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Editorial

Karma Yoga and Spiritual Life

Swami Vivekananda was the greatest advocate of Karma Yoga. In the past Karma Yoga was considered by many as merely a preparatory stage for other yogas; its role was to purify and prepare the mind and make an aspirant fit for undertaking spiritual disciplines.

But Sri Krishna emphatically tells us in the Gita that Karma Yoga is quite capable of leading us to Self-knowledge all by itself. He tells us that in the past many aspirants like King Janaka attained Self-knowledge through the practice of Karma Yoga. Swami Vivekananda also advocated it as an independent path in its own right leading to God-realisation.

In one of his lectures on Karma Yoga, Non-attachment is Complete Self-abnegation, Swami Vivekananda says: "Each one of our Yogas is fitted to make man perfect even without the help of others, because they have all the same goal in view. The Yogas of work, of wisdom and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of Liberation."

Karma Yoga in our age

Karma Yoga is specially needed in our age. Why do we say this? Because our present age is characterised by stress, insecurity and overwork. People hoped very much that technological advances would lead to increased leisure and happiness. We forgot that without a spiritual outlook increase of knowledge also results in the increase of misery and suffering; we forgot that knowledge also leads to technology, which in turn leads to the production of many desirable (and undesirable!!) goods, and hence increases our desire to possess and enjoy them. Paradoxically these very advances made way to more desires resulting in more work, more stress, less leisure, less security and more unhappiness, causing impatience and restlessness. Hence Karma Yoga is indispensable if we wish to retain our sanity and attain

some amount of peace and equanimity.

Karma Yoga

That which joins us with Self or God is Yoga. So Karma Yoga is a way of performing actions which helps us go toward God. Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita gives us two beautiful definitions of Yoga.

1. Yoga is evenness of mind (in success and failure).
2. Yoga is dexterity in work.

Dexterity means to work efficiently, intelligently, with full concentration and with the sole aim of pleasing God alone. Dexterity means not to be bound by the result of Karma. The only thing a Karma Yogin desires is to realise God and advance in spiritual life. Naturally the mind needs to be kept calm and serene. Actions which bind us to the infinite rounds of births and rebirths, lead to Liberation and Bliss supreme when done in the spirit of Yoga or perfect equanimity. That is dexterity.

All the doers of good work are not Karma Yogins

There are many people who think they are Karma Yogins because they do a lot of good work. Undoubtedly there are many who are doing good work for their country, society, or helping in monasteries and charitable organisations etc. There is no doubt that a lot of good work is done this way. And undoubtedly such good work gives them a lot of merit, and as a result of their actions they obtain happiness in life. But many render such service because they may be restless or time hangs too heavily on them, or they are trying to escape from boredom and ennui. However useful and good their work may be, it cannot be called Karma Yoga.

The goal of Karma Yoga is Self-knowledge

Karma Yoga is not merely doing good or unselfish work. Let us not forget that the goal of any Yoga including Karma Yoga is to take us to God, to help us get out of the bondage of the world. So only a person who is yearning for God-realisation through the path of Karma alone can be called a true Karma Yogin.

To be a Karma Yogi a man should seek only spiritual life. Karma Yoga is not simply a moral discipline, but a life of intense spiritual practice. Until a person has intense yearning for God-realisation, he may be unselfish in one sense, but he is no Karma Yogi.

Other signs of a true Karma Yogin

A person who wants to follow the path of Karma Yoga will be efficient and focussed. We can count out any one who is sloppy and unfocussed in his work. By endowing Karma with a spiritual outlook Karma Yoga teaches us efficiency in work.

A Karma Yogin also loves his work, does it to the best of his capacity and derives immense joy in its performance. Yet at the same time he is free from the sense of doership; he has no attachment for any particular type of work, is ever ready to do any type of work and offers the results of all his actions to the Divine Lord. The only thing he desires is to please God and to progress on his spiritual path.

Because a Karma Yogin has no attachment to the fruit of his actions, he is not affected by good or bad results. And he offers the results of all his actions to God, for he accepts all consequences as the will of God and remains calm and serene. He is no slave to passing

emotions.

Karma Yoga is the common basis of all the Yogas. It is the basis, the stepping-stone to the Yogas of knowledge, meditation and devotion, known respectively as Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. Karma Yoga can be combined with any of these three Yogas.

Swami Vivekananda shows us how we can worship God face to face through our dealings with others. He calls upon us to look on all beings as veritable manifestations of God and serve and worship Him in them.

"From the highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere the same God, the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body at their feet.
These are His manifold forms before thee.
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings, without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God."

(To a Friend, Swami Vivekananda)

One can practise Karma Yoga without believing in a conventional religion or God, or adhering to any creed. Simply through unselfish action with the sole aim of advancing in spiritual life, one can gradually attain to the state of inner peace and freedom.

Swami Dayatmananda

First Chapel to Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Amareshananda

The first place of worship for Sri Ramakrishna; where and when did it come into existence? Interestingly, it was at a devotee's house. Swami Amareshananda, a monk of the Order Ramakrishna, unfolds some of its history.

A tiny seed of the Banyan, going unnoticed at first, sprouts and grows in course of time into a gigantic tree providing shade and shelter to a large number of people. Similarly, just a century ago, the name of Sri Ramakrishna, current only among a limited circle of citizens of Calcutta, has today become a household name. Now lakhs of people look upon him as God-incarnate and worship him as their Ideal of Life, while quite a good number of chapels and temples stand dedicated to him in India and abroad.

The genesis of the worship dates back to the very lifetime of the Master himself. Five categories of people came to Dakshineswar to keep his holy company: Some were curious visitors; some were people seeking solutions for mundane problems; some belonging to various faiths were searching for guidance in the spiritual life; a few were families, all of whose members had been devoted to him for years; and a handful were pure, earnest youths who came to belong to his 'inner circle,' later transformed into spiritual dynamos and torch-bearers.

Sri Navagopal Ghosh was the head of a family of the fourth category. He and all the members of his family looked upon the Master as God-incarnate, the pole-star of their lives, and passed on this heritage to their descendants.

Sri Navagopal Ghosh, born in Begampur village of the Hooghly District in 1832, resided in the Badurbagan neighbourhood of Calcutta. He was by nature gentle, cheerful and kind, and held a top executive post in the English firm M/s Henderson Company. He distributed medicines free of cost to the poor, and supported many from time to time. Being endowed with a religious temperament Navagopal used to find delight in religious festivals, took part in group singing and lived a contented spiritual life. Early in life he was married twice and each time his wife died prematurely. Finally he married a third time to the devout Nistarini Devi. In her dwelt the Goddess of Fortune as well as a current of devotion. She had even in youth developed remarkable devotion to God and had instilled the same fervour into the sons and daughters of her family.

Once Navagopal chanced to hear about Paramahansa Deva of Dakshineswar and became at once eager to meet him. Accordingly, one Sunday he proceeded with his wife to Dakshineswar. After the preliminaries it was the practice with Sri Ramakrishna to guide each seeker along a path best suited to his nature. Not much is known about this first meeting of Navagopal with the Master, but so instructed, Navagopal began to chant and sing the name of God daily without any interruption. Of course this was to his liking, so every morning he along with his wife and children used to sing together the divine names to the accompaniment of cymbals and khol, a type of percussion instrument.

Nearly three years went by and Navagopal had not visited the Master at Dakshineswar a second time. The Master however did not forget his devotees. He made enquiries through Kishori Roy, who happened to be a friend of Navagopal saying, "Hallo, some three years ago, a gentleman came here with you who lived in Badurbagan holding a high post in an office, and who distributed medicines free to the poor, where is he nowadays? If you meet him, ask him to come over here, once at least."

On hearing of the kind enquiries of Sri Ramakrishna through his friend, Navagopal's eyes filled with tears of gratitude and joy. Taking his family with him, he at once hastened to Dakshineswar. To Sri Ramakrishna's enquiry about his long absence, the devotee replied that he had been meticulously following the instructions imparted to him. Sri Ramakrishna then advised Navagopal not to simply confine himself to the routine practices, but to come to Dakshineswar frequently so that he could make progress and easily reach the state of divine bliss. Thereafter, whenever he was free, Navagopal used to come to the Master with his family. We may recall the assurance Sri Krishna gave to Arjuna in the Gita (IX. 22): "Those devotees who are ever devoted to Me; to them I carry what they lack..."

Sri Ramakrishna really took over the responsibility for the devotee.

Gradually Sri Ramakrishna completely possessed the hearts of the family and became their Preceptor and Chosen Deity in one. Navagopal's son, Suresh, was then five or six years old and even at this very tender age was a talented player of the kiwi in accompaniment to singing. Sri Ramakrishna loved this boy very much.

In those days devotees having the means, in order to benefit by the blessed company and presence of Sri Ramakrishna, by turn invited him to their homes and organized religious meetings on Sundays. Navagopal too, taking the cue from others, earnestly requested Sri Ramakrishna to sanctify his home. And after getting the Master's consent arranged a religious festival. On that auspicious day, when the reading of the Bhagavata was in progress, Sri Ramakrishna arrived. When the attention of all the assembled devotees was drawn to him, the reading did not proceed further. He took a seat and shortly thereafter, Banavari, the noted vaisnava musician with his group of sankirtan singers commenced singing. Sri Ramakrishna, who was already in divine inebriation, was stirred up by the music and in a virile mood he leapt amidst the orchestra and stood motionless in the posture of Sri Krishna playing the flute. Slowly he entered the state of mahabhava. Navagopal Ghosh had kept two beautiful garlands made of fragrant flowers to adorn the Master. Seeing him in that God-intoxicated mood the devotee placed those flowers on his neck and began to dance round the Master. Some shed tears of joy, and a few who were unable to check their emotions lay flat on the floor.

Women devotees used to remain in the inner apartments and offer separately their respects to Sri Ramakrishna on such occasions. On this occasion Nistarini Devi and other women devotees, busy in the inner apartments on the first floor, were arranging to serve food to all the assembled people. They were also eagerly waiting to pay their respects to Sri Ramakrishna. Regaining partially his normal mood and being helped by others he went upstairs. The women devotees who were waiting then offered their obeisance and Nistarini was blessed by him.

Sri Ramakrishna, who could see the innermost of a person, sometimes used to awaken the spiritual consciousness lying dormant in qualified aspirants. He would do this either by a mere look, or a touch, or by writing a sacred mantra (a name of God) on the tongue with his finger. On this occasion Nistarini Devi, overflowing with motherly devotion, beseeched Sri Ramakrishna to allow her to feed him with her own hand. In an exalted mood the Master asked her, "Who are you to feed me?" After a little pause, knowing her deep devotion and pious nature, the Master allowed her to put food into his mouth. To her utter surprise, while so doing she felt that some great spiritual presence residing in him had accepted the food. Being fed three or four morsels in this way, the Master became normal and resumed taking his food himself. On some earlier occasion Sri Ramakrishna had indicated that Nistarini was endowed with an element of Chinna-masta, a form of the Divine Mother embodying divine knowledge. Once she had remained in an exalted spiritual mood for six months

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna contains stray references about Navagopal Ghosh. Other books like Paramahamsadever Jivana-vrttnata (The Life of Paramahansa Deva) by Ramchandra Dutta; Sri Ramakrishna Punthi, by Akshaya Kumar Sen, and others give some more details. Finding Navagopal shedding tears of joy at the sight of Sri Ramakrishna in samadhi gives us an indication of his mental make-up. Navagopal was one of the older devotees assigned to attend Sri Ramakrishna at Shyampukur and Cossipore during his last illness.

When Sri Ramakrishna was seriously ill at the Cossipore garden house, Navagopal's family used to visit him as often as they could. During one of these visits Nistarini Devi, who was frank and free with him, was asked by Sri Ramakrishna if she would agree to take charge of a cat with kittens which had taken shelter with him. Before handing them over to her, he got

confirmed by her that it would not entail any undue hardship or be disapproved of by her husband. Nistarini Devi replied, "It will be my great good fortune, and I like to keep cats and kittens anyway. You are giving; it is your grace." Though Sri Ramakrishna's mind soared high, yet he took note of minute details in all matters and paid proper attention to them. On her part, Nistarini Devi accepted his gift with all humility and felt blessed. She never allowed anyone to ill-treat the kittens.

Then came a memorable day, January 1, 1886. Though lying seriously ill, Sri Ramakrishna became the Wish-fulfilling Tree of epic fame (Kalpataru). He blessed and bestowed his unbounded grace on some thirty devotees who happened to be present at Cossipore on that day. Ramchandra Dutta, having just got the Master's blessing, seeing Navagopal Ghosh, eagerly called him, "Sir! What are you doing here? Hurry up, be quick! If you want any favour from Sri Ramakrishna, ask for it, today he has become the Kalpataru! Hearing these words of Ram, Navagopal hastened to Sri Ramakrishna, offered obeisance and implored: "O Lord, what will be my lot?" Sri Ramakrishna, after a pause, asked him, "Can you do japa and meditation?" Replied Navagopal, "I am a householder having responsibility for wife, children and other dependents. Where is the time left for carrying on japa and meditation? I am afraid I shall not be able to do it." Again Sri Ramakrishna asked, "Can you not do even a small number of japam?" He answered, "Even for that, where is the time, Sir?" Sri Ramakrishna simply asked him, "Well can you remember me and chant my name?" Navagopal, overwhelmed with joy, replied, "Certainly! certainly! That I can do!" Sri Ramakrishna then assured him, "That will do. You need not do anything else."

Thereafter Navagopal Ghosh used to chant with deep feeling the Master's name most of the time. Returning from his office every evening he used to distribute sweets to the children of the locality and repeat the Master's name. The children used to call out "Jai Ramakrishna," Hail to Sri Ramakrishna! and dance round him playfully. In the neighbourhood he became thus known as "Jai Ramakrishna," After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, while Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda were undergoing severe austerities at Vrindavan, Navagopal too went there with his son Nirod and spent some time in their holy company. He went also to Vindhyachal and returned to Calcutta with Swami Brahmananda.

Navagopal Ghosh had such a fascination for the name Ramakrishna that, finding a locality in the Howrah area bearing the name 'Ramakrishnapur Lane,' he purchased a house in this lane and shifted his residence from Badurbagan. He added a spacious room to it on the first floor, provided it with an altar and marble floor and began using it as his chapel. On the auspicious Magh Purnima (full moon day of 6 Feb, 1898), in the morning, Swami Vivekananda accompanied by Swamis Adbhutananda, Brahmananda, Premananda, Subodhananda, and Turiyananda, came to Navagopal's house by country boat, all the way singing devotional songs with cymbal and khol. With the blowing of conchs and due solemnity in the presence of all the great monks, Navagopal installed and dedicated the picture of Sri Ramakrishna in the new shrine. Swamiji himself sat on the worshipper's seat and worshipped the Master's photo. As the worship came to an end, he composed extempore the now famous lines:

"Establisher of righteousness,
Embodiment of all religions;
Best of Avataras, to Thee I bow."

Then with great feeling the family requested Swami Vivekananda to pray to Sri Ramakrishna that he always reside in the chapel. Swamiji humorously remarked, "For fourteen generations Sri Ramakrishna (his line) never dwelt in such a fine building with marble flooring! If he does not reside here, where will he?"

Some call this chapel of Navagopal the first and oldest chapel of the Master, since the

monastery had always been located in rented buildings and was shifted from place to place a few times, only at the end being finally established at the Belur Math. There was a mart of joy on that day in Ramakrishnapur Lane. From then onwards, even till today, descendants of Navagopal Ghosh offer daily worship and observe Magh Purnima with a festive special worship of Sri Ramakrishna. The day is celebrated with great joy. Subsequently, as the original chapel was located adjacent to a living room, a separate hall was constructed on the second floor and the chapel shifted there. A new picture of Sri Ramakrishna on porcelain, made in Germany, was later consecrated by Swami Brahmananda. Besides himself being an ardent devotee, Navagopal also brought Nagendra Ghosh, Dr. Ramlal Ghosh, Haran Babu, and others into the fold of the Master's circle of devotees.

The eleventh book of the Srimad Bhagavatam, particularly the twenty-three chapters from seven to twenty-nine, are called Uddhava Gita "The Last Message of Sri Krishna to Uddhava." They deal with the doctrine of Bhakti and Jnana. While discoursing on the ways of devotion and worship, the Lord lays stress on service rendered to holy men, listening to the scriptures and meditating, building and maintaining temples and organizing and celebrating special festivals, and feeding the devotees with sacramental food. These injunctions were carried out true to the letter and spirit for many years by Sri Navagopal Ghosh and his family.

Sri Ramakrishna used to caution his householder devotees engaged in the spiritual life, of the dangers of losing one's balance due to excessive attachment to worldly relations. He used to advise them to hold on to the Lord at all times, in fortune and adversity alike. When one of Navagopal's married daughters died suddenly, everyone in the family was broken down in sorrow and dejection. But Navagopal maintained his calm, and smoking his chillum in his usual way said, "All is His will; there is nothing to grieve over." Thus he corroborated the Bhagavatam's statement: "The association with sons, wives, dear friends, and other relatives is no better than the chance gathering of a group of travellers in a caravanserai."

Like her husband, Nistarini Devi too, was a great devotee. She acquired perfection in japa, the repetition of the Lord's name. She had a vision of Sri Ramachandra, her Ista, through japa. Once when she was offering obeisance to Him, in the process of touching His feet, she actually saw the form of her Guru, Sri Ramakrishna. When the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, was in Vrindavan for about a year after the passing away of the Master, during a vesper service in the Radharaman temple, she saw in a vision a Nistarini Devi fanning the presiding Deity and after returning to her residence she narrated to Yogin Ma, "Yogen, Navagopal Babu's wife is very pure. I saw her like this." Holy Mother, too, sanctified the house of Navagopal by her visit, invited by Nistarini Devi, in August 1909.

Nistarini Devi cherished great respect and love for the monks of Belur Math, If she heard that any one of them was ill, she took the ailing monk into her house and arranged for his treatment, diet and nursing till his recovery. Those were the days when there was not much provision for taking care of sick monks at the Belur Math due to paucity of funds. The monks found their loving mother in her.

Swami Brahmananda visited the pious household of Navagopal many a time. Shyamsundar and Nirod, two of the sons of Navagopal, were his disciples. Both of them were greatly devoted to him, like their parents had been to Sri Ramakrishna. On the passing away of Swami Brahmananda, Shayamsundar, by this time grown up, donated rupees forty thousand towards the construction of the Brahmananda temple at the Math. Swami Abhayananda, used to reminisce that "Shyam Babu, son of Navagopal, bore almost the entire expense of the construction of the temple, even for the statue of Swami Brahmananda inside." He recounted that every day Shyam Babu used to come to the Math on a white horse and watch the progress of the construction till it was completed and dedicated by Swami Shivananda in 1924.

In April 1909, at the age of seventy-seven, Navagopal had a premonition of his coming end. He drew all his family members close to him and blessed them, saying in a firm voice,

"Do not grieve. The physical body is bound to perish. Sri Ramakrishna is our real Master. We are his children. He will take care of you, instead of grieving, call on him."

Navagopal carried out the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna that he had received on the Kalpataru day, to remember him and chant his name, till his last breath. Chanting his sweet name and feeling a sense of complete fulfilment, Navagopal breathed his last, his face beaming with joy. He demonstrated how an ideal householder should live: "One who is devoted to Me, can continue to live in the home itself till his end, performing all duties as offerings to me."

Nistarini Devi, in her old age, when she was lying ill, felt joy when the monks, the authorities at Belur Math, arranged for her nursing just as she used to look after them. She was then in her 'Divine mood of Chinna-masta and could not bear the touch of impure persons. In that exalted spiritual mood she passed away.

The other son of the family, Nirod, joined the Belur Math at the tender age of eighteen in 1902. His parents were all praise for his taking up the monastic life. He was ordained with sannyasa by his guru, Swami Brahmananda in 1914 and was given the name Ambikananda. He was well known for his musical ability and was also good in painting. It is said that only after deep meditation on different deities, he used to paint his pictures of the gods and goddesses. Once he was asked by Swami Brahmananda to set a melody for the Rama Nama Sankirtana which was included in the Bengali drama, Ramanuja. The same is sung now on Ekadasi days in most of the Ramakrishna Mission Centres. Swami Ambikananda passed away while leading an austere life in the Punjab in 1954.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, June 1991)

Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and his Way

Umesh C. Gulati

It is quite natural for people in any pluralistic society to differ on various issues. But what distinguishes a democratic society and an authoritarian one is how these issues get resolved. The history of the last two thousand years, and especially of the last millennium, saw every nation resolve many of the inter-faith, inter-personal, and international conflicts through violence. Had it been otherwise the world would have been far better off than it is today.

Mahatma Gandhi whose life and message are the subject of this essay, broke with this tradition of conflict and hatred and used instead the way of love, and won India's freedom from the British through non-violence. "In an age," says Huston Smith, "in which violence and peace faced each other more fatefully than ever before, his name became the counterpoise to Stalin and Hitler." On learning of the assassination of Gandhi on January 30, 1948, President Truman's Secretary of State and Nobel Laureate General Marshall said, "Mahatma Gandhi was the spokesman for the conscience of mankind."

Many Christians in America and Europe instinctively used to speak of him as the most Christ-like man alive. As the American missionary E. Stanley Jones put it, "Never in human history has so much light been shed on the Cross, as has been through this one man, and that man not called a Christian." He was indeed a real peacemaker, and helped resolve many areas

of conflict in the Indian society and helped India emerge as the world's largest democracy, with many castes, creeds, and languages.

Gandhi is remembered throughout the world not because of what he did, but how he did it, which he called Satyagraha, or the struggle based on truth. Let us illustrate it by one of the incidents that occurred in early 1930. The government had imposed a law forbidding Indians to make their own salt, making them dependent on a British monopoly. Gandhi thought it to be the perfect symbol of colonial exploitation. In defiance of the law he marched with seventy-eight of his trusted followers to the Dandi beach on the Western coast of India. Later the number swelled to many hundreds, including men, women and even children. With Gandhi leading the way, they all swept down to the sea to gather salt in direct disobedience of the British law. Their contraband salt was auctioned off at premium prices to those in the cities who could break the law only by buying.

Months later, while negotiating at teatime with Lord Irwin, Gandhi took a little paper out of the folds of his cloak and, before the viceroy's astonished eyes, dropped a little of its contents into his cup, "I will put a little of the salt into my tea," he explained mischievously, "to remind us of the famous Boston Tea party." Lord Irwin had the grace to join in his laughter.

Unlike some of his leading contemporaries, Gandhi was not an orator. But he was a deeply religious man. It is no wonder then that Nelson Mandela, the former president of South Africa, described him a "sacred warrior." His religion, however, had nothing to do with any dogma. Rather, Gandhi's Hinduism was grounded in what he called "the rock bottom doctrine" of non-dualism, the crest jewel of Vedanta philosophy. Its cardinal principle is that God, which Gandhi called Truth, is both transcendent and immanent, and pervades all creatures and things. No one can fathom God by reason, but is revealed to us by experience and direct perception.

Vedanta calls the immanence of God in each one of us as the Self, and proclaims that Self is our real essence, while our bodies and minds, and names and forms are mere masks. The Self is infinite, immortal, and indivisible. The Bhagavad Gita says that one who remains aware of the Self, and sees the same Self in all, is really a wise person; for such a person all life is one.

To attain that awareness, however, is a process, and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, for that was his real name, had to struggle hard to reach that level of consciousness. Gandhi was born in 1869 in a relatively affluent family of Gujrat, Western India. His father was the prime minister in a princely state. His mother, a follower of Jainism and very religious, was compassionate and loved to serve the needy. Gandhi was just an average student in school, timid and afraid of darkness and ghosts, but he was very introspective.

Gandhi's parents got him married when he was only thirteen. He was very much infatuated with his wife. During that time his father fell ill, and he served him well. One night while he was near his bedside nursing him, his uncle came to relieve him. So Gandhi went straight to his bedroom to his wife. A little later his uncle knocked at the door to inform him that his father had just passed away. Gandhi never forgave himself for his youthful carnal obsession, and felt deeply ashamed and miserable.

At the age of nineteen, Gandhi went to England to study law. Since for a Hindu crossing the seas was considered sin those days, his mother very reluctantly gave her permission, but not before she extracted from him three vows: not to touch wine, woman, and meat. On reaching London he bought himself the most elegant clothing, took lessons in dancing, violin, and French. Introspective and sensitive as he was, he soon found them too expensive, superfluous and unnecessary for the purpose for which he had come. "If my character made a gentleman of me," he wrote, "so much the better. Otherwise I should forego the ambition." So

he gave up lessons in social improvement and sold his violin.

Gandhi then began to practice a simpler way of life. Following an example of one poor student, he rented a one-room apartment that was centrally located so that he could walk to every place wherever needed instead of taking the bus. For months Gandhi had nothing to eat in the whole of London but bread and boiled spinach. At last he came into contact with some zealous vegetarians and began to experiment with all sorts of vegetarian combinations to see which worked best for him. Gradually, deprived of the pungent spices of Indian cooking, he began to taste the food instead, and realized that he was relishing dishes, which had been a torture to eat before. He had discovered that the sense of taste lies not in the tongue but in the mind.

Gandhi used his three-year stay in London to have an in-depth study of the Bhagavad Gita. He also bought a copy of the Bible, but it was the Sermon on the Mount that gripped his mind. As Huston Smith has pointed out that although the Sermon on the Mount profoundly influenced Gandhi, his basic inspiration came from his native India. For early in his autobiography Gandhi wrote, "such power as I possess for working in the political field (have) derived (from) my experiments in spiritual field," adding that in the latter "truth is the sovereign principle," and that the Bhagavad Gita is "the book par excellence for the knowledge of Truth."

After returning home he found that his book learning of the English legal system was of little application in India. So, no one would dream of giving him a case. His colleagues in Mumbai (called Bombay then) began to call him laughingly the "brief-less barrister." His first and only case in Mumbai was a routine Rs30 claim. Gandhi stood up with trembling knees to make his cross-examination, but discovered abruptly that he could not utter a single word. Finally amidst his colleagues' laughter, he handed the case to someone else and left.

Just imagine if Gandhi had succeeded and become a famous lawyer, would we be writing this essay about his life and message? All this now seems to be the play of what is called Divine Providence. It was the same Divine Providence that made an owner of a company approach Gandhi to assist its legal team in a lawsuit against a fellow Muslim relative in South Africa. It was a God-sent opportunity, which he accepted and sailed there in April 1893.

During his journey from Durban to Pretoria by train he experienced two dreadful incidents of racial prejudice that transformed his life. Gandhi held a first class ticket, but at Maritzburg a white man entered the same compartment. Seeing Gandhi there he forcibly got him pushed out from the train by the police, as Gandhi refused to leave voluntarily. So he spent the whole night in bitter cold at the platform. Next day on a stagecoach, he was segregated, made to sit with the driver and beaten. Once he was almost lynched by an angry white mob.

Much later, when someone asked Gandhi what was the most creative incident in his life, he told the story of the night in Maritzburg station. He underwent many trials, suffered abuses and even physical attacks, but that long night in the Natal Mountains he made the decision never to yield to force and never to use force to win a cause. It is as if the truth of what he had read in the Gita about the immortality of the Self stood revealed before him. Atman, which is our true essence, which no weapon can cleave, nor the fire burn, nor the water wet or the wind dry it. This revelation transformed his timidity into fearlessness and weakness into strength.

At any rate Gandhi settled down in Pretoria and put his heart and soul into studying his client's case. But the more he studied the case the more he felt that litigation would bankrupt the defendant, for he was sure that his client would win. He therefore persuaded the parties to accept an out-of-court settlement, and also got his client to accept payment in installments, thus saving the defendant from bankruptcy. This case convinced Gandhi that the function of lawyers must be to unite the two parties - a conduct worthy of emulation in our

highly litigious society.

In his continued exploration into the Hindu religion, two ideas of service and simplicity began to influence his mind at this time. He started ironing his own clothes and cutting his own hair. Besides, he began to provide service in a small local hospital, and to any one needing his help. He once nursed and fed a leper who came to the door for help. And most of all, he settled many disputes between parties out of court for which he charged very nominal fee.

By 1901 Gandhi prepared to leave for India. At the time of his departure, the Indian merchants presented him costly gifts, including a gold watch for himself and a diamond necklace for his wife. Gandhi felt embarrassed and brooded over the ethics of accepting such expensive gifts. Accepting them was not only inconsistent with his simple life style, but also wrong. For the gifts clearly seemed for the public service he had rendered. Gandhi believed that service must be free; otherwise it's a trade. So all gifts, including the diamond necklace, which his wife parted with tears in her eyes, were made into a trust for the service of the poor Indian workers there.

Gandhi remained in India just two years, when at the request of his former client he went back to South Africa. Back in that country, Gandhi organized the Natal Indian Congress and led civil disobedience campaigns against many acts of racial injustice by the white government toward indentured workers from India. His most important acts of service, however, were leading a team of volunteers to fight the black plague, which broke out in an Indian ghetto, and organizing an Indian Ambulance Corps during the Zulu rebellion. It was this Corps, which treated the injured Zulus, as the white ambulance service refused treatment to them.

More importantly he continued his religious quest. He read thoroughly some spiritual classics, including Raja Yoga by Swami Vivekananda, which he had brought from India. From his study of the Bhagavad Gita, Gandhi found the key to achieving peace by renunciation, and dedicating all one's work to the Lord. "Work you must but without any thought of a reward," and "one who performs work without attachment attains liberation," says the Gita. Gandhi also learned from the Gita that the first step in achieving equanimity, peace, and Moksha (salvation or liberation) is to observe perfect continence in thought, word and deed.

So at the age of 37, he took the vow of perfect celibacy with his wife's consent. Very soon he began to feel an ineffable joy and peace, redoubling his ability, physical and mental, to devote more time for serving the indentured laborers. He also began to divest himself from material possessions. For he realized that God, not himself, was the real master of his earnings, while he was only God's instrument and trustee. This enjoined him to treat the whole world as his family and treat everyone equally. That left him and his family just enough for their simple living.

Consequently, the Gandhi family began to achieve economy in every direction. It washed its own laundry, grinded flour, and baked unleavened bread. Contrary to prevailing ideology that the wealth of a nation depended on serving one's own private interest, Ruskin's *Unto this Last* convinced Gandhi that "the good of the individual is contained in the good of all," and following his non-dualist Vedantic doctrine, the suffering of others is, in fact, our own suffering. At this time when his income was still quite substantial, he terminated his practice. Giving away all he had to a Trust for the welfare of the poor, he returned to India in 1912.

Between these two decades of stay in South Africa, Gandhi's life had taken a full 180-degree turn. He was no longer an ambitious young man craving for name, fame and wealth, but a transformed man, and immersed himself in the struggle for India's freedom. Clad in a simple garment of an ordinary farmer with a staff in his hand, he traversed the whole length and breadth of India's villages on foot, listening to the woes of the poor and helpless under

the foreign rule. Wherever he went, people hailed him as Mahatma, a holy man, a saint, or a man of God. That is how he got his title Mahatma. But people in general reverently called him Bapu or Father.

As already stated, Gandhi called his struggle Satyagraha - a struggle based on truth and non-violence that does not intend to humiliate one's adversary but transform him. Satyagraha, according to him, seeks to liquidate antagonisms but not the antagonists. Once he told a reporter, "I do not have any enemy." The reporter commented, "But what about the British?" "The British are not my enemy. Imperialism is," he replied firmly. "For a nonviolent person," according to Gandhi, "the whole world is one family. He will thus fear none, nor will others fear him."

The import of Mahatma Gandhi's advocacy of Ahimsa, loosely translated into English as non-violence, however, is not well understood. First, Ahimsa means absence of violence in thought, word and action. Said Gandhi, "The principle of Ahimsa is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs (this author's emphasis)." Given this broader meaning, Ahimsa is the same as love. So, Ahimsa and love are synonymous.

Said Gandhi: "In its positive form Ahimsa is the largest love, greatest charity." He once said, "... I have come to the conclusion that the definition, 'Truth is God,' gives me the greatest satisfaction. And when you want to find Truth or God the only inevitable means is Love, and since I believe that ultimately the means and the end are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love." So Ahimsa is not only a means but also an end.

"Love," as Erich Fromm has said, "is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one's 'object' of love." Once a reporter asked Gandhi's wife how many children they had. She said, "I have four sons, but my husband has three hundred million," referring to the population of whole India at that time.

Unfortunately, our world does not abound in angels. So Gandhi made exception to the "physical aspect" of Ahimsa, to maintain law and order, and to defend the country when under attack. He himself once severely rebuked his followers who let police assault their women while they stood watching, and called it sheer cowardice.

While love is the logical consequence of the ideology of non-dualism, democracy is its closest twin, for it professes equality at every level of our society, which included the poor and oppressed. In Gandhi's world this included, among others, the indentured laborers of South Africa, the landless farmers of rural northern India, and the "untouchables," whom he called Harijans, "children of God." Said he, "It is a mystery to me how anyone can feel himself honored by the humiliation of a fellow human being."

But Gandhi did not simply protest; there was no march on Delhi to eliminate untouchability. In fact he did something far more radical: he cleaned the latrines himself and invited others to do the same, volunteered in a hospital and emptied the bedpans, the work that was meant for the untouchables. He publicly ate with untouchables. He adopted an untouchable girl and insisted that an untouchable family should become a part of the Sabarmati Ashrama. He spoke of himself as "touchable by birth, and untouchable by choice."

The sufferings of the poor in India distressed Gandhi very much. To relieve their poverty, he encouraged all Indians the age-old craft of hand spinning, so that the poor of seven hundred thousand impoverished villages could regain secondary employment. He asked all Indians to wear rough white homespun cloth called khadi and boycott foreign cloth. Khadi thus became the symbol of independence, linking the upper and middle classes of the Indian society to the vast masses of the poor. He also encouraged many other family crafts in the

villages to make the poor farmers become self-reliant and supplement their meager and uncertain income from farming.

Not surprisingly, such measures affected the manufacturing industry of England. The 1930s was the beginning of the worldwide depression and the British textile industry, especially, was in terrible shape. In 1931 when Gandhi was in England to attend the Round Table Conference to negotiate India's independence with His Majesty's government, he decided to visit Lancashire, the heart of British textile factories, and meet directly with the unemployed workers who were angry with him because of the boycott.

Gandhi addressed them with great respect, but also with great firmness, that he felt bad for three million unemployed factory workers in England. In India, however, there were three hundred million people who had work only for six months in a year. He told them that he felt sad that because of the economic slump they could get only bread and butter and no meat for many days. In India, on the other hand, millions of people went hungry for many days. Such a frank and respectful talk with the workers won Gandhi their admiration and they all cheered him at the end.

Aside from such mundane matters, Gandhi believed in the equality of all religions. So he wanted everyone to give the same respect to other religions, as they would give to their own. "Mind you," he said, "not mutual toleration, but equal respect." Gandhi's conviction that all religions are equal was not just a sentiment or wishy-washy eclecticism. Rather, it was the outcome of his deep study of scriptures of other religions, and he advised others to do the same.

Lastly, Gandhi extended the ethics of democracy to all beings, not just to human beings. An American professor in Comparative Theology once asked him to tell her in a nutshell the chief value of Hinduism. Gandhi replied that the chief value of Hinduism lies in holding "that all life is one, i.e. all life is coming from One Universal Source." He further asserted that in principle "it was not given to humans to dominate or exploit nature, but cooperate with it for aiding and enhancing our mutual welfare." Environmental problems had not yet surfaced in Gandhi's time, but a sympathetic reader can very well see his spiritual rationale for protecting environment. For his non-dualist Vedanta implies universal brotherhood of man, animal, and indeed of all nature.

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Warnings and Hints to the Spiritual Aspirant

Swami Yatiswarananda

Concentration and Meditation

Without previously having attained to a certain amount of sublimation and purification of our feeling and desires, concentration becomes very dangerous. In the case of persons who have not prepared themselves properly for the higher life, it may lead to very bad effects. In a way, we all make the mind concentrated, but then we do not know how to manipulate it. This concentrated mind will run after sensual enjoyment and all kinds of worldly distractions and objects with a greater intensity for having become concentrated. So if we do not know how to handle it in the right way, it becomes a great danger. It is far better not to have concentration if one does not attain sublimation and purification at the same time. Therefore the necessity of purity, of non-injury, truthfulness, continence, etc., in thought, word and deed, has to be stressed very much. Without sublimation of all our desires and feelings we cannot progress in the spiritual path. It is after we have followed a strict code of ethics and morals that we should attempt concentration. The concentrated mind, if it is not purified, becomes a veritable demon and creates untold troubles for the spiritual aspirant.

The concentration of a worldly man on his gross material gain, profit and enjoyment; the concentration of the scientist on his experiments, for instance, on the structure of the atom or the constitution of the plant; the concentration of the Yogi upon his analysis of the ego and the non-ego, - all these are but different forms of concentration, judged from the objective standpoint. But considered from the subjective point of view their contents differ very widely, and they lead to altogether different experiences and results.

The Yogic seeker after Truth, having no faith in God as ordinarily understood, may begin with concentration and meditation on gross elements associated with time and space. He may next take up the subtle elements as the objects of his concentration and meditation, at first within time and space, and later beyond their limits. Proceeding further, he may first make the mind, and afterwards the ego, the objects of this concentration and meditation. Knowing the true nature of these objects he ceases to identify himself with these limiting adjuncts, and having come nearer to his real Self he enjoys a wonderful state of bliss and illumination.

The Vedantic aspirant who believes in the existence of the Divine, may at the beginning meditate on the physical form of some great, holy personality, image or picture or symbolic representation of the Divine, first associated with time and space, and then without these limitations. Advancing further, he may meditate on the "heart" of the holy personality or on the Divine Mind, and gradually imbibe the noble attributes associated with it. Later, he may pass on to Pure Consciousness, individual or cosmic, and thereby succeed in purifying and expanding his impure, limited consciousness, come in touch with the Infinite Being within his Self, and even proceed to the highest Divine Realization in which the meditator, like a salt-doll coming in contact with the ocean, gets merged into the Absolute Divine Principle. Thus, beginning with different forms of concentration and meditation associated with individualised consciousness, he may reach the highest Superconsciousness, the Absolute Reality, the One Undivided Principle, in which all subject-object relationship, nay, all relativity is completely transcended.

By themselves concentration and meditation may not have any spiritual value. As already said, they may even be dangerous if the person who practices them has not already attained a certain amount of mental purification and does not continue the process of sublimation at the same time. Concentration and meditation become spiritually effective to

the extent to which the mind is purified of its dross, of all the dirt and filth and bad impressions and tendencies it has been allowed to accumulate through successive evil thoughts and actions. With the attainment of great dispassion and purity alone can the aspirant take up successfully the higher forms of concentration and meditation, ultimately leading to the highest Divine experience and freedom.

The Godward Turn

Every average person has the capacity to practice concentration and meditation, although these are usually directed towards persons or objects of gain and enjoyment presented to us by the world. In order to follow the spiritual life, no new faculties need to be created all of a sudden. The old capacities and tendencies are to be given a Godward turn without diminishing their intensity, and then the worldly man is transformed into a spiritual man. So the true devotee prays, "Lord may I think of Thee with that strong love which the ignorant cherish for the things of the world, and may that love never cease to abide in my heart."

The ego asserts itself again and again. So, says Sri Ramakrishna, make it the servant of the Lord. Desires and passions refuse to be controlled. Give a Godward turn to them, maintaining their intensity, so advises the spiritual teacher. Instead of yearning for the company of men and women, yearn for union with the Divine. See Him in all, but take care that you do not cheat yourself. He alone can satisfy the hunger of the soul. He alone can fill its void and give it permanent peace and joy.

Instead of being angry with those standing in the way of your sense-enjoyments, gross or subtle, be angry with all the obstacles lying in the path to the Divine. Learn to be angry with your lower desires, with your turbulent passions, with your very anger, and avoid them all as your great and relentless enemies. Instead of wishing to possess another "human doll" or fleeting worldly wealth, covet the Divine and His inexhaustible wealth which can never be lost and is alone able to give abiding peace. So, says the Bhagavatam: "Lust, anger, fear, affection, fellowship and friendship, when directed towards the Divine Being, lead to union with the Divine."

At the touch of the philosopher's stone all the base metals of desires and passions, of greed and anger, lose their evil nature and are transmuted into pure devotion bringing Bliss and Immortality to the soul. "Even if the very wicked worships Me (the Divine) with devotion to none else, he should be regarded as good, for he has rightly resolved. Soon does he become righteous and obtain eternal peace. Boldly canst thou proclaim that My devotee never comes to grief," says the Bhagavad Gita.

Time and again, Sri Ramakrishna says, "Give a Godward turn to all your tendencies." Especially in the path of devotion, all desires and passions should be consciously given a higher direction without allowing them to decrease in intensity.

The Process of Self-Purification

Let us take e.g., the question of anger. Why are we angry? Only because someone or other is standing in the way of what we think to be the object of our enjoyment. This is the only reason for all our anger. Always we find that anger is closely connected with the over-stressed ego or a strong sense of personality, and without this strong sense of the ego and an inordinate desire for enjoyment, physical and mental, anger could never even rise in our hearts. So this ego, this desire of enjoyment, is the only cause of our becoming angry, if we do not desire any enjoyment, if we do not expect anything from anybody, but just give and

act without ever expecting any return, giving up all expectations, there can never be any rise of anger. So we should get angry with our desires for sense-enjoyment and not with the objects as such. This is the only practical way of uprooting anger and eventually eliminating it. And without eliminating anger and other associated evils to a great extent, we can never make progress in spiritual life. Lust and anger are the two greatest enemies in the spiritual path. So they should be carefully avoided by all aspirants.

Thus, whenever there is anger there is some attachment or other, some inordinate desire or affection, for, truly speaking, without attachment to some person or thing there can never rise any form of anger. It is only our thwarted will to enjoyment that brings anger. But this should be understood more in a subtle sense than in a gross one. It need not necessarily be any craving for the grosser forms of enjoyment that lies as the root-cause of anger.

It may happen that a person is fully convinced of the evil effects of desires, but still is not able to rid himself completely of them. What is such a person to do? How can he rise above them? He can direct them all, directly or indirectly, to the Divine, give every desire, every sensual impulse, every passion a Godward turn, consciously and knowingly, with an effort of the will. If he cannot rid himself of the inordinate desire for music, let him listen to devotional, holy music, and all the time he is so doing, let him think of the Divine. If his artistic sense and his desire to enjoy are very strong, he should take up some holy form of art and make that a stepping stone for rising to the plane of the Divine. If he is very fond of the sweet fragrance and beauty of flowers and wishes to enjoy them, let him pluck the flowers, offer them to the Divine and decorate the holy altar artistically with them. If he desires to love somebody, feels greatly attracted towards somebody, let him love the Divine in that person and be thereby directly drawn towards the Divine. If done consciously and knowingly, all this acts as a great controlling factor, as a great regulating agency, helping us in sublimating our desires and in giving them a higher and higher turn and attaining a greater and greater purity. But even here the ultimate goal to be attained by the aspirant is perfect control and Divine Realization. Everything else serves only as a stepping-stone to that. Following the graduated steps we must be able to rise to the Highest sooner or later.

Unless all the filth and foulness which has gathered in the mind is removed from it, from all nooks and corners, our problem is not really solved. If some light just enters a room through a chink in the door and the rest of the room remains shrouded in darkness and continues to be dirty, nothing is achieved. There is no real spiritual illumination if just a tiny bit of light enters our mind and all the dirt and filth lying there is pushed away for the time being into some far-off corner. In such a case the man remains just what he was before he had this kind of "glimpse." Mere theories and philosophies do not help us in any way, however wonderful they may be. What is essential is the practical application, the sublimation, the removal of all the dirt lying hidden in the dark corners of the mind, not the so-called perfect control of all the mental modifications (vrittis) as some people would have it, which only leads to self-induced sleep in the beginner, but not to any form of real illumination. People talking of the complete stopping of all the mental modifications at the very beginning of their spiritual life do not know what they mean.

Very often there is in us a certain amount of external control, but as distinct from this there should be real internal control. If we are outwardly controlled, but are not able to stop the activity in the sense-organ or in the mind, we can not attain to higher forms of control. If the senses have been controlled, but are still eager to come in touch with the sense-objects, real control has not been achieved, but only its outward form. Even then a step has been taken in the right direction.

One form of control is to draw oneself away completely from the objects of the senses. Another form is to allow the senses to come in touch with things that are pure and not likely to harm the aspirant by rousing fresh desires in him. This is the better and easier method for most people.

"O my mind, worship the Mother and repeat day and night the great mantram (the mystic word) that you have received from your Guru. When you lie down, think that you are meditating on Her. When you eat, think that you are offering food to Her. With great joy Ramprasad proclaims: Mother dwells in all bodies. When you walk in the city think that you are going round the Mother Divine."

The idea of this beautiful song is this: To connect consciously every thought and every single act of our life either directly or indirectly with the Divine, to practice the Presence of God at all times.

Recognition of the All-Pervading Divine Principle

The Divine is everywhere and in everything, but we should learn to discriminate and act accordingly. We should learn to become more wide awake and conscious. We should be more reflective and act less on the impulse of the senses and of our instincts, be they good or bad. We are so careless and easy-going in all this, that we follow the opposite course and bring no end of trouble on ourselves.

We should fully recognise this idea of unity but in the right way. At present we recognise this so half-heartedly. And properly speaking, without acquiring true dispassion and detachment we cannot recognise it whole-heartedly and act up to it. If we were convinced that the One Undivided Principle exists in all, we could not have any strong hatred or any animal love for anybody, separate from the rest, but would only turn our eyes towards the Principle at the back of him or her. This does not mean that we are to be like fools. No, we still should know that the tiger is a tiger, in spite of being a manifestation of this One Undivided Principle. So we should not go and shake hands with it. We should know the Principle to be present both in man and woman, but this knowledge should not prevent us from discriminating and being careful so long as we are on this phenomenal plane. We should see the One Principle at the back of the worldly person leading an impure and immoral life, but we should not go and have intimate talks with him. This is very, very essential. And if we do not act up to this rule, our feet will slip one day, and we shall seriously come to grief. The aspirant can never be careful enough in this. To the extent that we recognise the One Undivided Principle in all, our hatred, our so-called human love, our attachment, would be diminished and lose all strength and influence. Wherever we find in an aspirant the desire to mix indiscriminately with worldly-minded people and with members of the opposite sex, there is something seriously wrong. His desire for worldly things and enjoyment have not yet lost their tenacity and no purification has been attained. So spiritual progress and realization are altogether out of the question.

Ordinarily our attachment clouds our whole understanding. We must be able to stress the spirit more than the form, more than the personalities and sense-objects, but so long as our craving for sense-enjoyment, our clinging to this little personality of ours, continues to cloud our understanding, we can never really think of this One Undivided Principle, and thus we go on committing the same old mistakes over and over again. So dispassion should be cultivated as much as possible by all aspirants. Without it nothing positive can be achieved.

The Way to Divine Realization - The Highest Goal of Life

Christ says, "He who loves father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me." And that is perfectly true. Not only that, but also he who allows another to love him more than the Divine is not worthy of God. He who allows another to be more attracted by him than by the Divine is not worthy of God and cannot attain Him. When we make another person love us in such a way by not being sufficiently reserved, we are not worthy of God. So, in this, too, we should be very careful and wide awake. We feel flattered, no doubt, we like being attractive

to others, we like being loved by others as objects of enjoyment. But we are too impulsive and too unreflective to know that from the spiritual standpoint we create troubles both for ourselves and for others and prevent our progress. We should be dignified and well guarded. We should take such an attitude that others do not dare to approach us in a wrong way. In short, we should try to possess greater and greater discrimination.

Dispassion has both its negative and its positive aspect. We should try to disconnect ourselves from others as much as possible and then connect ourselves with the Divine. So that later on all connection with others can be made only through the Divine, but never again in a direct way. Human love connected with the Divine can be gradually transmuted, but if it is not so connected, it degenerates and always ends in disaster and misery, whatever we may think to the contrary. All our relationships, if they be direct relationships, are only born with the body and associated with others through connections of the body only. There is nothing lasting in them that could ever bring peace and real blessedness to any of us.

It is really very strange that people suffer so much and still are not brought to their senses, but cling to all these false identifications. The whole world is bound by the desire for wealth and by the desire for sex. We make money the highest goal of our life, and then we come to grief. We make love of a man or a woman the ultimate aim of our life, and end our life in misery. We should become introspective and know what is the real goal of life and then try to realize it.

Ordinarily there is in us such an awful identification with our body and our senses and passions that we just brush God aside. Whenever there is skepticism with reference to the Divine, there is some inordinate clinging to the self and to the senses and their objects, because of which God is pushed out. So long as the individual is full of sense-enjoyment, desire for possession, egoism and vanity, God has no place in his life. The Divine is pushed away by our creature consciousness. If the mind becomes perfectly free from desires and passions, one realizes the Divine then and there. So if we do not realize God, if we do not even get a glimpse of the Truth, we need not ask why it is so. We should know that in the conscious and in the subconscious mind there are still strong desires, and we should first rid ourselves of these obstructions. So long as we allow them to remain, the question does not even arise.

We should break the sway of our impulses over us. The very moment these impulses rise in us, we should try to expand ourselves, for then these impulses at once disappear just as the waves disappear in the ocean. The man who knows how to expand his consciousness, who knows how to attain a higher form of consciousness, is not affected by such impulses that rise in the mind. One of the most effective means to rise above one's impulses is to come in touch with the Divine Consciousness, with the Infinite Presence which is always in us. And without knowing how to rise above our instincts, without knowing how to control and curb our passions and cultivate true renunciation and dispassion, without having tried to attain the purity of mind and body, there can be no spiritual life for anyone. So we should become more reflective and more discriminating. We are not consistent enough in our thinking and in our actions. There should never be any haziness in the Vedantic aspirant. Vagueness and indefiniteness have no place in true spiritual life. Everything should be clear. We must have definite and right thoughts, definite and right emotions and feelings, definite and right actions, then alone can we proceed to the Divine goal and realize it.

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, Jul-Aug 1943)

Conversations With Swami Turiyananda

Swami Raghavananda

January 22

Swami Turiyananda: "Immediately after death a guide comes from a certain plane to take the spirit there. Among the many spheres, there is the realm of the fathers, the realm of the gods, the realm of death, and the realm of Brahma. According to the spiritual development of an individual, he goes to a particular realm. But you know, everything is in the mind. Take man's life on earth: If his heart is pure and if he is desireless, he finds heaven everywhere. All places are the same to him. 'Gold remains gold, even if it lies in the mud.'

"Swamiji used to say: 'Even he who has seen only a spook is more spiritual than book-learned pundits.'

"Take complete refuge in God. Call on him. Then all your worldliness will be wiped out.

"What is after-life? There is the body, but without bones and flesh."

January 23

Swami Turiyananda: "First be well balanced and calm; then you can help others. If you are tottering yourself, how can you expect to lift others up?"

"It is not good to feel free in the sense that you think you can do whatever you please.

"Seeking for praise is a great obstacle in spiritual life. Some people believe that it does not make any difference what they really are as long as others think well of them. They keep their faults hidden. But this is the attitude one should cultivate: 'I must purify myself! I must be good! I don't care what others may say about me!'

"The Lord knows our inmost heart. Of this we must convince ourselves first and then turn our gaze toward him. Thus only does man become fearless.

"I used to consider myself a follower of the path of knowledge. I used to study the scriptures and think, 'I will attain samadhi (union with God) immediately.' After I came to Sri Ramakrishna I learned what spiritual realization means and what samadhi means."

January 30

Swami Turiyananda: "Try to follow an ideal in everything. No part of our life is in vain. What is the purpose of life? It is to reach perfection. But in everything you must follow an authority. As a rational being you cannot say: 'I eat, drink, and make merry.' Such a life is the life of a brute.

"Be a devotee, but don't be a fool!' You must be alert in everything. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Look at me! The Divine Mother has placed me in such a state that I can hardly keep

clothes on my body, and yet I am not forgetful.' The Master told us: 'He who is careless is foolish.' In our scriptures too we read that a careless person gradually degrades himself. Always be on your toes!

"To be a man is to be alert, conscious. If you become unconscious, then be unconscious with full consciousness (in samadhi), like Sri Ramakrishna. He used to lose external consciousness in ecstasy when someone sang a devotional song. But even a slight mistake in the music would cause him pain and bring him back to ordinary consciousness.

"Struggle to keep yourselves awake and watchful; then it will become a habit with you. Be alert! Discriminate between good and evil. Then go beyond good and evil.

"There must be some ideal, standard, or criterion by which you can guide yourself. Otherwise your life will be aimless. Every day make the effort to reach your ideal."

January 31

Swami Turiyananda: "There is an indivisible, changeless Time - that is Brahman. What is known as divisible time exists only in the mind. Annihilate the mind, and time stops. The whole phenomenal universe is in the mind; everything exists for the moment: now is, then is not. But beyond these changeable phenomena there is an unchanging Witness. He is the one immutable Reality, lending an appearance of permanence to the changing phenomena.

Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, May - June 1958

Book Reviews

John Phillips

Upanishads in Daily Life

Published by the President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore,

Chennai - 4

Price: Rs. 60

In December 2007 the Vedanta Kesari brought out a special issue on the Upanishads as a timeless treasure of wisdom and practical guidelines waiting to become a part of daily life. That special issue has now been reproduced in the form of a book. It includes two articles taken from the works of Swami Vivekananda, but also articles by many well-known swamis of the Order, including our own Swami Dayatmananda, who has written about the story of Prajapati and its meaning. As the swami points out, Prajapati did not speak of the Atman to start with, but gradually led his students from a lower to a higher level of understanding. I am reminded of Christ's reaction to his disciple's request to "Show us the Father."

One chapter in the book gives some practical guidelines from the Upanishads for daily living, containing advice for instance on how to live in the world, self-discipline, cultivating a positive attitude and the essence of the spiritual struggle. After reading the articles when they first appeared in the Vedanta Kesari, one reader remarked: "Oh, this is what the Upanishads are calling upon us to do!"

The Upanishads have been a source of inspiration to philosophers both in the East and in the West. Reading these articles will help us to understand the Upanishads better, when we go back to reading the original texts. They are the distilled wisdom of the ancient sages made accessible to the modern world. As Swami Atmashraddhananda points out in the first article, the rishis or sages to whom these 'books' were revealed lived in forests, ate the simplest of food, meditated for long hours, and had no distractions such as the Internet and television. They were in touch with nature, whereas we are often out of touch. They therefore have much to teach us and we should listen carefully and think about what they say.

Consciousness: Talks About That Which Never Changes

By Alexander Smit

Translated from Dutch by Andr, van den Brink

Published by Epigraph Books, Rhinebeck, New York

Price £10

Alexander Smit was born in Rotterdam in 1948. At an early age he showed a great interest in philosophical matters as well as in music. At the age of 15 he had an extraordinary experience which changed his life completely. He came into contact with yoga and met a number of teachers, among whom were J. Krishnamurti, Rama Polderman, Swami Ranganathananda and later on Jean Klein, Douglas Harding, John Levy, Wei Wu Wei, and in particular Wolter A. Keers, who accompanied him on the classic path of Advaita.

In 1978 he met his final teacher of Advaita, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, from whom he received intensive training and instruction, and who directed him to instruct anyone in the West who was thirsty for 'Knowledge' on the path of Advaita. This he did extensively, particularly through his numerous talks and lectures. Alexander Smit passed away in the Netherlands in 1998.

The contents of this book are in the form of questions and answers - questions asked by students and answers given by Alexander Smit. Anyone who has read about Sri Nisargadatta and his teachings will soon observe that Alexander Smit is pursuing a similar approach to that of his guru. The quest is to find the Reality within oneself, but no specific method is advocated. Only transmittance or awakening by the guru can succeed. Mere philosophical reasoning will perhaps get you nowhere except to prepare you for the awakening. On the other hand some philosophical speculation seems inevitable, even though it may in the end lead to the end of all speculation. This book will therefore appeal to those attracted to Vedanta as a philosophy, although certainly also to those seeking the goal of freedom from bondage. The titles of some of the chapters are intriguing: "You are consciousness," "All

knowledge is ignorance" and "What you are cannot be located." So this is a book that will at least give you food for thought.

In view of its size (373 pages), this book appears to be a bargain at £10.

A Concise Encyclopaedia of Hinduism

(in three volumes)

Written and published by Swami Harshananda,

Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore

Price per set of three volumes: Rs. 1,500/- or US \$150

Hinduism is a vast field of study. Most of us tend to take up one tradition of Indian religion and concentrate our reading on that aspect, but in fact Hinduism covers a wide variety of fields, offering alternatives for different types of spiritual aspirants, who can each follow the path most suited to them.

Because of this complexity, there has long been a need for a comprehensive work covering all aspects of Indian religion. Swami Harshananda has chosen to meet this need by compiling an encyclopaedia of Hinduism, arranging the various topics in alphabetical order, so that students may easily look up the specific topic they are interested in. In doing so, he has covered such diverse subjects as Hindu religion, philosophy, mythology, rituals, scriptures, festivals and places of pilgrimage. Since Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are closely allied to Hinduism, they have also been briefly described along with the biographies of their founders. The meanings of many Sanskrit terms are explained in detail, which will also be of use to students of Sanskrit.

The encyclopaedia has been produced as a set of three large volumes, priced at US \$150 the set. It will be an ideal work of reference for libraries, but also for private use as a reference tool. It is illustrated with line drawings inserted in the text and with a separate section devoted to photographs, some of which are in colour.

This work is a colossal achievement, which has taken more than thirty years to complete. It will long be a standard work of reference for all students of Hinduism. One can only gasp in admiration at the fulfilment of such a great undertaking over such a long period of time and express on behalf of all present and future students of Hinduism our gratitude to Swami Harshananda for his monumental work.

Commentary by K.V. Krishna Murthy

The Yogataaraavali is a work in Sanskrit by Sri Sankaracharya. It has been translated into English by Dr. Vemuri Ramesam. The word Taaraavali means 'Garland of Stars.' It refers to the 27 stars in Indian astronomy. In this book Sri Sankaracharya describes the various yogas - Laya, Hatha and Raja yoga - in twenty-seven verses. The three yogas are further classified into eight yogic methods. In this little book Sankaracharya's text is given in Sanskrit characters with an accompanying transliteration into the Latin alphabet and a translation into English. A commentary was written in Telugu by Kuppa Venkata Krishna Murthy, a Pundit of the Vedas, the Vedanta and auxiliary vedic systems. Dr Vemuri Ramesam has translated this into English.

The second part of the book is devoted to some papers produced by Prof. K.V. Krishna Murthy. In these papers he discusses such subjects as the worship of God in different forms, whether God is male or female, sacrificing the sense of 'my,' the nature of energy and a comparison between the approach of modern science and the vedic sages.

Kuppa Venkata Krishna Murthy has given talks on Indian television, and these are now being published in book form. Part III of this series is entitled Sustenance and Part IV The Calm Down. The verses from the discourse between Vashista and a disciple, when quoted, are given in transliteration, but the book mainly consists of a condensed translation and explanation of the discourse and of a philosophical discussion of the message of the Yogavaasista. A glossary of Vedantic terms is included. In this work K.V. Krishna Murthy seeks to compare and correlate the ancient Hindu traditional knowledge with modern scientific knowledge.

Copies of the above two works are available at avadhotta datta peetham, Sri Ganapati Sachchidananda Ashrama, Datta nagar, Ooty Road, Mysore - 570025. Website: www.dattapeetham.com.