thousand suns shining at once. Voices, probably of saints, told him that God was coming. And when God came, He came "as when a cow rejoins her calf after a long time." In another place he says, in the vein of a vedantin, "What lamp can we light in order to see our Self? He who gives light to the sun and the moon needs no light to be seen."

Namadeva, as the name implies, was an apostle who preached that the Lord and the name of the Lord were one and the same. He used to say, "The name of God is the form of God and the form of God is the name of God;" "In the eighteen Puranas the only remedy suggested for the cure of man's evil nature is the repetition of the name of God;" "God may conceal Himself but He cannot conceal His name;" "Cling fast to the Lord's name, O young and old!"

Namadeva was, in his time, the greatest singer of devotional songs. With the vina in his hand he would sing and dance with an ecstasy that was most touching. In his house, which still

stands, there is the deity Kesiraja before whom his daily devotions in the form of singing and dancing used to be a great attraction to the people around. He would say that, if allowed, he would continue in this way throughout day and night, and he would not stop even for food and drink. Such was his habit that at no time of the day would he stop repeating the name of God, no matter how he was occupied; and he would say if ever the tongue failed to keep on uttering the name of God, he would prefer that it were destroyed.

Namadeva has many Abhangas to his credit, all of them remarkable for their simplicity and clarity. And they had such a universal appeal that many of them have transcended barriers of narrow sects, having found acceptance among varying communities of people including the Sikhs. What is most characteristic of these Abhangas is Namadeva's yearning for God which is the common note which all of them strike. In utter desolation he says, "Although you are called the Lord, strangely enough I remain helpless, a destitute, an orphan;" "While people praise you as one who grants redemption to those fallen, I remain a fallen man all the same;" "You are the Lord of the universe who controls everything ; yet it looks as if the world has overcome you, for why else should your presence not be known?" "I care for nobody except you. Is it not, therefore, a shame that you should remain indifferent to me?" "I hate this world, yet you have made me cling to it. Is this not an act of betrayal?" "With tears in his eyes and hands stretched out to you, Namadeva cries out to you, O Lord!"

Many stories are related bearing on the saintly character of Namadeva. Typical of them is one in which it is said that once a dog snatched away from him a piece of bread he was eating.

With a pot of curd he ran after it, begging that it might kindly accept the curd also.

Namadeva was lucky in being of a generation in which many saints flourished. Most of them were simple men and women, unlettered and of lowly birth. Those who deserve special mention among them are: Samvata, the gardener; Narahari, the goldsmith; Chokha, the untouchable; Kanhopatra, the dancing girl; Jana, the maidservant. The last named was Namadeva's maidservant, who was with him till his last day. Like her master and teacher, she also sang and danced ecstatically before the Lord, and among women saints she was only second to Muktabai, sister of Jnaneswara. Kanhopatra, whose famed beauty brought her many

suitors, declared that she would marry only him whose beauty equalled hers. And as according to her the only person who fulfilled that condition was Vitthala (a form of God), she would regard herself as His betrothed. Soon after this, the chief of a neighbouring State sent word asking for her hand. As it was impossible to refuse him, she stood before Vitthala and put an end to her life. There is an unidentified tree marking the spot where she was buried and the tree stands to this day and is worshipped.

Describing the characteristics of a saint, Namadeva says that he is a spiritual washerman. He applies the soap of illumination, beats his linens on the rock of tranquillity and washes it in the river of knowledge. It is thus that he removes the spots of sins. His further signs are that he sees God in every being and to him gold is as a clod of earth. His heart is free from anger and passion, and peace and forgiveness rule there. To him honour and dishonour are of the same value as they are to a tree. He recognizes no one as his enemy and his tongue is ever busy praising the Lord.

As to what we should ask of God, Namadeva says that all we need to ask of Him is that we may always think of Him alone in our hearts, utter His name alone with our lips, see nothing but Him alone with our eyes, use our hands in His service and worship only, hear only of His kindness, and that He should always be with us in this life and hereafter. Of such all-absorbing love for God there could not have been a better example than Namadeva himself, with whom it was like a fire which consumed him day and night. Till the day he passed away in 1350, his life was one long prayer, in which all his thoughts, feelings, and actions found themselves working in unison.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, January 1952)

## **Pathways of Realization (cont.)**

### **Clement James Knott**

#### **Realizing the Subtle Body**

Our beingness as Homo Sapiens comprises three bodies. They are: the physical body (in gross form), the subtle body (of finer substance) and the causal body (the finest substance). The

causal body is the cause that manifests both the subtle and the gross bodies. The causal state is like a seed form containing all the potentialities of the person.

The subtle body has been traditionally defined as comprising five subtle aspects (produced by subtle energy) These are: the five sense organs, the five organs of action, the five vital forces (pranas), cognitive mind (manas), and intellect (buddhi). These seventeen elements together with the inner organ of perception comprise the principal parts of subtle bodies perceived by the ancient Yogis. Modern Yogas and healing therapies have adapted this concept to one that is based on the seven main chakras and their nadis (the spinal channels). There are also many lesser chakras and nadis throughout the body, knowledge of which is necessary for Yoga healing.

The subtle body is energised by the movement of prana, the cosmic energy and life force. It is an invisible form of energy that is carried in earth, air, fire and water, sunlight and food, and energises all forms of matter. In its pure state it comprises both positive and negative aspects in a bi-flow mode, flowing both ways to and from the object. It can manifest either as a positive or a negative energy, prana and apana. Prana is a positive impulse whose tendency is to flow upwards and apana is a negative impulse whose tendency is to flow downwards.

As to the latent form of the subtle body, there is general agreement among the major sects and modern schools of thought regarding its abbreviated concept though there are differences of opinion as to some of the details.

The chakras are centres of consciousness in the subtle body, each of which is connected with a specific nerve plexus of the involuntary nervous system. They are sometimes depicted as being circular in form, but when energised they expand three-dimensionally. The chakras are radiant, radiating different colour sensations, and they have each retained and manifest specific qualities and attributes of individual beingness derived from impressions left by the dominant perceptions of the mental and feeling bodies.

The nadis are channels through which the pranic energy flows through the central spinal channel, sushumna on either side of it there are two other nadis, ida and pingala, spiralling through the chakras, energising them.

Kundalini is the latent spiritual force that energises the chakras and the inner consciousness of the subtle body and when aroused it integrates the functions of beingness. The spiritual force is the unifying power that draws all the created aspects together and endows their realities with powers of the spiritual aspect of beingness.

Kundalini is a static force having the qualities of a static entity, with the powers of cosmic energy. It is depicted as a coiled serpent at rest and it is located in the sacrum bone at the base of the spinal column.

Attitudes and feeling that have caused a dominant effect on one's personality leave an impression in the subtle body. If these impressions have not been realized by re-balancing the feeling body, then they can become an impression in seed form that will be retained and carried forward in the causal body.

These impressions can have a positive or a negative effect on the spiritual development of the individual.

### **The Qualities and Attributes of the Chakras**

As given by Sri Mataji Nirmala Devi, the founder of Sahaj Yoga.

7) Sahasrara Collective consciousness, harmony.

The crown. Unity of being.

(Connected with the Pineal gland)

6) Agnya Thoughtless, awareness  
and observation.

The forehead. Discernment, forgiveness.

Being fully present here, now.

5) Vishuddhi Communication, feeling of  
collectivity.

The throat. Respect for oneself and others.

4) Anahatha Confidence in oneself.

The heart. Love, responsibility.

3) Nabhi Satisfaction, interior peace.

The abdomen Generosity.

2) Swadisthan Attention, creativity.

The pelvis

The Kundalini The latent power.

In the sacrum at The divine Mother.

the base of the spine.

1) Mooladhara Innocence, wisdom, inner joy.

The perineum

### **Kundalini Yoga**

Kundalini Yoga in India was originally an esoteric practice studied in small sects by initiates as a personal path to realization. It was not until the 19th century, which brought more interest in Indian religious philosophy and practice, that their knowledge was opened up and became available for study and practice on a wider basis. In the past, some western writers have regarded Kundalini Yoga as a risky occupation. Remnants of this negative attitude are still with us, due to a lack of understanding of the nature of Kundalini, and its potential power for freeing the individual.

Kundalini Yoga covers established systems which aim at realizing the spiritual body of the individual (Atman) by freeing the subtle body of any obstacles and accretions, by energizing the chakras of the subtle body, calming the senses and by re-linking the Jivatman with the Source of being, the one true Spirit. This can be achieved by releasing the immanent power of Kundalini to rise through the Sushumna channel activating the chakras and the Sahasrara and so restoring the individual connection with the Divine from which one has been cut off long ago.

The adept in Kundalini Yoga is able to sense the state of the chakras of other aspirants by perceiving the flows passing through his or her own hands that correspond with each of the centres and by following certain simple procedures he can release any obstacles or accretions.

### **The Ascent of Kundalini**

The aim of Pranayama is to rouse Kundalini from her repose through concentration and special breathing exercises. She can also be raised by initiation by an accomplished Guru. Kundalini energy contains all the spiritual powers and is the mother of all the higher perceptions. It is dormant in the ordinary person but the new aspirant can prepare himself or herself by earnest meditation. As the energy of Kundalini rises, different states of consciousness are experienced and the qualities and attributes of each chakra are manifested. Any blocks or accretions on the centres can be located by appropriate procedures and released. When the blocks have been cleared, the consciousness can be directed into any of the clear chakras at will.

### **The Will**

The will is the directing power over the mind. The spiritual will manifests when clear thought action and selfless feeling come together as one, integrated and co-ordinated by the inner organ of perception. It can bypass the diminished ego-mind and the limitations of the ego-body.

The mind-stuff (Chitta) is formless, but the centre of awareness for directing the mind is static, normally in the head behind the eyes. Without this stable datum, perception becomes rather more difficult, needing fixed (false) viewpoints.

The will can direct the mind waves into any part of the mind or the body or into objects. The will needs to exert its primacy over movements of the mind to stop it wandering and wasting energy. When the perception has been completed then the mind-stuff withdraws into the centre of awareness. This is a normal reflex, but sadly, some people have been cut off from this stable datum, hence they do not have sufficient control over the movements of their own minds, whether out flowing or inflowing.

Anyone who has lost contact with the stable datum of his perceiving mind can recover it by postulating it as he wishes it to become. He can meditate on the ever-effulgent core of his mind, carefully watching and witnessing the flows of perceptions and directing them. This can become a part of his procedure for self-observation and assessment.

## Conversations with Swami Turiyananda (cont.)

### Swami Raghavananda

January 31

Swami Turiyananda: "There are some great souls who live in that indivisible, changeless Time. To them this whole universe appears momentary and unreal. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) dwelt in that state much of the time. But you see, we normally live on this relative plane. Maya (the Cosmic Illusion) is such that, though you drive it away, it comes back.

"Once I was sitting on the bank of the Ganges, meditating. I lost external consciousness. It was about three o'clock in the morning when I came to. Someone said, 'Let us go home.' These words were like a stunning blow to me. You see, I had no home at that time, and I realized that the desire to go home had come from my own mind. Through practice of discrimination I understood that birth, lineage, race, and country are all figments of the imagination. Then I took a vow to erase all such ideas from my mind. This little incident made a deep impression on me.

"At one period I used to bathe in the Ganges at half past three in the morning. One day I noticed something like a thick rope floating in the water; it was moving in the opposite direction of the current. I watched carefully and then saw a crocodile give a lash with its tail. I ran back to the bank. But I despised my behavior and began to consider, "What, you think you are the Atman, birthless, deathless, and now you run away from death?" After I discriminated in this manner I dived into the water and faced the crocodile. I was determined not to run away even if the crocodile should try to kill me. But from within myself a voice said, "Look here. You are not acting from knowledge of the Atman. You have not yet attained that state. You are letting yourself be guided by your wilful ego. This is nothing but rashness." You see, I was nervous at the time. If I had had the realization of the Atman, I would not have been afraid; I would have faced the crocodile calmly. But I did not run away, although I understood that I was acting impulsively and was not yet free from fear. Thus did the Lord teach me.

"Sri Ramakrishna's example solved all the problems of my own life. I have no problems left to

solve. While I was in the West, whenever anyone asked me a question, I used to look at the person, see his problem, and the answer would immediately come to my mind.

"At one time I liked the philosophy that everything is in a state of flux, but then I realized the fallacy of it; I felt that there must be a permanent substance to witness the changes.

"One looks on the phenomenal universe as real unless one finds something higher. Why don't we understand the truth that this world is unreal? Because we are attached to it.

"I used to ponder over all these philosophies. Then I realized that love for God is the only point that matters. After studying and discussing philosophy I came to the conclusion that onepointed devotion to the supreme Atman is the one important thing.

"Sri Ramakrishna's life had two aspects. You must try to understand both. If you accept only one aspect there will be misunderstanding and confusion. For instance: The Master used to give presents to musicians who played for him. When he had nothing else to offer them he gave away the very cloth he was wearing. Was not that an example of supreme renunciation? On the other hand, when that same Ramakrishna did not receive the customary food offering from the temple, he anxiously inquired about it and asked Swami Yogananda to go and get it.

"Swami Yogananda asked, 'Why bother?' The Master rebuked him, 'Oh yes, I know you are a man of great renunciation. You don't care!'

"How to reconcile these two attitudes? Of course Sri Ramakrishna did not take a morsel of that food offering himself. He had it brought for distribution among the devotees.

"One day Sri Ramakrishna told Yogananda, 'Be a devotee, but don't be a fool! When you want to buy something, go to different shops, compare the prices, and take the best and the cheapest. If you save money this way, give that money to the poor.'

"There is another instance. When Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) found a piece that someone had lost, and showed it to the Master, the latter said, 'Why did you take it? You don't need it. Why would a person who doesn't want any fish go to the fish market and haggle about prices?'

"How can you reconcile these contradictory attitudes? One time Sri Ramakrishna apparently behaves like any other worldly man, carefully calculating about everything. Then again he exemplifies the ideal of renunciation. You see, he was a man of principle. He represented an

ideal in whatever he did. And this is what I would call a perfect soul.

"If an ordinary man gets a little renunciation, he completely loses his head. The worldly man, on the other hand, is very grasping... As we associated with Sri Ramakrishna, our eyes opened. He showed us the ideal life by his own example.

"When the Marwari devotee Lakshminarayan offered Sri Ramakrishna ten thousand rupees, the Master fell unconscious. Regaining consciousness, he told the devotee to get away from him. When Lakshminarayan suggested giving the money to Hriday (Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, for the Master's use) instead, the Master exclaimed, 'Oh no! He will accept it in my name, and I can't bear the thought of possessing money!'

"The devotee remarked, 'Ah, I see. You have not yet overcome the idea of acceptance and rejection.' The Master simply replied, 'No, I haven't...'

"I have somebody to look after me. I know that for a fact. So I do not worry. This is neither imagination, nor poetry, nor romanticism; it is really true. I see my Protector as I see you before me. I am the vilest of the vile. I willfully try to do wrong, but He won't let me. He is protecting me. Can you understand this? But one must not talk about such things. Ego, ego! Vanity! Very bad!"

## **February 7**

Swami Turiyananda: "Some holy men, while eating, really feel that they are offering sacrifice to Brahman, the all-pervading Spirit, in the form of the vital energy. Any other attitude is brutish. Such people feel light in body; others carry a heavy weight.

"There are yogis who can cure any kind of physical disease. I firmly believe that if I made the attempt I could get back my youth. But that would be small-minded. You cannot keep the body forever. Everyone knows that, so why waste your energy to prolong the life span?

Furthermore, everything happens by His will. Why assert yourself? It only increases your sense of ego. Great suffering is in store for the man who takes his own responsibility and does not surrender himself to God. You see, I don't feel responsible for myself, and therefore I enjoy the fun.

"How people worry about wealth! You boys have renounced everything. You know that the

Lord supplies all the necessities of your life although you own nothing. But as a general rule, people seek the power of wealth. The Divine Mother does not let them know that she alone protects, because they are attached to possessions. She shows them the play of wealth.

"Kali Maharaj (Swami Abhedananda) at one time used to catch fish, reasoning that the Atman is immortal: it neither slays nor is slain. Learning of this, Sri Ramakrishna sent for him. He told Kali Maharaj, 'What you are saying is true. But at your state of development, before you have realized the Atman, it is not good to discriminate in that way and kill any creature. You should know that realization of the Atman is a state of attainment beyond all logic and reason. He who attains that state feels compassion for all beings. A holy man is freed from all samskaras (tendencies of the mind), but the thought-wave of compassion stays with him to the last moment of his life. Never give up the ideal of a holy man!'

"There are people who worship God in order to gain power - occult power, for instance. But we want the sweet and loving aspect of God. Those who seek power feed their ego; the ego, which causes all the suffering in the world.

"Narada taught constant recollectedness of God. Let no other thought or desire enter your heart. Let the current of your mind run to God, smoothly, like oil poured from one vessel into another.

"At one time I felt that my life was unbearable because of my sense of ego. How was I to get rid of it? By committing suicide? Of course not! But this very thought - how to overcome the sense of ego - made me restless. Then it disappeared. This was a sort of crisis that I passed through.

"Spiritual growth is a gradual process. Practice the disciplines patiently and make them habitual in your life. If you try to advance too quickly, there comes a reaction.

"Manu has written that if a brahmin or a brahmachari (a novice) wakes up after sunrise, that is a sin which has to be expiated. I don't think that I ever woke up after sunrise. For a time I practically gave up sleep altogether. I used to practice spiritual disciplines constantly and I never suffered from drowsiness.

"This world is a bad place. But if one does not worry about himself but thinks of others and

acts accordingly, one finds some meaning to this life.

"In one of his letters Swamiji wrote, 'When I go for alms, I give people something in return.' Give and take - that is the motto for a monk. Monks who live only for themselves and don't even practice spiritual disciplines are impostors.

"Sanatan Goswami, a well-known disciple of Sri Chaitanya, had admitted his defeat in a debate with a scholar and wrote a certificate to that effect. Jiva, Sanatan's brother-disciple, defeated this scholar in turn and took the certificate away. Learning of this, Sanatan excommunicated Jiva for his egotism, and Jiva practiced austerities to purify himself. Rupa Chaitanya, another of Sri Chaitanya's disciples, said that the duty of a devotee of God is to have compassion for all creatures. Sanatan used to take a glass of buttermilk as his sole daily food, and chanted the name of the Lord all day long. Haridas, one of his brother-disciples, would not break his fast until he had repeated the Divine Name three hundred thousand times. But you know, these were not ordinary human beings. It is not possible for average people to practice spiritual disciplines to this extent.

"We have seen Swamiji meditate the whole night, then early in the morning he would take his bath; and people did not know anything about his austerities. I never saw Swamiji sitting idly; he either studied or conversed on God or meditated.

"One day Swami Shivananda sang a devotional song to Sri Krishna. While listening, I began to weep and went into ecstasy, and Swamiji did too.

"To live the ideal life is our only purpose. The truth of the Upanishads is to be attained. The Truth is, and it must be realized in one's own Self. Swamiji did that. Of course, the one Truth is perceived in many ways, according to the capacity of the individual.

"To be completely selfless - that is the ideal which everybody understands. Selfishness is the root of lust. Lust will decrease as you become unselfish. People become restless by thinking of themselves. The more you renounce your ego the greater will be your spiritual unfoldment. Cling to your little self and you will remain little.

"Many people think, first let circumstances become favourable, then they will practice spiritual disciplines. But conditions will never be ideal. You must begin your spiritual struggles

wherever you are and under whatever circumstances you find yourself.

"Worship the Lord! Make it a regular routine in your life to worship Him. Wake up early in the morning. First worship the Lord, sing his praises, and then only attend to your other duties.

"There are two selves, as it were. One is impersonal, the unchanging Reality. The other is the so-called individual self, identified with many adjuncts (body, mind, senses, possessions). It is the individual self that is born, grows old, and dies. The impersonal Self always remains the witness. As long as a man identifies himself with his adjuncts, he cannot realize the Impersonal. Free yourself from these limitations and realize the Absolute!

"The cause of man's bondage is the sense of "me" and "mine." Renounce this sense of possession and you become liberated.'

"Sickness, mental laziness, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, sloth, craving for sense-pleasure, false perception, despair caused by failure to concentrate and unsteadiness in concentration: these distractions are the obstacles to knowledge.'

"Sickness. Mental laziness: The laziness of mind and body. You don't want to do anything. The mind is depressed. Doubt: doubt whether you will succeed or not. Lack of enthusiasm: always afraid to act. You have to be full of energy to achieve anything!

Sloth. Craving for sense-pleasure: The mind does not wish to give up its distractions; it knows that they are bad and yet cannot give them up. . . .

"Ram Maharaj (a disciple of Swami Brahmananda) never gave lame excuses. Whatever work he undertook he would do with a perfectly concentrated mind. Unless one is sincere one cannot grow spiritually.

"To be successful in work one first has to plan the work carefully and then do it. How can it succeed without organization? In every act you must keep perfectly calm. Many times in the process of performing one right action we make ten mistakes.

"What are the effects of meditation and japam (chanting the name of the Lord)? They make the mind strong and pure. One attains sincerity of purpose. One is the same inside and outside.

"For several years I used to sleep only two hours a night. I never had any headaches. In the

morning I used to sit for four or five hours, meditate, chant, and study at one sitting, and then do the worship, and then cook. I would eat very little and so never felt drowsy or lethargic.

### **Date unknown**

Swami turiyananda: "He who has only attained the Impersonal and has become merged only in the Absolute, is one-sided. The jnani (follower of the path of knowledge) is afraid of being born again, of becoming deluded again. But a real knower of Brahman, an 'expert player,' is not afraid. On the other hand, he who has only realized the personal aspect of God, and not that absolute Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss beyond all ideas and emotions, he too is one-sided.

"In one of the Puranas it is written that even when this whole universe is dissolved, the divine forms remain. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there are places in the ocean where the ice never melts. It seems to me that this is a state in which one worships God in his eternal form after the realization of both his personal and impersonal aspects. Here the ice does not melt because the rays of the sun do not enter. We never knew of these things until we came to Sri Ramakrishna."

Disciple: "But there must be a supreme goal! There must be an end to all this!"

Swami Turiyananda: "He is the goal. But what is He? He is with form; He is without form; He is personal; He is impersonal; and something more. He who knows Him, knows. He who lives under the tree in which the chameleon makes its home knows that it has more than one colour.

"'What is known as the nondual Brahman in the Upanishads is a ray of light from His Body.' A Vaishnava saying. This is sectarianism. Swamiji used to make fun of this kind of attitude.

"In the beginning of monastic life do not accept gifts from just anyone. If you do, it is only natural that you will be influenced by that person. You will lose your independence. Who can accept gifts from others? He who feels no obligation, whose mind is not affected. He will accept the gift as coming from God himself. Of course you may accept gifts from good people, who would not interfere with your independence or try to control you.

"How many want the truth? Very few can bear the full light of truth; most people close their eyes and try to reject it. They want a comfortable religion. We all want comfort and happiness for ourselves. There is nothing wrong with that. I don't mean to say that we should court misery. But our attitude should be: Let happiness or misery come; I want the truth. How many feel this way? Only a few great souls seek truth for its own sake.

"As a general rule, spiritual aspirants stop after having reached a certain level of growth. They remain satisfied with what they have attained and do not struggle for greater unfoldment. Only a highly spiritual soul can understand the workings of his mind. The mind plays tricks on us and deludes us in many ways. If someone points out the fallacies, we make excuses.

"We do not realize how much self-love there is within us. To become humble - not outwardly for show, but inside, in spirit - is very difficult. He who has genuine humility is truly a man of character. Think of Sri Ramakrishna, how humble he was! When a visitor who came to the temple garden mistook him for a gardener and ordered him to pick a flower, the Master humbly fulfilled the request."

Disciple: "Should we humble ourselves before everybody?"

Swami Turiyananda: "Yes, see the Lord in everybody, and be humble before Him. Learn to see God in all."

Disciple: "Then one has to rise above social etiquette?"

Swami Turiyananda: "Forget your social etiquette! Follow the truth! The mind is so crooked! Butter is mixed with buttermilk. To make the heart and the lips the same is not so easy.

"We read page after page of scriptures. How much do we actually assimilate in our lives? Sri Ramakrishna once said to Girish Ghosh: 'What are you talking about the knowledge of Brahman! Sukadeva only saw and touched the ocean of Knowledge. Lord Shiva drank only three handfuls of its water and became unconscious.' Girish Ghosh clasped his head and exclaimed: 'Say no more, sir! My brain is reeling.'

"Try to understand this. Try to understand Girish Ghosh also. What a great mind he had. And how he could assimilate spiritual teaching! With us it enters through one ear and goes out

through the other. Think of Suka! How great he was! He did not want to be born in this world because he realized that it was illusory. And he only saw and touched the ocean of Brahman! And Lord Shiva is the God of gods. He could only sip its water three times! How true! One's head would reel to think of it!"

In the Swami's room everything was kept in perfect order.

Swami Turiyananda remarked: "That's good. There is no disorder outside. In the same way, see to it that there is no confusion in your mind. Your mind must be so disciplined that you can concentrate it on a particular thought any time you wish. When your room is properly arranged, you can find any object you want even in the dark. Your mind must be organized just as well as your external life. Anything else is a weakness of character.

"When I was young I disliked to think that I would grow old. I thought I would rather die than face old age. But later I learned to surrender myself to the higher Will.

"These days I get agitated when I talk on spiritual matters. The reason is that my nerves are not as strong as they used to be. The mind, however, remains calm. Years ago I had great powers of explaining spiritual truths. If somebody asked a question, I immediately saw the whole character of the man, the cause of his question, and his motive in asking it. And my answer would come like a flood of light.

"What is the way to overcome this world? Control your senses. Until you attain self-mastery, the problems of life remain unsolved.

"A doer of good never comes to grief.' The spiritual struggles that you undergo are never in vain. Even if you do not attain the highest in this life, you carry your spiritual gain with you to the next life. Don't you see that there are people who from childhood are devoted to God and live without worldly cravings? On the other hand, there are some who may be learned but live like worms in filth. Without the control of lust nothing can be achieved. Look at Swamiji!

What was his power? He was free from lust. He lived among beautiful women, yet there was dispassion in his heart."

(to be continued)

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## Indian Thought and Carmelite Spirituality

### Swami Siddheshwarananda

"When the understanding of the soul is less pure and less simple, she seems clearer and more important; because when she is surrounded, combined, enveloped by intelligible forms, everything is more easily understood. This general knowledge we are speaking of is communicated with so much purity and simplicity and at such a completely remote distance from all intelligible forms which are the usual objects of understanding, that the understanding is not even aware of it. Sometimes, when this knowledge is at its purest, the soul blinds the understanding because she deprives it of what usually illuminates - representations or images - and then it becomes aware of the darkness in which it finds itself."

The state of contemplation described above corresponds to the final stage of dhyana according to the method of yoga: at that degree the mind is turned towards the ideal which faith incarnates. If we have followed attentively the reading of the work of St. John of the Cross, we will understand that in the word "faith" is concentrated a great richness of meaning, capable of satisfying our heart and our mind at the same time. According to the interpretation of St. John of the Cross, faith is the equivalent of the highest knowledge. Now we might profit by the occasion offered us here to make an observation on this matter. We often hear people who have left the Catholic Church say that they have renounced Christianity because they could not find a rational, intellectual way of approaching it. For those people, the whole of Christianity is limited to devotion directed towards salvation. However, if we reflect on the idea of "general knowledge" the way the saint teaches it, as a necessary factor before abandoning meditation, we discover there a solid basis where the buddhi guides our approach to Reality. In our comparisons we must be fair and not take the best of our side to oppose the worst in other doctrines. When we speak of a way of knowledge in the Christian tradition, we should take for our study those who, like St. John of the Cross, represent that way at its best, for whom the idea of faith is not merely an emotional dynamic but is also an arrow pointed towards the supreme Intelligence - which is another name for the

Realm of God. For certain mystics, that method of approach is the awakening of the pre-Adamic memories, an awakening provoked not by man but by the grace of God . That awakening cannot be obtained by intellectual or dialectics methods, since the intellect is vitiated by original sin. Vedanta would put it this way: the intellect dies into ignorance (avidya) so that knowledge (vidya) can rise out of a moment of ignorance.

Generally speaking, when we use the word "faith", we are aware of our emotional reactions; but the meaning which St. John of the Cross gives this word corresponds to the Sanskrit shraddha etymologically srat has the sense of Truth. faith and Truth are thus synonyms. When we use the word "Truth," the reaction aroused in us has its source in our intelligence. We assert that, in the yoga of St. John of the Cross, faith takes the place occupied by the Ishtam on which the disciple meditates, following the experimental way of yoga. faith and Christian revelation are identical, and we can say that these two terms are interchangeable; thus Jesus-Christ incarnates the Revelation. In the Indian tradition, although at first the Guru and the Ishtam are conceived separately, at a given moment the disciple must realise the fusion of the Guru in the Ishtam, according to the way Sri Ramakrishna has explained it. Meditation on Jesus Christ is a meditation on faith. The idea of faith contains a dynamic charge of "intelligence", and it is what the saint suggests when he requires of the disciple "that general knowledge" destined to become, thanks to the knowledge of what must be done and what must be avoided, the structure of intelligence. St. John of the Cross witnesses to the same demand which the Bhagavad Gita does: "Let these scriptures be thus the authority which determines for you what must be done and what must not be done." A deep intelligence is necessary to understand the scriptures and to know how to find what must be done or avoided. Formal education is of no use here. Brother Lawrence, Lata Maharaj, or Hui Neng had no erudition. The intelligence we are speaking of is a free gift; as soon as it awakes in the soul, even in that of an illiterate, the mute become eloquent and the ignorant become erudite. St. John of the Cross considers that the disciple must possess that general knowledge before abandoning the way of meditation.

Next let us study St John's concept of meditation. In the order of spiritual development,

meditation is anterior to infused contemplation. Before getting into our subject, let us consider a question very important from the point of view of yoga: to what extent would St. John of the Cross accept the role of the Guru and the Ishtam? The Guru is a spiritual guide (for a guide is necessary in pursuing this difficult way). In entering the spiritual way, the disciple confronts a terrible ordeal, which consists of reducing his own individuality to nothing; the realisation of the purpose is announced by the saint thus:

"The reader must also keep in mind the intention and the purpose I set myself in writing this book: my purpose was to direct the soul in all her natural and supernatural knowledge, freeing her from illusions and difficulties, in the purity of faith in order to attain union with the divine." (AMC, Book II, chap. 28, 1)

Such are the actual words of St. John of the Cross. Beginning with his prologue, he specifies that this road is very difficult, and that, in this work, he is not addressing the general public:

"Furthermore my main intention is not to address everyone in general but rather certain people, religious of the reform of Our Lady of Carmel ... God has given them the grace of setting them on the path of that mount. Since they are already totally stripped of the goods of this world, they will better understand this doctrine of spiritual nakedness." (Prologue, 9)

The doctrine of the Dark Night is not a practice within the reach of everyone. It is reserved for those who have heard the call of the Lord: "Abandon all and follow me ... If someone wishes to follow my way, let him renounce, let him take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his soul will lose it, and he who will lose it for love of me will save it."

[Mark 8:34]

And St. John of the Cross cites from Genesis the story of Jacob climbing Mount Bethel in order to erect an altar and offer a sacrifice to God. [Gen. 35] Jacob imposed three conditions on those who would follow him: first, renounce foreign gods; second, purify yourself; third, change garments. The first condition implies renouncing all feelings related to anything or anyone other than God. The second is the purification by the Dark Night of the Soul, which is to say renunciation of all tendencies rooted in sensual attachment.

The soul must mortify itself by a severe discipline; it must have the control of all sensual

appetites and repent all past errors. The third condition, which consists of changing garments, means that the soul must be transformed. Human initiative is necessary for the first two conditions, but the third - changing garments - is the work of God. "God himself puts on the new garments. He endows the soul with a new faculty of knowing and loving God in himself." The disciple does not know how to put on these new garments. Here the help of the Guru is essential. The road travelled by the disciple is away from the flesh, according to the saint; it is a supernatural way, which leads to a different nature, transformed and transfigured. He preaches a monastic ideal. Here is a quotation from St. Paul taken from the end of Book III Chapter 18 of AMC:

"One thing is certain, my brothers: time is short; consequently let those who are married be as those who are not; those who weep be as those who do not; those who rejoice be as those who do not rejoice; let those who buy be as those who possess nothing; let those who deal with the world be as those who have no dealing with it." (I Cor. 7:29-31)

Only a sure guide can direct the soul towards its final destiny. Who is the Guru of Christians en route to perfection? The Holy Church. The Catholic Church is much more than an organisation of the faithful, such as the sangha of the Buddhists; it is a higher idea. In fact, the holy church is considered the incarnation of the faith, a living faith indicated by the feminine gender: one says "Our Mother Church." She is the mediator between the soul and God.

Her role is identical to the goddess in the Vaishnavite tradition of Krishna. It is interesting to establish a parallel between this idea of the Church and the Vaishnavite notion of Krishna as the Eternal Masculine and Radha as the Eternal Feminine.

According to the Vaishnavite tradition, the totality of the manifested (or created) world is prakriti, which is to say, feminine. Let us make clear, however, that it is in no way a question of individual sex but a way of symbolising positive and negative principles. The eternal non-transitory principle, Purusha, is represented by the masculine, positive principle; whereas the Eternal Feminine represents the transitory (prakriti or maya), the negative principle (let us note in passing the etymological sense of the word maya: that which changes and never stays

the same). Everything which belongs to maya participates in its impermanent aspect; hence everything which belongs to this manifested world expresses the negative principle of change: all is feminine.

This theory is that of the Vaishnavite school of Sri Krishna Chaitanya. Liberation or Mukti intervenes only at the moment when the faithful perceive the masculine principle, symbolised by Krishna, as the principle active in all things. The jiva (soul), submerged in ignorance, believes he is himself the agent, the author of his acts, whereas in reality only the eternal cosmic principle works in each of us. How can one obtain that realisation? It cannot be done except by the grace of Radha, the Eternal Feminine. The gopis who surround Radha and Krishna are souls. Each one of them must be "transformed" into Radha, the Eternal Feminine, and for that contemplate herself in the mirror of Radha. Each of us one day will have to abandon the idea of being one who acts; there is a transposition of the teaching of St. John of the Cross when he urges us to submerge understanding, memory, and will in the dark night. The one who grants us mediation to help us reduce our personality to "nothing," as St. John of the Cross puts it, is the Guru, the Eternal Feminine, and this is the role which the Church plays: the mediator. We read in the Gita: "What is night for all beings is the time of waking for the sage who sees; what is the time of waking for all beings is night for the sage who sees." The Guru, the Church, awakes in us the sleeping creature. The powers of the soul are reduced to silence, faith comes to life, and the purified soul is united to the Eternal Masculine by the intermediary of the Eternal Feminine.

This guidance of the soul by Holy Church is accomplished by means of faith, which is expressed by possessing that general knowledge which contemplation furnishes. For Raja Yoga, one of the most essential practices is meditation on the Guru imagined in the heart of the disciple. In the work of St. John of the Cross, we do not find any special mention of meditation centred in that chakra (psychic centre), but the rigour imposed on the disciple for the purification of emotions, which constitutes the first part of the via purgative, implies that a strict watch be kept over the impulses which precede our affectivity, which, according to popular belief, are seated in the heart.

We know that the idea of abandoning meditation will shock our Hindu readers as well as those who have some familiarity with the directives usually given for Hindu meditation; for them, it would be difficult to admit that it is possible to give up the practice of meditation.

Nevertheless we will discover in reading advanced Vaishnavite texts that a time comes when even meditation must be abandoned, since in meditation the soul is active, and activity comes from ego; thus, in a correct view of spirituality, work has no legitimate place. In fact, if the disciple has progressed, meditation on the Guru, or the church and its doctrines, will have opened a way to contemplation, and meditation will cease of its own accord. But meditation, according to St. John of the Cross, will have served to create a new habit of love:

"Each time that the soul produces this fruit by meditation, she accomplishes an act ... and the multiplicity of acts finally will engender in the soul the habit, just as the multiple acts of knowledge full of Love of God which the soul produces to achieve the formation of habit ... He (God) sends them immediately into contemplation and into love."

The acts the saint speaks of are called Kainkaryas in the terminology of the Vaishnava saints of the school of Prabandha in South India. St. John of the Cross adds that love establishes the resemblance between the one who loves and the beloved object. Love not only renders them similar but also subjects the one who loves to the beloved object. A long contact is necessary before love is born, says the saint, and meditation is the means of creating this habit. This is what the school of yoga calls *smarana* and *manana* (memory and reflection); the current of meditation excites the soul to acts of love.

There, where the soul takes up its abode, there lies our treasure. When the mind fastens itself to something which it does not possess but, on the contrary, the thing in question is what possesses it, then we are the slaves of our thoughts. How do we become the slaves of our thoughts of God? We must love Him, and that love comes only by dint of a habit formed by a constant association of our mind with the thought of God.

If the holy Church is the Guru, the disciple must obtain faith by constant meditation on the foundations of that faith. In order to interpret the function of the Guru without becoming

enmeshed in what St. John of the Cross calls "a mass of errors and imperfections," the disciple must have recourse to the advice of a director of conscience... However, the director of conscience does not take the place of the Guru, and St. John of the Cross criticizes bitterly those directors of conscience who with time become a veritable danger for the spiritual evolution of the disciple; he exhorts disciples to find good directors of conscience.

Jesus Christ undoubtedly occupies the place occupied by the Ishtam in the yogic tradition. St. John of the Cross often repeats that "one makes progress only by imitating Christ; He is the way, the truth, the life. No one goes to the Father except by the Son, as He proclaims Himself."

This kind of meditation is analogous to that practised by students of raja yoga, who use images and visualisations. The saint describes in detail the snares and dangers this method presents, it risks leading the faithful away from the truth more than drawing them to it. In the course of a minute analysis, St. John of the Cross examines the dangers likely to divert the student from his purpose and turn him into a possessor of psychic and occult powers which the saint declares to be the work of the demon. This is exactly the same temptation which lies in wait for those who follow certain practices of raja yoga; they risk falling into the clutches of powers (siddhis) which, naturally, reinforce the ego instead of destroying it. Love for Christ is developed by following the way which he himself prepared for his disciples and not by embarking on an adventure which will yield him only supernatural powers. That way comes close to what Hindus call manasa puja (mental worship). Adoration and meditation begin with a kind of visualisation of Krishna, Rama, or some other chosen ideal which the disciple imagines in his heart. According as the meditation develops, the centre of attention is displaced and glides from the physical form of the divinity into the faith which it represents. The mind is then submerged, so to speak, in that "general knowledge" to which the saint gives such great importance. The Lord Jesus, the faith, and that "general knowledge" fuse and become identical.

For the students of yoga who practice meditation, the face of the ideal is identified with the contents of Pranava, Om, the meaning of which is given in numerous Upanishads and their

commentaries. The cosmic conception of that meditation is taught and transmitted only by initiation. Initiation is not a mysterious ritual; we use that term to indicate that it is a matter of knowledge which goes beyond the compass of a public lecture and is transmitted individually. A psychoanalyst would say that a disciple is "qualified" only after having experienced transference.

When the process of projection is completely terminated, at the end of his spiritual evolution, the disciple discovers that his Atman is the Self of all living beings: he is identical to that Atman which he had been worshipping. In the course of this process, love is born between the Guru and the disciple, an emotional bond which St. John of the Cross calls "betrothal" between the soul and God. This is the loving submission of the soul to the Church (or Guru). This is the moment when the disciple becomes the slave of the Guru, for St. John of the Cross teaches us that love not only makes the lover resemble the beloved object but subjects him to it.

The term "initiation" indicates a certain psychological maturity, since the riches of the guru are transmitted to the disciple. The notion which we in India have of initiation in its most intensive form (not the ordinary rite by which each of us receives a mantra from the family Guru) is an interior awakening aroused by a real spiritual hunger. This kind of initiation is distinctly different from initiation rites which bind one to a religious community, as for example, baptism for Christians or the investiture of the sacred thread for Brahmins. The higher kind of initiation we want to discuss is found in the Bible. St. John of the Cross cites this passage:

"If there are among you certain prophets of the Lord, I will appear to them in dreams. But there is no one like my servant Moses; he is the most faithful in all the house. I speak to him mouth to mouth, and he sees the Lord not by means of comparisons, symbols, or images, but openly."

This kind of initiation or realisation is instantaneous and is accompanied by a transmission of knowledge. It is well known in the history of Indian mysticism as when Sri Ramakrishna says to Swami Vivekananda "I see God as I see you, but in a manner much more intense," and at the

initiation of the Swami by that vision, Sri Ramakrishna used the same words of transmission, thanks to which the disciple sees the Lord, not by means of comparison, symbol, or image, but openly.

This meditation is not for everyone. In order to conquer the faith St. John of the Cross speaks of, one must first pass through the *via purgativa*. Most members of a spiritual community indulge themselves in consolation. St. John of the Cross vehemently proves their error. All of us need compensations in life; those who wish to be free of the congenital need for compensation are rare. We try to replace the compensations of life with religious consolations. As we have already said, in the eyes of St. John of the Cross, faith is knowledge, and in knowledge there cannot be this personal factor which dominates our whole system of compensations. Very few of the faithful reach the point where they see in Jesus Christ the incarnation of faith which brings them the redemption of compensatory forces. St. John of the Cross makes no compromise when he writes:

"Jesus Christ is almost unknown to those who believe themselves his friends. We see them, in fact, seeking in him gentleness and consolation, see them loving themselves dearly, instead of seeking the bitterness and self-abasement which are the mark of the love they bear. As for those who live far from him and separated from him - the important people, scholars, potentates and others who live in the midst of the world, preoccupied with satisfying their ambitions and their desires for greatness - how can we say that they know Christ? ... They are not dealt with in this writing."

The acquisition of general knowledge is identical to the acquisition of supernatural light. In his natural state, man identifies himself with the intelligible forms which are the proper object of understanding. The supernatural state, of which St. John of the Cross speaks, corresponds to the vedantic notion of Purusha permitting the disciple to contemplate Him, and we have already indicated on this subject that, according to the Hindu point of view, the possibilities of the Eternal are infinite. It is the teaching expounded in the Bhagavad Gita (IX, 15), where reality is conceived in its unity, distinct from the soul, and as an omnipresent multiplicity.

(to be continued)

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## Leaves of an Ashrama 30:

### The Truly Great as Friends and Models

#### Swami Vidyatmananda

"I think constantly of those who were truly great." This magnificent line opens Stephen Spender's<sup>1</sup> celebration of those extraordinary individuals we regard as geniuses of the spirit, who Ramakrishna would respect as extraordinary manifestations of God's power. Born of the sun, they travelled a short while towards the sun, and left the vivid air signed with their honour.

Reducing our dependence on conventional relationships, we are content eventually to seek only the great as our intimate friends. They are the most delightful companions; in their company there is no disappointment, no boredom, no remorse for wasted hours. They are gracious enough to visit my room in the ashrama; an ashrama is a place where they feel very much at home.

To find, say, Walt Whitman near me as I prepare for the day - is it not a joy? With him I loaf and invite my soul. He confides: In the faces of men and women I see God. He discloses: I say the whole world and all the stars in the sky are for religion's sake. He offers his own proof for the existence of God; is a better one possible? And a mouse is a miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

In the rest-period after lunch, perhaps a visit with William Blake<sup>2</sup>. In relating his own experience, he reminds me of who I am and what I am trying to do here:

"To see the world in a grain of sand

And a heaven in a wildflower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand

And eternity in an hour."

What could be more bracing than to close the day in the company of my friend Meister Eckhart?<sup>3</sup> His thought has been criticized as being dangerously close to pantheism. Well, what is wrong with pantheism? If anybody can see all as God and God as all, is that not wonderful? Isn't that our objective? He has told me many things, among them this, which has taught me how to view my work: One must not always think so much of what one should do, but rather what one should be. Our works do not ennoble us; but we must ennoble our works. At other times, other friends who from the womb remembered, who in their lives fought for life. They are the clouds of witnesses who compass us about, see what we are doing, encourage us to run with patience the race that is set before us. (Yes, St. Paul is a good friend also, and what a capable writer!) Or call them guardian angels who bear us up in their hands lest we dash our foot against a stone. Or call them brother-seekers who succeeded. Feeling affection for, and gaining affection from the wise is the only distraction permitted a serious aspirant. The Japanese essayist Yoshida Kenko said more than six hundred years ago: To sit alone in the lamplight with a book spread out before you, and hold intimate converse with men of unseen generations - such is a pleasure beyond compare. I dare even add: the fact that being in the company of wisdom enralls you clearly means that you are increasing in wisdom yourself.

1 Stephen Spender (1909- ). English poet and critic.

2 William Blake (1757-1827). English poet and artist.

3 Meister Eckhart (1260-1321). German Dominican monk and mystic.

## **Book Reviews**

### **The Book**

On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are

By Alan Watts

Published by Souvenir Press

Price: £8.99

Alan Watts was one of the best known writers of the 1960's and 1970's and millions of young people at that time studied his work as a means of understanding their own place in the world. For many years his work has been unavailable in the UK, but a new edition of his most acclaimed work, "The Book," is now being published for a new generation of readers.

In "The Book" Alan Watts explains how a person's identity (his or her ego) binds him or her to the physical universe, creating a relationship with the environment and other people.

Starting with an exposition of the taboo on enquiring into who you are, he explains that many people look upon God as the King of the Universe, the Absolute Technocrat who personally and consciously controls every detail of his cosmos. Alan Watts goes on to point out that the view he is putting forward is not this one, but comes from ancient India. It is the Vedanta philosophy. He therefore employs the term "Ultimate Ground of Being" or the "Self of the World" as a "decontaminated" term for "God."

In a somewhat jocular vein he then goes on to speculate about the possible future of mankind in this ever-increasing technological world, also delving into such questions as "how to be a genuine fake" and "the world is your body."

This book will appeal to those who are seeking to relate the Vedanta philosophy to our contemporary world and look at this ancient philosophy from a modern counter-cultural standpoint. Alan Watts explores the subject in concrete terms, using current idioms and expressions which will also appeal to the younger reader.

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### **The Philosophical Verses of Yogavasishtha**

By Swami Bhaskarananda

Published by Viveka Press, Seattle

Price: US\$9.95

The original Yogavasishtha is a very large book, containing 32,000 verses in Sanskrit. A shorter version called the Laghu Yogavasishtha, consisting of 6,000 verses selected from the original was created by Pundit Abhinanda Gaur of Kashmir in the 9th century A.D. Later an anonymous scholar created a smaller version called Yogavasishtha-sara, consisting of only 223 verses. It is this latter book that Swami Bashkarananda has translated for the benefit of English-speaking readers.

Following the translation into English, the Sanskrit text is also reproduced and this is followed by a glossary of Sanskrit terms. Throughout the book explanatory notes have been provided wherever needed.

It is interesting to observe that the notes also supplement the information contained in the book by Alan Watts (also reviewed above). The note on Chapter I, verse 22, of the Yogavasishtha, for instance, reads:

"It should be clearly understood that the ego, which is usually considered the self, is an idea of the mind only; it is purely mental. According to Vedantic tradition, mind is matter in a finer form. On the other hand, the Atman is the spirit; it is not matter. The Atman, which is spirit, forms the very core of every person's being. It, being none other than Brahman, is divine. That's why the word Atman is described as the indwelling Divine Self."

**John Phillips**

