

# Vedanta

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**A Comparative Study of the Commentaries on the  
Brahma-Sutras**  
*Swami Vireshwarananda*

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**Reminiscences of Swamis Brahmananda  
and Shivananda**  
*Sri Kalidasadaya Paschima*

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## Divine Wisdom

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MASTER: "Radha had attained mahabhava. There was no desire behind the ecstatic love of the gopis. A true lover does not seek anything from God. He prays only for pure love. He doesn't want any powers or miracles.

"It is very troublesome to possess occult powers. Nangta taught me this by a story. A man who had acquired occult powers was sitting on the seashore when a storm arose. It caused him great discomfort, so he said, 'Let the storm stop.' His words could not remain unfulfilled. At that moment a ship was going full sail before the wind. When the storm ceased abruptly the ship capsized and sank. The passengers perished and the sin of causing their death fell to the man. And because of that sin he lost his occult powers and went to hell.

"Once upon a time a sadhu acquired great occult powers. He was vain about them. But he was a good man and had some austerities to his credit. One day the Lord, disguised as a holy man, came to him and said, 'Revered sir, I have heard that you have great occult powers.' The sadhu received the Lord cordially and offered him a seat. Just then an elephant passed by. The Lord, in the disguise of the holy man, said to the sadhu, 'Revered sir, can you kill this elephant if you like?' The sadhu said, 'Yes, it is possible.' So saying, he took a pinch of dust, muttered some mantras over it, and threw it at the elephant. The beast struggled awhile in pain and then dropped dead. The Lord said: 'What power you have! You have killed the elephant!' The sadhu laughed. Again the Lord spoke: 'Now can you revive the elephant?' 'That too is possible', replied the sadhu. He threw another pinch of charmed dust at the beast. The elephant writhed about a little and came back to life. Then the Lord said: 'Wonderful is your power. But may I ask you

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## Is Buddha Relevant for Us ? (cont.)

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### Right Speech

**W**e discussed earlier that Right View leads to Right Determination, and this should translate into a righteous way of life. Right determination must help us transform our body and mind into perfect instruments capable of experiencing *Nirvana*. Thought, speech and deed must become pure, truthful and harmonious. Until we achieve this no headway can be made in spiritual life.

*Sila* is the second stage in the scheme of Buddha's spiritual disciplines. *Sila* is ethical, moral and harmonious conduct in life.

There are many people in this world who do not care for spiritual life. However, even they seek only happiness. Buddha's teachings are meant to help both the worldly and spiritual people. Even those who aspire for worldly happiness cannot bypass *Sila* or the moral path. For *Sila* is harmony, without harmony there is no security and without *dharma* (ethics) there is no happiness. *Dharma* is happiness. We think we can cheat life and still obtain happiness by hook or by crook. The law of Karma is inexorable and extracts its toll.

For those who wish to follow the spiritual path *Sila* is a must and it manifests through thought, word and deed. The practice of *Sila* helps us develop a spiritual attitude towards life. According to Lord Buddha every spiritual aspirant must develop a spiritual attitude or a way of looking and interacting with the world. Without this special attitude one can hardly make any spiritual progress. Such an attitude involves developing Loving kindness, Compassion, Joy at the happiness of others,

and Equanimity. The practice of *Sila* helps in developing this special attitude. *Sila* primarily consists of three aspects: Right Speech , Right Livelihood, and Right Action. In this editorial we will discuss about Right Speech.

What is Right Speech? It is communicating information truthfully; It is a way of communicating to further our understanding of ourselves and others, and as a way to develop deeper insight into truth.

### **The Basics of Right Speech**

As recorded in the Pali Canon Buddha taught:

- a. Abstain from false speech; do not tell lies or deceive.
- b. Do not slander others or speak in a way that causes disharmony or enmity.
- c. Abstain from rude, impolite or abusive language.
- d. Do not indulge in idle talk or gossip.

In practice these four aspects of Right Speech work out in a positive way. It means speaking truthfully and honestly; speaking in a way to promote harmony and good will; using language to reduce anger and ease tensions; using language in a way that is profitable to all in every way. Speaking rightly is a form of austerity. Sri Krishna teaches us: "Speaking only words that are inoffensive, true, pleasant and beneficial, as also regular recitation of scriptures, constitute austerity pertaining to speech." (*Bhagavad Gita*, 17:15)

Thanks to the tremendous progress in telecommunications, ours has become an age of incessant talk and chattering. How much we talk and disturb both ourselves and others is indescribable. The harm we do thus to ourselves and others is immense. Truly we create noise pollution through TV, radio, phone, internet etc. One of the characteristics of a great man is the

measure of his words. The great ones can communicate effectively more through silence than talking. We are living in an age where pleasure and profit (or lust and gold as Sri Ramakrishna puts it!) are often the only goals of life. Lying and cheating have become consummate arts, practised by politicians, business men, and all of us, often, in the name of etiquette and culture. He who can lie smoothly can achieve power and position. Speech is very often employed to cloak ulterior motives. We lie to ourselves and cheat others, often without being aware of it!! If we look around we see plenty of this lying and cheating right at this very moment. The recent events illustrate this amply. Speeches are made to inflame passions and violence, to separate people into sectarian and ideological groups and to justify wars. How often do we hear a speech that leads to peace, communal welfare and harmony? Can a harsh speech justify a worthy cause? Can a lie ever bring peace? Even more damaging than these hypocritical speeches is the art of turning them into highly enjoyable sensationalism. (Our leaders routinely employ highly skilled writers to write their speeches!) As a general rule we tend to think of violent, hateful words as being less harmful than violent actions. Violent thoughts, words and actions are harmful to our own peace of mind quite apart from danger to others.

One of the requisites of Right Speech is the art of listening with love and attention. In one of his books, the Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Deep listening is the foundation of Right Speech. If we cannot listen mindfully, we cannot practice Right Speech. No matter what we say, it will not be mindful, because we'll be speaking only our own ideas and not in response to the other person."

## Practice of Right Speech

The Buddha lays down five conditions of Right Speech. He says: "These five conditions must be investigated in oneself. And what five conditions must be established in oneself?"

- 1) Do I speak at the right time or not?
- 2) Do I speak of facts or not?
- 3) Do I speak gently or harshly?
- 4) Do I speak profitable words or not?
- 5) Do I speak with a kindly heart, or am I inwardly malicious?

"O *bhikkhus*, these five conditions are to be investigated in oneself and the following five must be established in oneself by a *bhikkhu* who desires to admonish another."

## How to admonish another skilfully

"O *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* who desires to admonish another should do so after investigating five conditions in himself. What are the five conditions which he should investigate in himself?"

- 1) Am I one who practises purity in bodily action, flawless and untainted...?
- 2) Am I one who practises purity in speech, flawless and untainted...?
- 3) Is my heart of goodwill, free from malice, established in me towards fellow-farers in the holy life...?
- 4) Am I or am I not one who has heard much those teachings which are good alike in their beginning, middle, and ending, proclaiming perfectly the spirit of the purified holy life?
- 5) Are the *Patimokkhas*, (rules of conduct for monks and nuns) fully learned by heart, well-analyzed with thorough

knowledge of their meanings, and known in minute detail by me?

Mindfulness is one of the requisites of Right Speech. We should be mindful of what's going on inside ourselves. If we aren't paying attention to our own emotions and taking care of ourselves, tension and suffering can build up.

If we are incapable of Right Speech it is better to remain silent. Silence is golden. True silence is much more than keeping quiet. It is creative, pure and harmonious. From pure, insightful, compassionate and deep thoughts come words of truth, wisdom and comfort.

Control of speech also helps us control the mind. A great Buddhist teacher, once said, "If you can't control your mouth, there is no way you can hope to control your mind. Those who talk too much will become restless. That is why right speech is so important in spiritual life."

In positive terms, right speech means speaking in ways that are trustworthy, harmonious, comforting, and worth taking to heart. When we make a practice of these positive forms of right speech, our words become a gift to others. In response, other people will start listening more to what we say, and are more likely to respond in kind.

According to Shankara restraint of speech is the first step to Yoga, to Self-knowledge. Through Right Speech we grow in *sattva* which leads us to God.

*(to be continued)*

*Swami Dayatmananda*

## Monastic Spirituality: Christian And Hindu (cont.)

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**A** Sister: How can work outside the convent be compatible with a contemplative life? How does India's monastic system solve this problem?

Swami: India's monastic life was entirely contemplative from the very beginning. Either the monks and nuns stayed in the monastery or convent, or wandered from place to place depending on alms from the householders. They lived in forests or caves, singly or in groups, and were served by individual householders nearby, or by religious charitable institutions set up by the householders for the purpose; some more daring monastics lived only on fruits or roots or what chance might bring. All these took no interest in the secular concerns of life.

But in the modern age, a change has come over the organization and programme of monastic life for many. First of all it is centred in monasteries, secondly, individual monks or nuns do not generally go out to beg; they are cared for by the monastic institutions maintained by voluntary contributions of householder devotees. This type of life coexists with the wandering monastics and cave or forest dwellers. Many of these modern monasteries also concern themselves with man's secular problems, like poverty, illiteracy, disease, etc., and conduct institutions to serve people in these fields. This is particularly the case with the Ramakrishna Order, to which I belong. And this combination of the active life and the contemplative life is effected by the Ramakrishna Order in the light of a unifying philosophy, the *Vedanta*, as interpreted by the *Gita* in the past, and by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the present age.

India is now passing through an industrial revolution; it is making for vast and rapid social changes. This has necessitated changes in the organization and programme of Indian monasticism as well; certainly, it is posing a challenge to Indian wisdom; and that wisdom has responded to that challenge through teachers like Swami Vivekananda, in whom our age-old monasticism has acquired a new vitality and national relevance, and a new enlightened relationship with lay society. Because of this, the general public, even in its modern progressive section, have the same high regard for the monk as before, and take delight in serving him, who on his part also takes spiritual delight in serving the lay public.

Another Sister: We nuns now live in the convent, but work in the world outside and run the convent with our own earnings. Western society has undergone revolutionary changes, especially since the end of the Second World War. People are not any more interested or inclined to give any help to monks or nuns. They have, therefore, to work and earn to run their convents and monasteries, increasingly. They have to beg no more. They have to become aligned with modern life; and yet we have, as monks and nuns, to draw our nourishment from our inner lives. This is posing a difficult problem for us; what suggestions have you to give to us on this?

Swami: The West is passing through a difficult period of adjustment; it is not that the western people today are atheistic and unspiritual: they are in earnest search of true religion. But they are dissatisfied with its outmoded dogmatic and institutional forms, its anti-scientific attitudes, and its colonialist and similar worldly expressions. When they will come across a rational and spiritual presentation and exemplification of religion, they will respond wholeheartedly and a new religious revolution will sweep over the West. And India's contribution to this is going to

be vital: it will help in the emergence of a pure, rational, spiritual Christianity. In the meantime and with a view to bringing about such a desirable revolution, the monks and nuns of today have to uphold the spiritual ideals in their lives and work and remain beacons of strength and inspiration to western society. They must continue to bear witness to the truth of God by their holy and pure lives. They should treat their convents and monasteries as laboratories of the science of God. And yet, they may have to work outside and earn their living and mix with the world, and treat all that as a continuation of their spiritual strivings within the convent or monastery, thus demonstrating that contemplation and action are complementary and not contradictory. You are not away from God at the time of work. Contemplation as an exclusive form of spiritual life may cease to have such importance as in the past; but it will become more and more attractive, and more widespread and sought-after by many monastics as well as laymen, for short periods and for once or twice a year. These short intense spiritual experiences will help them to retain a God-awareness during the rest of the year.

Another Sister: Is it necessary to have a certain attitude towards outside work?

Swami: Yes; the spiritual attitude during meditation, worship, and prayer has to be continued, in varying intensity, during work also. The effort should be to live a God-centred life. If you consider that the work you do is worldly work, it will not help spiritually. Spiritual life is universal in scope; when we change our centre from our limited ego to God, we change also our attitude to work, but not necessarily the work itself. This is how the laymen's life and work also can become spiritualized. This is the direction of the future religion of humanity, as our sages pointed out long ago. More and more people will live in the world without being worldly; spirituality will be a universal

quality, not the privilege of the monastics - but there may be varying grades of it. Some may have grown more, spiritually, some less, but everyone will be on the spiritual path. As beautifully expressed by Sri Ramakrishna: Live in the world; there is no harm in that. But don't allow the world, worldliness, to live in you. That will make for stagnation. A boat will be on the water; that is the correct place for the boat; but water should not be allowed in the boat. That is the wrong place for the water, and it will also make the boat unfit for the purpose for which it is meant. This teaching should be given to one and all by nuns and monks who dare to live and work in the world establishing God in their hearts. This lesson cannot be imparted either by a worldly person - because it will not have authenticity - or by a monastic who lives exclusively a contemplative life.

Another Sister: To preserve this God-centred attitude, we have to isolate ourselves in contemplation?

Swami: Yes; in the early stages, and for short periods regularly each day, till we become spiritually strong. In the initial stages, one certainly gets spiritually diluted by constantly mixing with worldly people and activities. Hence we need to retreat inwardly, periodically, and gain fresh strength and inspiration. But if and when we become like Brother Lawrence, we shall find, like him, no distinction between work and worship. There will be a flood of God-awareness all the time. Spiritual effort and struggle is compared by St. Teresa to watering our farms: In the beginning, we have to dig a well and laboriously lift its water to irrigate the fields; then we secure a Persian wheel which makes the irrigation less laborious and more efficient; and finally comes the downpour of God's rain when hard labour ends and irrigation becomes spontaneous and natural. This last represents the descent of the grace of God on the struggling aspirant. But till that happens it is all struggle, but a struggle which is not dismal but

pleasant, because God is involved in it both as its means and as its end.

Swami Vivekananda has therefore instituted a spiritual programme of work combined with meditation - with more stress on meditation, in the West, and on work in India - and occasional or annual spiritual retreats for a more intense spiritual experience. While putting greater stress on meditation for westerners, he imparts one teaching which the West today needs badly to understand and implement; namely, to treat work as a spiritual discipline and not as a drudgery. The concept of work as drudgery, and consequently of joy as obtainable only outside work, in leisure, has unfortunately developed greatly in the modern West. When the spirit of service is taken away from work, it becomes dismal drudgery; then pleasure is to be sought in one's leisure hours. Even the care of one's baby becomes drudgery: becomes mechanical, bereft of love, soul-killing as much to the mother as to the baby. This attitude is getting to be widespread in the West, specially in the U.S.A., and it has incapacitated man for his spiritual growth from individuality to personality, from stagnation of the ego at the organic level to the warmth and expanse of his true self, from evolution at his organic level to evolution at his psycho-social level. This stagnation at what Bertrand Russell termed the billiard-ball individuality level is the source of most contemporary personal and interpersonal tensions and unfulfilments. Hence the need for this teaching of Swami Vivekananda, this teaching of the *Gita*, about doing work as service, in a spirit of love and dedication. This is also the teaching of Christianity.

Monastic life in the West must become capable of conveying this great message to the people, so that they may be led on the road of their spiritual growth from stagnant individuals into warm personalities, led on the road of fulfilment, individual

and collective. Such teaching becomes effective only if backed by personal example. If you can work hard, face your problems, serve the people with love and dedication, and be all this and do all this in a calm and cheerful spirit, your life and work will show an inner richness which will stand in contrast to the inner poverty of even the most successful worldly people. And if they ask you whence you got all that inner richness, and learn that its source is God, what better demonstration of the truth of God and its value for human life and fulfilment could there be? This is the force of the utterance of Jesus: "By their fruits shall ye know them."

Another Sister: I do not know whether we are strong enough to succeed in it.

Swami: Even a little success in this line will be a source of much strength to human society today. Society derives strength and inspiration from the people, maybe a small group, whose lives, in the language of Christian mysticism, stand as witnesses to God. Otherwise, this monastic life has no meaning: the light shining in a monk or a nun is a strange new light, the light of the spirit, the light of God. And it must be bright enough to illumine others as much as itself. This is the meaning of what Jesus referred to as the difference between putting a light under a bushel and putting it on a candlestick: the latter spreads its light around, destroying the prevailing darkness. "And, let the light in thee so shine before men," exhorts Jesus.

Another Sister: Can you explain what you mean by meditation?

Swami: Meditation, of course, is intense thought of God with the senses withdrawn from the outer world and the mind calm and concentrated. In meditation, the self of man approaches, in awareness, God, who is the infinite Self of all. Nothing else is present at that time except you and God: you in communion with God.

Sister: If I have correctly understood it, in meditation there is no activity of even speech or thought?

Swami: There can be thought and speech, but all within the mind, and within the context of communion with God; and when meditation deepens, such speech and thought also will disappear in perfect communion of the soul with God.

Sister: To cut off all thoughts is a very difficult thing to do for us.

Swami: One need not cut off all thoughts, but only worldly thoughts.

Sister: But worldly thoughts pursue us even when we are in meditation.

Swami: They pursue us there, because we have been pursuing them all the time before.

Another Sister: If we can place these thoughts in the context of a correct spiritual attitude, they come to rest and cease to disturb us any more. That is different from putting them out of our minds by will power, which will not prevent their coming back into our minds again.

Swami: Indeed; a proper spiritual attitude is most helpful in this.

*(To be concluded)*

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## A Comparative Study of the Commentaries on the Brahma-sutras

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All philosophical ideas in India can be traced to their source in the *Vedas*. These ideas were there even in the *Samhitas*, and were later on developed in the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads*. Yet the *Upanishadic* thought did not constitute any consistent system but was merely a record of the spiritual experiences of the Aryan race, which developed later on into various systems of philosophy. These different systems grew side by side in the various centres of learning in the country, till they became very unwieldy and required regular systematization. Thus systematic treatises were written which were in the form of short aphorisms called *Sutras* or clues to long discussions on particular topics. The maximum of thought was compressed into as few words as possible, and this desire for brevity was carried to such extremes that the *Sutra* literature now is unintelligible, and the *Vedanta-Sutras* too are no exception to this.

Badarayana, to whom the authorship of the *Brahma-Sutras* is ascribed, was not the only one who had tried to systematize the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. In the *Brahma-Sutras* itself we find the names of Audulomi, Kasha-krishna, Badari, and others, whose views have been either accepted or rejected by the author. This shows that there were other schools of *Vedanta* besides Badarayana's, though probably his was the latest and best, and so has survived time. All the *Vedantic* sects in India today hold his work to be the great authority and the various religious teachers who have founded a sect have commented on these *Sutras*. The oldest extant commentary on it is by Shankara, the

exponent of Monism. Shankara was followed by a host of commentators, all of whom have raised their voice against the monistic explanation of Shankara and his doctrine of *Maya*, and have given a theistic interpretation of these *Sutras*, but there are various shades of difference amongst themselves. Madhva refers to twenty-one commentaries on these *Sutras* extant in his day. Each of these commentators tries to maintain that his system is the one that Badaranya propounded through the *Sutras*.

It has already been stated that the *Sutra* literature, owing to its extreme brevity of thought, is unintelligible. This difficulty becomes greatly enhanced in the absence of an unbroken tradition. While there is an accepted tradition as regards the division into Chapters and Sections, there is no such tradition as regards the division into topics, nor as regards the texts of the Scriptures that are discussed therein. Again, the same *Sutra* sometimes yields just the opposite meaning by a mere shifting of the stops, e.g., Shankara's and Ramanuja's commentaries on III. ii. n. The total number of *Sutras*, too, differs in the various commentaries, and sometimes a single *Sutra* is split into two, or two *Sutras* are combined into one, or a *Sutra* is dropped, or a new one added. The readings of the *Sutras* also differ in the various commentaries and the addition of a single (sanskrit) letter like 'but', or 'and', makes the meaning completely different. Some of the words, used in the *Sutras* are very ambiguous too, for in the *Upanishads* themselves they convey different meanings in different places. All this gives the commentators freedom to interpret the *Sutras* according to their predilections.

It is not possible to do justice to a vast subject like this, viz. a comparative study of the various comentaries in so short an article as this. So we shall consider only a few of the comentaries, viz. those of Shankara, Bhaskara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhva,

and Vallabha, and that too on a few salient topics, taking some significant *Sutras* only into consideration.<sup>1</sup>

### **Preliminaries to an Inquiry into *Brahman***

*Sutra* I. i. 1 says: "Now, therefore, an inquiry into *Brahman*." The words 'now' and 'therefore' in this *Sutra* are interpreted differently by different commentators, which from the very beginning indicates to a great extent the lines on which their metaphysical thought would evolve.

Sankara takes 'now' in the sense of 'immediate consecution,' the antecedent fact referred to being the four *Sadhanas* or spiritual requisites. The root cause of bondage is the superimposition of the Self and not-Self on each other owing to ignorance. Release is attained by the destruction of ignorance through the intuitive knowledge of the unity of the Self taught by texts like 'That Thou art.' Only such intuitive knowledge destroys ignorance, and *Brahman* which is an eternally existing self-luminous entity, reveals Itself, even as when the illusion of the snake is destroyed, the rope reveals itself and is not in any way created. As knowledge alone effects release without any further act to be performed, it has no connection with any action nor *Upasana*. Hence a knowledge of the *Purva-Mimamsa* or the performance of work is useless to an aspirant after *Brahman*, and therefore cannot be taken as antecedent to an inquiry into *Brahman* (I.i.i). Nevertheless all works prescribed by the Scriptures (Brh. Up., IV. iv. 22) may serve as an indirect means to knowledge by way of the purification of the mind, but they have no part in producing the result of knowledge, viz. release (III. iv. 26).

The word 'therefore' according to Shankara expresses a reason and is interpreted by him to mean, 'As the results obtained

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1 The numbering of the *Sutras* in the different commentaries varies. But in this study the references are according to Shankara as that would facilitate comparison.

by sacrifices etc. are ephemeral, whereas the result of the knowledge of *Brahman* is eternal,' the inquiry into *Brahman* should be taken up.

Bhaskara, Ramanuja, and Nimbarka also take the word 'now' in the sense of 'immediate sequence,' but the antecedent referred to is the knowledge of the *Purva-Mimamsa*. Bhaskara prescribes the combination of works with knowledge. The works prescribed for all the *Ashramas* are to be performed throughout life for the Scripture (Brh. Up., IV. iv. 22) enjoins them as auxiliary to knowledge for attaining release (III.iv.26), Mere knowledge cannot effect release. So works are not to be given up even by an aspirant after knowledge. Combined with knowledge, they yield eternal results, viz. final release. Therefore a knowledge of the *Purva-Mimamsa* is a necessary pre-requisite for an inquiry into *Brahman* (I.i.i and IV. i. 16).

Ramanuja also prescribes a combination of works and knowledge, for Scriptures prescribe it (Isa. Up., 11). Though he holds that the knowledge of *Brahman* alone leads to release he understands by knowledge *Upasana* or devout meditation. Meditation, again, is constant remembrance of the object of meditation for which another name is *Bhakti* or devotion. Scriptures in texts like, 'Whomsoever the Self chooses, unto him It reveals Itself' (Mund. Up., III.ii.3; Katha Up., II.23) show that mere hearing etc. lead nowhere, but it is only devotion alone to the Lord that leads to release, since he who is devoted to the Self is dear to the Self and is therefore chosen. For the practice of this devotion all works as are prescribed by Scriptures (Brh. Up., IV. iv. 22) are necessary, for the Lord pleased with the performance of such works vouchsafes such devout meditation to the devotee out of grace (III.iv.26). They are thus helpful to the origination of knowledge and since knowledge is to be practised all through life to attain release (IV.i.12), works also have to be performed all

through life. Works performed without desires, as worship of the Lord, and combined with knowledge yield eternal result, viz. final release. Hence a knowledge of the *Purva-Mimamsa* is necessary (I.i.i and IV.i.16).

Nimbarka also holds that all works prescribed by the Scriptures (Brh. Up., IV.iv.22) are not to be renounced by an aspirant after knowledge, but should be performed all through life, for these are not antagonistic to knowledge but helpful in its origination (III. iv.26). Hence a knowledge of the *Purva-Mimamsa* is essential.

Madhva connects the word 'now' with the qualification of the aspirant whom he classifies as ordinary, middling, and the best. One who is devoted to and has taken refuge in the Lord, has studied the *Vedas*, is dispassionate, and has renounced all work, is the best aspirant and fit for the knowledge of *Brahman* (I.i.i). Knowledge does not stand in need of works for securing release, but prescribed works are helpful in the origination of knowledge. After knowledge, however, works are to be given up (III iv.26).

Vallabha takes the word 'now' as introducing a new subject, and does not think a knowledge of the *Purva-Mimamsa* or the spiritual requisites of Shankara as necessary prerequisites for an inquiry into *Brahman*. Yet he also prescribes a combination of works and knowledge. *Sutra* III.iv.26 he does not interpret as, 'All works are necessary' or as, 'In all *Ashramas* works are necessary' but as 'All, viz. work, knowledge, and devotion, are necessary' for the origination of knowledge, and cites Brh. Up., IV.iv.5 as authority. This text refers to a person who performs work with desire and says that he transmigrates. But one who performs work without desire, and who thus being free from all desires, attains the Lord and has all his desires fulfilled in Him, does not transmigrate (Brh. Up., IV.iv.6). So works are necessary. This, however, applies to one who wants release and not to the

extremely devoted viz.. the followers of *Pushtimarga* (the path of divine grace), for whom there is no need of anything.

The word 'therefore' is interpreted by all the above commentators more or less like Shankara, though some of them, as Ramanuja and Bhaskara, would add the word 'mere' and say, 'As the result of mere works, i.e. works not combined with knowledge, is transitory,' etc. According to Madhva, the word 'therefore' expresses a reason for the enquiry into *Brahman*. Without the knowledge of *Brahman* there is no grace of the Lord, and without it there is no release. Therefore an enquiry into *Brahman* should be made for attaining this knowledge.

*(To be continued)*

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That man who can throw himself at the feet of the Lord and say, "All this is Thine; this body, mind and soul all belong to Thee; of myself I am utterly helpless; do Thou take me." - the Lord takes up that man and makes his hands, his feet, his eyes and ears His instruments. He speaks through his mouth. He works through his hands. He walks with his feet, and the man becomes a living representative of God. This is Salvation.

*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

## Discipleship (continued)

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The next qualification is that the disciple must have faith in the Guru (teacher). In the West the teacher simply gives intellectual knowledge; that is all. The relationship with the teacher is the greatest in life. My dearest and nearest relative in life is my Guru; next, my mother; then my father. My first reverence is to the Guru. If my father says, "Do this", and my Guru says, "Do not do this", I do not do it. The Guru frees my soul. The father and mother give me this body; but the Guru gives me rebirth in the soul.

We have certain peculiar beliefs. One of these is that there are some souls, a few exceptional ones, who are already free and who will be born here for the good of the world, to help the world. They are free already; they do not care for their own salvation, they want to help others. They do not require to be taught anything. From their childhood they know everything; they may speak the highest truth even when they are babies six months old. Upon these free souls depends the spiritual growth of mankind. They are like the first lamps from which other lamps are lighted. True, the light is in everyone, but in most men it is hidden. The great souls are shining lights from the beginning. Those who come in contact with them have as it were their own lamps lighted. By this the first lamp does not lose anything; yet it communicates its light to other lamps. A million lamps are lighted; but the first lamp goes on shining with undiminished light. The first lamp is the Guru, and the lamp that is lighted from it is the disciple. The second in turn becomes the Guru, and so on. These great ones whom you call Incarnations of God are mighty spiritual giants.

They come and set in motion a tremendous spiritual current by transmitting their power to their immediate disciples and through them to generation after generation of disciples. A bishop in the Christian Church, by the laying on of hands, claims to transmit the power which he is supposed to have received from the preceding bishops. The bishop says that Jesus Christ transmitted his power to his immediate disciples and they to others, and that that is how the Christ's power has come to him. We hold that every one of us, not bishops only, ought to have such power. There is no reason why each of you cannot be a vehicle of the mighty current of spirituality. But first you must find a teacher, a true teacher, and you must remember that he is not just a man. You may get a teacher in the body; but the real teacher is not in the body; he is not the physical man, he is not as he appears to your eyes. It may be the teacher will come to you as a human being, and you will receive the power from him. Sometimes he will come in a dream and transmit things to the world. The power of the teacher may come to us in many ways. But for us ordinary mortals the teacher must come, and our preparation must go on till he comes.

We attend lectures and read books, argue and reason about God and soul, religion and salvation. These are not spirituality, because spirituality does not exist in books or theories or in philosophies. It is not in learning or reasoning, but in actual inner growth. Even parrots can learn things by heart and repeat them. If you become learned, what of it? Asses can carry whole libraries. So when real light will come, there will be no more of this learning from books - no book-learning. The man who cannot write even his own name can be perfectly religious, and the man with all the libraries of the world in his head may fail to be. Learning is not a condition of spiritual growth; scholarship is not a condition. The touch of the Guru, the transmittal of spiritual

energy, will quicken your heart. Then will begin the growth. That is the real baptism by fire. No more stopping. You go on and go on.

Some years ago one of your Christian teachers, a friend of mine, said, "You believe in Christ?" "Yes," I answered, "but perhaps with a little more reverence." "Then why don't you be baptised?" How could I be baptised? By whom? Where is the man who can give true baptism? What is baptism? Is it sprinkling some water over you, or dipping you in water, while muttering formulas? Baptism is the direct introduction into the life of the spirit. If you receive the real baptism, you know you are not the body but the spirit. Give me that baptism if you can. If not, you are not Christians. Even after the so-called baptism which you received, you have remained the same. What is the sense of merely saying you have been baptised in the name of the Christ? Mere talk, talk; ever disturbing the world with your foolishness! "Ever steeped in the darkness of ignorance, yet considering themselves wise and learned, the fools go round and round, staggering to and fro like the blind led by the blind." Therefore do not say you are Christians, do not brag about baptism and things of that sort. Of course there is true baptism; there was baptism in the beginning when the Christ came to the earth and taught. The illumined souls, the great ones that come to the earth from time to time, have the power to reveal the Supernal Vision to us. This is true baptism. You see, before the formulas and ceremonies of every religion, there exists the germ of universal truth. In course of time this truth becomes forgotten; it becomes as it were strangled by forms and ceremonies. The forms remain; we find there the casket with the spirit all gone. You have the form of baptism, but few can evoke the living spirit of baptism. The form will not suffice.

If we want to gain the living knowledge of the living truth, we have to be truly initiated into it. That is the ideal. The Guru must teach me and lead me into light, make me a link in that chain of which he himself is a link. The man in the street cannot claim to be a Guru. The Guru must be a man who has known, has actually realized the Divine truth, has perceived himself as the spirit. A mere talker cannot be the Guru. A talkative fool like me can talk much, but cannot be the Guru. A true Guru will tell the disciple, "Go and sin no more;" and no more can he sin, no more has the person the power to sin. I have seen such men in this life. I have read the *Bible* and all such books; they are wonderful. But the living power you cannot find in the books. The power that can transform life in a moment can be found only in the living illumined souls, those shining lights who appear among us from time to time. They alone are fit to be Gurus. You and I are only hollow talk-talk, not teachers. We are disturbing the world more by talking, making bad vibrations.

We hope and pray and struggle on, and the day will come when we shall arrive at the truth, and we shall not have to speak. "The teacher was a boy of sixteen; he taught a man of eighty. Silence was the method of the teacher; and the doubts of the disciple vanished for ever." That is the Guru. Just think, if you find such a man, what faith and love you ought to have for that person! Why, he is God Himself, nothing less than that! That is why Christ's disciples worshipped him as God. The disciple must worship the Guru as God Himself. All a man can know is the living God, God as embodied in man, until he himself has realized God. How else would he know God? Here is a man in America, born nineteen hundred years after Christ, who does not even belong to the same race as Christ, the Jewish race. He has not seen Jesus or his family. He says, "Jesus was God. If you do not believe it, you will go to hell." We can understand how the disciples

believed it - that Christ was God; he was their Guru, and they must have believed he was God. But what has this American got to do with the man born nineteen hundred years ago? This young man tells me that I do not believe in Jesus and therefore I shall have to go to hell. What does he know of Jesus? He is fit for a lunatic asylum. This kind of belief will not do. He will have to find his Guru. Jesus may be born again, may come to you. Then, if you worship him as God, you are all right. We must all wait till the Guru comes, and the Guru must be worshipped as God. He is God, he is nothing less than that. As you look at him, the Guru gradually melts away and what is left? The Guru picture gives place to God Himself. The Guru is the bright mask which God wears in order to come to us. As we look steadily on, gradually the mask falls off and God is revealed. "I bow to the Guru who is the embodiment of the Bliss Divine, the personification of the highest knowledge and the giver of the greatest beatitude, who is pure, perfect, one without a second, eternal, beyond pleasure and pain, beyond all thought and all qualification, transcendental." Such is in reality the Guru. No wonder the disciple looks upon him as God Himself and trusts him, reveres him, obeys him, follows him unquestioningly. This is the relation between the Guru and the disciple.

The next condition the disciple must fulfil is to conceive an extreme desire to be free. We are like moths plunging into the flaming fire, knowing that it will burn us, knowing that the senses only burn us, that they only enhance desire. "Desire is never satiated by enjoyment; enjoyment only increases desire as butter fed into fire increases the fire." Desire is increased by desire. Knowing all this, people still plunge into it all the time. Life after life they have been going after the objects of desire, suffering extremely in consequence, yet they cannot give up desire. Even religion, which should rescue them from this terrible bondage of

desire, they have made a means of satisfying desire. Rarely do they ask God to free them from bondage to the body and senses, from slavery to desires. Instead, they pray to Him for health and prosperity, for long life: "O God, cure my headache, give me some money or something!" The circle of vision has become so narrow, so degraded, so beastly, so animal! None is desiring anything beyond this body. Oh, the terrible degradation, the terrible misery of it! What little flesh, the five senses, the stomach! What is the world but a combination of stomach and sex? Look at millions of men and women - that is what they are living for. Take these away from them and they will find their life empty, meaningless, and intolerable. Such are we. And such is our mind; it is continually hankering for ways and means to satisfy the hunger of the stomach and sex. All the time this is going on. There is also endless suffering; these desires of the body bring only momentary satisfaction and endless suffering. It is like drinking a cup of which the surface layer is nectar, while underneath all is poison. But we still hanker for all these things.

What can be done? Renunciation of the senses and desires is the only way out of this misery. If you want to be spiritual, you must renounce. This is the real test. Give up the world; this nonsense of the senses. There is only one real desire: to know what is true, to be spiritual. No more materialism, no more this egoism, I must become spiritual. Strong, intense must be the desire. If a man's hands and feet were so tied that he could not move and then if a burning piece of charcoal were placed on his body, he would struggle with all his power to throw it off. When I shall have that sort of extreme desire, that restless struggle, to throw off this burning world, then the time will have come for me to glimpse the Divine Truth.

Look at me. If I lose my little pocketbook with two or three dollars in it, I go twenty times into the house to find that

pocketbook. The anxiety, the worry, and the struggle! If one of you crosses me, I remember it twenty years, I cannot forgive and forget it. For the little things of the senses I can struggle like that. Who is there that struggles for God that way? "Children forget everything in their play. The young are mad after the enjoyment of the senses; they do not care for anything else. The old are brooding over their past misdeeds" (Shankara). They are thinking of their past enjoyments; old men that cannot have any enjoyment. Chewing the cud, that is the best they can do. None crave for the Lord in the same intense spirit with which they crave for the things of the senses. They all say that God is the Truth, the only thing that really exists; that spirit alone is, not matter. Yet the things they seek of God are rarely spirit. They ask always for material things. In their prayers spirit is not separated from matter.

Degradation: that is what religion has turned out to be. The whole thing is becoming sham. And the years are rolling on and nothing spiritual is being attained. But man should hunger for one thing alone, the spirit, because spirit alone exists. That is the ideal. If you cannot attain it now, say, "I cannot do it; that is the ideal, I know, but I cannot follow it yet." But that is not what you do. You degrade religion to your low level and seek matter in the name of spirit. You are all atheists. You do not believe in anything except the senses. "So- and-so said such-and-such; there may be something in it. Let us try and have the fun. Possibly some benefit will come; possibly my broken leg will get straight." Miserable are the diseased people; they are great worshippers of the Lord, for they hope that if they pray to Him He will heal them. Not that that is altogether bad - if such prayers are honest and if they remember that that is not religion. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita* (VII.16), "Four classes of people worship Me: the distressed, the seeker of material things, the inquirer, and the knower of

truth." People who are in distress approach God for relief. If they are ill, they worship Him to be healed; if they lose their wealth, they pray to Him to get it back.

There are other people who ask Him for all kinds of things, because they are full of desires: name, fame, wealth, position and so on. They will say, "O Virgin Mary, I will make an offering to you if I get what I want. If you are successful in granting my prayer, I will worship God and give you a part of everything."

Men not so material as that, but still with no faith in God, feel inclined to know about Him. They study philosophies, read scriptures, listen to lectures, and so on. They are the inquirers.

The last class are those who worship God and know Him. All these four classes of people are good, not bad. All of them worship Him. But we are trying to be disciples. Our sole concern is to know the highest truth. Our goal is the loftiest. We have said big words to ourselves: absolute realization and all that. Let us measure up to the words. Let us worship the spirit in spirit, standing on spirit. Let the foundation be spirit, the middle spirit, the culmination spirit. There will be no world anywhere. Let it go and whirl into space - who cares? Stand thou in the spirit! That is the goal. We know we cannot reach it yet. Never mind. Do not despair, and do not drag the ideal down. The important thing is: how much less you think of the body, of yourself as matter - as dead, dull, insentient matter; how much more you think of yourself as shining immortal being. The more you think of yourself as shining immortal spirit, the more eager you will be to be absolutely free of matter, body, and senses. This is the intense desire to be free.

The fourth and last condition of discipleship is the discrimination of the real from the unreal. There is only one thing that is real: God. All the time the mind must be drawn to Him, dedicated to Him. God exists, nothing else exists, everything else

comes and goes. Any desire for the world is illusion, because the world is unreal. More and more the mind must become conscious of God alone, until everything else appears as it really is: unreal.

These are the four conditions which one who wants to be a disciple must fulfil; without fulfilling them he will not be able to come in contact with the true Guru. And even if he is fortunate enough to find him, he will not be quickened by the power that the Guru may transmit. There cannot be any compromising of these conditions. With the fulfilment of these conditions, with all these preparations, the lotus of the disciple's heart will open, and the bee shall come. Then the disciple knows that the Guru was within the body, within himself. He opens out. He realizes. He crosses the ocean of life, goes beyond. He crosses this terrible ocean: and in mercy, without a thought of gain or praise, he in his turn helps others to cross. □

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Even amongst the spiritual aspirants who are more advanced, distractions arise during the hour of meditation. It is not merely true of you alone. You must therefore pray to God and keep watch over the vagaries of your mind. Also whenever the mind may wander about, whatever distracting thoughts may arise in the mind, learn to feel in all those distractions the all-pervading presence of your Chosen Ideal.

*Swami Premananda*

## God is also Mother (cont.)

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### Mary and the East

As we said at the beginning: the biographical and historical material we possess regarding Mary is extremely sparse – and yet how it has blossomed forth! From the “lowly maid” there has come the Queen of Heaven, “clothed with the sun,” with the moon at her feet and God on her lap. Her background and her origin are just as anonymous as the ground from which the whole of creation has come forth. Like the *Atman*, she is smaller than the smallest, and perhaps for this reason she has grown beyond all measure. She helps us out of our afflictions – at least if one lives in Mexico, Poland or Bavaria - while “God” often quite disappears into the background and is not mentioned on any votive tablet.

One can dismiss the cult of Mary as the “Kindergarten” of religion – suitable for those who first have to feel their way to the true God, the formless, pure spirit, who is of course male. Yet those who force their way out of this father image into the pure nameless ground of divinity, still often have a secret weakness for the cult of Mary; the simple humble people’s faith and the highest mysticism seem at many points to touch each other. Is it by chance that so many strict Protestants have at one and the same time been critical of both the cult of Mary and mysticism? They have believed that all pictures and “idols” have to be destroyed in order to remain true to the pure word of the divine revelation. Yet in so doing they have all too often made the word, the scripture, into idols. Yes, their strict Father God became the greatest idol that the world has ever seen, more moody and tyrannical than all the heathen “idols” put together. One can

disguise the divine Ground not only with pictures and statues, but also by fastening on to the word and occupying the centre of the divine teaching with the projection of a strict super-ego, which handicaps us from letting go, relaxing and finding ourselves again in the Ground of divinity: as one with this Ground.

Anyone however who succeeds in letting go completely, finds the Divine Ground expressed everywhere, in the smallest blade of grass, but also in the pictures of divine beings and saints. Everything has become permeable and transparent, so that we no longer see a person in Mary, who disguises the ultimate Ground, but on the one hand the tiny seed that expands into divine mercy and therefore also symbolises the spiritualisation of every person, on the other hand also and especially the divine Ground itself, which expresses itself graciously through a picture of Mary, which smiles at us through her and approaches us through her. God is not only the Lawgiver, he also has “charm” and Mary is one of the channels through which this charm and this grace shines through to us. I therefore do not hesitate to call her an embodiment of God, an incarnation of the divine through which God’s love and mercy can be grasped. “The milk of God’s love flows to us through God’s incarnations,” said Ramakrishna, and Jesus proclaims: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7, 37). This applies not only to the male incarnations, but also to the *Shaktis*, who in particular embody the grace of God. In a church in the Tirol there is an altarpiece, in which a saint approaches the Mother of God. She shows him her grace, in that she quenches his thirst by a gush of milk from her breast. A Puritan would certainly be upset with regard to such an unconventional way of God showing His mercy. But is not the way Jesus speaks of the living water that streams out of his inside (literally his abdomen, his “lap”) also somewhat strange – at least for a completely muddled and impoverished religious way of

thinking, which has turned its back on all sensory symbolic language, without however finding the least spiritual ground – so that most wander around in a barren no man’s land , where one can smell no fresh grass and find no milk and no water to drink, where however even the transcendental Ground is not realized?

Anyone who has attained the Ground, however, will again find joy in such pictures. He will be gladly captivated by the charm of a picture of Mary, in which something Eastern is often wafted towards us, something very mature and superior, a resting in oneself, being anchored right in the centre. A smile blossoms out in an otherwise so strict religion, in which one can hardly offer flowers to the Father God. The altars of Mary are always decorated with flowers, especially in May, in Mary’s month, when the scent of lilacs is almost overpowering. One can speak of the remains of a primitive nature religion – but is it not nature that has slipped away from us? When we today speak of a new age and are convinced that the return of the Mother will play a big part in it, this also especially concerns our relationship with nature. There may be experience of a certain, spiritually tinged, “materialism” in this connection, for which the mystical ground is a biological compost heap, but we cannot afford today to critically point out possible one-sided developments here and there. We must transform ourselves. And that means in particular first of all to die: to enter into the divine Ground, but also into nature, until we can again feel her as our real mother, who bears us. Between the transcendental Ground and the “natural” ground there exist, in spite of all the differences, a correspondence, and the curse of modern man consists in not being at home in either of them.

But to return to Mary: anonymity and improbability have not prevented her rise, but on the contrary promoted it, as due to

this “formlessness” she could so much more easily take on form: as the archetype of the Divine Mother, as Virgin and God-bearer, in short: as the female aspect of the divine. Her rise would of course not have been possible, if there had not always been a niche for her in the human psyche – a niche, which had previously been occupied in the Mediterranean area by the Magna Mater, the Great Mother in all her various aspects. Early Christianity first swept this niche clean, but when the Lord’s appearance, which had been expected soon, did not occur, when the Kingdom of God did not suddenly take shape in the old world, when the rhythm of the seasons continued to turn in a circle, when one began to plant flowers again and think of coming generations, the picture of the Mother again arose, now in the form of Mary, the Lord’s Mother.

Was she a “step forward” compared with the earlier goddesses of antiquity? It is often said that she took up all the positive aspects of the old mother gods, so that the latter could blossom forth into new life in an ennobled – namely “Christian” – form. Many churches of Mary were indeed deliberately founded on the ruins of former temples, which were dedicated to a goddess.

And one must indeed say: much appears to be ennobled in her. She radiates purity and kindness, which we hardly find in the earlier goddesses in the Mediterranean area. This judgement – perhaps also a prejudice – is certainly also connected with the fact that we are today largely missing the living relationship with these goddesses: with Isis, Astarte, Demeter, etc. We know many songs in their honour, we have descriptions of their services and mystery cults, which even today have something moving for us, and yet they are regarded as an established part of our education, archaeological findings. One can collect these remnants and thus upholster a kind of anti-

Christian attitude, but an intellectual and emotional protest against a certain Christian one-sidedness is not a positive cult. Anything that is not continuously worshipped and surrounded by a still living cult atmosphere appears to be slowly dying out – just as though the *prana*, the life energy, were flowing out,

This does not however apply to India: there the Mother is still living in all her different manifestations, as a heavenly archetype, as an all-embracing World Mother, as small restricted tree goddesses or again as a human “embodiment.” An almost endlessly long golden thread of mother worship binds the oldest mother goddess of the pre-Arian era to the “Mother” of the Aurobindo Ashram. From a geographical point of view the Indian Mother seems to us to be further away than Isis and Demeter, but in reality she is nearer to us – not least because the Divine Mother there in the last hundred years through great saints and yogis like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Aurobindo was “awakened” to intensive life – not to mention the *Shaktis*, who often accompanied these great enlightened ones. Without India we would hardly encounter the reality of the Mother so strongly. We see her through the eyes of the great masses of people, who seek her protection and whose fervour is only comparable with the intensive Mary worship of the Poles or Mexicans; but we also see her through the eyes of the great mystics and enlightened ones, who bear witness to her presence. Ramakrishna’s lifelong dialogue with “his” Divine Mother is for me much more important than a hundred learned discourses about the archetype of the Great Mother, because it encourages me to turn to the Mother myself, to open up fully to Her. The cult of Mary also receives a new impulse through this Indian blood transfusion, it grows still further into the cosmic, into the great wide beyond, and thus loses its provincial character, which still sometimes clings to it.

Of course, through this encounter with the Mother, whether in her Indian manifestations, whether in the form of Mary, or also the goddess of Babylon, Egypt and ancient Greece and Rome, she becomes somewhat more living than before, as one recognises this or that feature in them. Nevertheless concern with them remains strongly on the intellectual and artistic level, at which I “think about” the mother and everything female at all, in which the mother divinity seems “interesting” to me, as an object of research or a subject for discussion. The light does not come from inside, but is shone on to her from outside – as from museum spotlights. The psychologist and sociologist, and of course the person interested in art, enjoy themselves, but do not enter the innermost centre of mother worship. However fascinating Isis may seem to me – I cannot pray to her. I cannot make prostrations before Demeter, I do not feel moved in my innermost being. Of course many Indian *Shakti* forms have their exotic sides, which will remain strange to me, which one can only understand as a Bengali or a South Indian. Yet here at least her great devotees, through whose eyes we see her, removed the largest blocks of misunderstanding - just as Jesus also took some features of the Jahve cult and made it possible for us to see *Abba* in God. By this I do not mean simply a “taming” of God. The volcano and desert god Jahve and the often quite aggressive Kali were not domesticated by Jesus and Ramakrishna into good harmless house gods, who lack any teeth. Their vitality remained, but they lost their provincial features, so that for instance in the case of Kali it is also possible for me as a Westerner to envisage God as Mother – without thereby necessarily thinking of a protruding tongue or other metaphorical attributes.

Anyone who sometimes approaches somewhat gruesome Indian images of the Mother, often then seeks refuge in the familiar and trusted image of Mary. In Christianity it is now

admitted, although hesitatingly, that the divine nature could very well have a female aspect, but it is then always at once added: To find this out, we do not need the East, Mary is quite sufficient; if she was capable of absorbing all the ancient goddesses of the Mediterranean area, this also applies to the Indian mother divinities.

Really? We should not at once hand ourselves entirely over to the East, before we have sounded the depths of what our own Western tradition has to offer. Yet just as the male needs the complement of the female in order to be complete, so does the West need the East, and it would be completely senseless to want always to be confined to what is allegedly "one's own." It is not a betrayal of Mary, if we supplement her by her Asian sisters: by female figures such as Sita, Radha or Sarada Devi, by the lovely forms of Sarasvatis, Lakshmis or the Chinese Kuan-yin (Kwannon in Japanese), but also by the "wilder" mother divinities, such as Durga, Kali and Tara.

In other words: the cult of Mary seems to me not to fully cover what we have called the female and motherly dimension of God. Firstly, it will always be difficult in Christianity – not only among Protestants, but also in the teachings of the Catholic Church, for Mary to be recognised as an aspect of God. Those who worship her may unconsciously worship the divine in and through her, but in their conscience they always insist that Mary is of course not God. Thousand-year-old modes of thought cannot be reversed from one day to the next. Those who dare to advance furthest in this regard are indeed the best proof of how difficult it is for a Christian to ignore his past. When the American Catholic Andrew Greeley begins his study on Mary with the words: "This is not a book about Mary in the traditional sense. It is more about God, who manifests Himself in Mary," it sounds extremely promising. Greeley would like to go to Mary with the reader, "in

order to learn something about God." We begin to suspect that this Christian writer does not see God as a limited person, but as the divine with various aspects and "dimensions" – a divine being, who reveals himself through persons, through the completely male Jahve, but also through Mary. Finally Greeley continually draws our attention to the fact that our understanding of God has so far been one-sided and male. But when it then becomes serious, this brave Catholic seems to fear his own courage. He admits that "there are no philosophical, theological or religious grounds at all, why we cannot address God as a woman." Yet: "I would not wish to assert that we should address God as a woman. I should only like to say that it is quite possible and legitimate to do this." Yes, if only the rift between theory and practice were not so great, and courage to jump over it were a little greater!

Yet it is not only a question of a firmly established practice. Behind it there are also hidden theoretical roots. Greeley gives himself away when he writes: "Even if there have been wrong developments in the cult of Mary, the worship of the new Queen of Heaven has never reached divine transcendence or been questioned." In plain language: the female has – in spite of all the deep bows before it – nothing to do with divine transcendence, because this is exclusively reserved for the male God, who jealously watches over his sole lordship. For anyone therefore who calls himself a Christian the call for a female divinity is completely unnecessary, as Mary already fulfils all these requirements; he thus just says that God cannot be a mother, as the mother whom he worships cannot be God according to his faith.

One could of course give a purely external reason: Mary is and remains a "creature," a being created by God. It is not so much a female dimension of God that is denied, but that God

could become a creature. It is not the maternal female that is denied transcendence, but the creature named Mary. If the two are so often mixed up, this is a regrettable chance occurrence.

But is it really a question of a chance occurrence, are we not encountering a deep connection? It is not a chance occurrence that at the head of all strictly monotheistic religions there is a Father God, who alone represents the divine. Anything that even only remotely looks like pantheism, like a blurring of the frontiers between the Creator God and his creation, is persecuted. His transcendence is sharply distinguished from everything that is not Him, what He has created out of nothing: the material world, the creatures, nature – and thus also the female. The worship of the female – for instance in the fertility cults – is just as strongly fought against as the efforts of the creatures to emancipate themselves. One can almost make a comparison out of this: the female becomes a “sign” for everything created, for everything that is dependent, derived and “trivial.” It is the “other” for the male God, his opposite, his object, his inferior, by which his superiority and divine transcendence is so rightly known. He is the absolute being, who needs nothing outside Himself, while the creature-female has nothing outside herself, just exists, because she is kept by Him and is for Him. In this regard God is endlessly merciful. He lets what He has created in no way fall back into non-existence, for which He has the authority and the right to do, but holds it in His strong arms. Yes, He even falls in love with this nonentity, as a man with a woman. The whole of creation and in particular His chosen people become His “bride,” His “daughter Zion,” whom He passionately courts. And this love adventure becomes acute when he chooses Mary from this chosen people, in order with her help to have a son, who then again falls in love with his chosen people, the Church, which he regards as his “bride,” and has not seldom grown with the figure of Mary,

as the Bride of God, whom God takes home into his eternal nuptial chamber.

*(To be continued)*

The Master would teach us how to pray. Sitting on his cot with legs outstretched like a child he would cry "O Mother, come to me, do come. I cannot bear the separation. How can You be at peace, away from Your little son? How can You, forgetful of me, busy Yourself with other things? Come, O Mother, come and take me up in Your arms!" At such times he would cry like an utterly forlorn child just to show us how a child in distress pines for its mother. The idea awakened his feelings to such a degree that he would actually cry like a child restless to see its mother.

After some time Sri Ramakrishna would become still and begin saying with tears, in a trembling voice, "O Mother, I am without any *Sadhana*, without *Bhajan* (devotional singing and worship). O Mother, give me knowledge, give me devotion. O Mother, may I have the mind fixed at Your feet!"

*Swami Akhandananda*

## Leaves of an Ashrama 37: The Gift of Being Available

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**V***edanta* teaches us that until we have become illumined we cannot help anybody else religiously. What we may believe to be spiritual assistance will be egotistic interference - the vain clamor of a busybody - capable possibly of harming the one we would aid, and ourselves as well. "If while still ignorant a man tries to help another, it is like the blind leading the blind. Both will fall into a ditch."

I quite agree. We have had enough helpers who themselves need help. And yet, it seems so self-centered to concentrate on one's own growth, to the exclusion of the growth of others. Is there nothing at all that one can do for other people during the time one is still ignorant?

Perhaps there is. The activity I have in mind does not afford spiritual help, but it can perhaps give psychological support. What I am thinking of is this, that one should consciously, continually, make it one's habit to be available. The whole world is hungry for sympathy, for a listener, for someone who is interested. Am I so busy, are my concerns so important, that I cannot spare the time just to be nice?

How often we sense that someone would like to tell us something. Yet, impatiently, we feel that it cannot be very important. Or we may know that a person wants to be assured that he has done well or is appreciated; yet we will not be human-hearted enough to even smile assent. To be available means to inquire into something we know someone is eager to tell us, in order that he will; or it may only mean being quiet,

while he talks. We merely need to be generous of our time, willing to let ourselves be 'bored' if necessary, to do others a good turn.

Probably all I am saying is that anyone trying to be spiritual ought first to be kind. This is only practicing proper *dharma*, that is to say, moral discipline preliminary to all religious progress. Consideration must come to be the habitual attitude of anyone aspiring to become spiritual.

What actually happens is that as we practice the discipline of being available, other people stop actually being boring. They turn lovable in our eyes. This is because we grow interested, and anything that interests us becomes a pleasure to us. Self-concern lessens and we become happier, we become contented. Thus emphasized again is the truth that the world is a mirror, giving back faithfully that given to it.

So we are back to where we started. Only God, through the illumined teacher, can help others. Even the slight gesture of being available - which we may initiate with the idea that it will help others - mainly helps ourselves. It attenuates the ego, smoothes our own path, and makes the passage toward God a little more rapid. □

Make the mind one-pointed - like the mariner's compass. In whatever direction the ship may sail, the compass always points to the north and keeps the ship on its course. Keep your mind pointed toward God, and your boat will sail smoothly. A man who does this never loses his faith and devotion, even if he is thrown into an evil environment.

*Swami Brahmananda*

## Reminiscences of Swamis Brahmananda and Shivananda

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It was at the beginning of the year 1922 that under a strong urge for initiation into spiritual life, I entered into correspondence with His Holiness Swami Brahmananda (Maharaj), the then President of the Ramakrishna Math at Belur. I was staying, as I still continue to do, at a small town of East Bengal on the Assam border. On February 4, 1922, Swami Brahmananda was pleased to write to me from Balaram Mandir, Baghbazar, that he had no objection to my seeing him personally, if I was bent upon it. There was neither any positive direction that I should go, nor any indication that my prayer would be granted if I went to him. It was left entirely to me to decide whether to go or not to go.

It was about noon when I arrived at the Math premises. Seeing that I was a stranger, and apparently unaware of the Math regulations, one kind-hearted *sadhu* directed me to seek the permission of Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj) who was seated in his room.

Swami Shivananda was busy with his correspondence. Feeling rather disturbed by a stranger suddenly entering the room, he asked me, "What do you want?"

"Sir", I replied humbly, "I have come here on receipt of a letter from Maharaj."

"Then you should go to Maharaj, and not come to me."

"Forgive me, Sir", said quietly I, "I now see that I should have gone to Balaram Mandir first, but, Sir, it is nearly noontide, and much too late to go to Baghbazar."

"Oh! I see. You want to have *prasad*. Very well. Go to the Manager."

The *sadhu*, who was waiting outside beckoned to me to come away, as the necessary permission had been obtained. Though I had permission for the midday meal only, I stayed on for the night too, though not without some pricks of conscience. What would Mahapurushji Maharaj think of me, if he noticed that I was taking undue advantage of his permission? Next morning, I got ready for going to Balaram Mandir. The journey between Belur Math and Baghbazar was usually made in those days by country boat or by steam launches. My friends called a boatman to the ghat in order to pick me up. But lo! as soon as the boat touched the ghat, Mahapurush Maharaj followed by an attendant just shot from within the building, went straight to the boat, and seated himself majestically in the pit intended for passengers. I was taken entirely by surprise and did not know what to do. With some hesitation I got into the same boat, and sat on the deck under the open sky. Mahapurushji's keen eye soon fell upon me and he asked, "Look here, are you not from Sylhet? Did you stay at the Math last night?"

"Yes,' Maharaj."

"Are you going to Baghbazar with a view to see Raja Maharaj? He is laid up with fever. You cannot see him. Do you understand?"

Mahapurushji went on repeating this several times. I could not help thinking that I must banish from my mind the hope of receiving initiation. But even so, I did not feel depressed. "Here you are" said I to myself, "an insignificant person from a remote, almost unknown place, sitting in the august presence of God-intoxicated Mahapurushji on a boat on the holy Ganga, with the Belur Math visible yonder. This should be enough for you."

When the boat reached the other bank we all got on to the shore. Mahapurushji's attendant, seeing that I was also going to Balaram Mandir, made over to me the hand-bag of Mahapurush Maharaj asking me to carry it and to follow Maharaj. The attendant had to make a detour in connection with some other business. Mahapurushji walked briskly on, but not without looking backwards every now and then, and telling me that there was absolutely no chance of my seeing Raja Maharaj. On the way he stopped once to make obeisance to Mother Kali in a roadside temple, and next at a devotee's house to enquire about his health. Though Mahapurushji spoke to me nothing but words of discouragement, I did not actually feel depressed. Was it not that the All-Merciful in his graciousness had found me such an illustrious guide? On reaching Balaram Mandir, Mahapurushji took over his handbag from me, and entering Raja Maharaj's room shut the door behind him without saying even a word to me!

I was determined not to give up the object of my visit. I looked into the big hall on the northern wing of the building and was agreeably surprised to find small knots of people waiting eagerly, apparently in expectation of the arrival of Swami Brahmananda. I too entered the Hall. Soon I noticed the bright figure of Swami Brahmananda walking slowly towards the Hall in an ecstatic mood, his dreamy eyes alternately closing and half-opening as if contemplating all the while on the sole object of his meditation. As soon as he approached sufficiently near I prostrated before him. Without asking me a word, he said in a voice full of compassion, "My dear child, you go to Mahapurush. I am very ill." I was taken aback with surprise, and could not help thinking that the two of them must have discussed between themselves about me. My joy knew no bounds. I went to Maharaj's room and found Mahapurushji relaxing himself on a reclining chair. I made obeisance and squatted on the floor.

Looking surprised, he asked, "What is it you want?" I replied humbly, "Maharaj has passed me on to you. That is why I am at your feet. I am a supplicant for *Diksa*."

"*Diksa*! What is it? I know not your name, nor where you come from. How can I give you *Diksa*?"

At this I told him all about myself; how I earn my livelihood and how I devote all my spare time to the work of the local Sevashram. Having heard me with close attention, he ejaculated: "Well, my *Diksa* would be nothing else than what you have been doing. Give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty in the name of the Lord, in the name of Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) and of Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda). This is the only *Diksa* I know of. If you want to be initiated into mysterious words, like *Kring*, go to the priests, don't come to us."

Previously, I had read very carefully the chapters relating to *Diksa* in the *Sastras*, about the forms and ceremonies to be observed by the would-be disciple. I could clearly perceive that Mahapurushji was deliberately pounding the ideas I had gathered and cherished within myself. Being somewhat perplexed, I sat in silence. . . .

After a little while Swami Brahmananda came back and took his seat on the bed. Mahapurushji told him in a complaining tone, "Maharaj, this boy (pointing towards me) wants *Diksa*." These words seemed to disturb the calmness of the attitude of Swami Brahmananda. He burst out, "Yes, yes, I know, he wants to earn the distinction of having received *Diksa*. from the President of the Ramakrishna Mission. "Addressing me, Swami Brahmananda continued: "Well, boy, I know only too well the nature of the people of East Bengal. They show so much eagerness and enthusiasm for *Diksa*, but after having received it, do not care to practise the *mantram*. You simply want to add to the number of such disciples. Is it not?"

"Sir, why should you think so?" I protested gently. "There must be some who do follow the right path, and I shall add to the number of this group." This reply seemed to calm him a little and he said, "When one has acquired the fitness for *Diksa*, one does not have to apply. We ourselves invite such a person to come to us."

"Shall I ever acquire such fitness, Maharaj?" enquired I. He seemed a little agitated and replied in an emphatic tone, "Yes, yes - you shall be. I say, you shall be." At this moment, Mahapurushji intervened. Casting one look at me, and then turning to Swami Brahmananda he said, "Maharaj, this boy has been doing good work at his own place to obtain the grace of Thakur and Swamiji. Please take pity on him and bless him." At this, Swami Brahmananda resumed his usual attitude of calmness and compassion. With a soft voice expressive of kindness, he replied, "My blessings are already upon him." Mahapurushji turning to me said, "At this moment you have received grace. This is the real thing. The rest is nothing but mere formality to strengthen conviction, and that too will come soon." We all sat still for a while. Then breaking the silence in a voice full of sweetness and affection Swami Brahmanandaji said to me: "Is it such an easy thing, my child, to withdraw the mind completely from all the distractions around us, and concentrate it on the *Kutastham*, the Absolute which stands behind the world of phenomena?" With these words, he appeared to switch off all his sense contacts with the outer world, and became entirely merged in himself...

It was past 9 o'clock in the morning, and Maharaj asked me to arrange somewhere for my midday meal. Seeing that I was unused to the ways of city life, Mahapurushji advised me to go back to Belur Math and gave me permission to stay there. I returned to the Math at about 11 a.m.

Brahmachari Jnan Maharaj took me to the Sri Ramakrishna Students' Home at Baghbazar and arranged for my stay there. The Home was quite near to Balaram Mandir which I could, therefore, visit at any time of the day and have a darsan of Maharaj. His behaviour was exactly like that of a playful child. At one moment he would be cutting jokes with the people around him. The next moment he would perhaps become lost in meditation, his face aglow with divine light. Or he would perhaps become so grave that nobody would dare stay near him.

One day he had just come into his room after taking the daily bath, when I entered it. On seeing me, he posed the fingers of his right hand in a jocose manner, and with a posture of dance, asked, "Well, how do you do? How do you do?" His posture and the manner of his utterance were exactly like those of a child teasing, or playing with, his companion. But in a moment he found out that my mind was pitifully torn by a great struggle going on within myself. At once he changed his attitude and, addressing me, recited these words in a grave yet reassuring tone.

"Desire is the cause of extreme unhappiness, desirelessness is the cause of supreme happiness."

Sometimes he would put questions on the most homely subjects. For example, he would ask me what time I had taken my meal, how many courses there were, and whether I relished them. On hearing my reply he would express pleasant surprise at the excellence of the dishes served.

One day he thrice sent word to me saying that now that I had met him so many times, I should better go back to my place. But I persisted in my daily visits adding by way of explanation that I simply stood in one corner of the corridor fully satisfied with mere darsan, and there seemed to be no reason why I should give it up. Thereafter he did not press for my withdrawal. On one occasion, when I showed great eagerness for the early fulfilment

of my heart's desire, he silenced me by saying, "What is that to me? And why are you in such a hurry?" On the eve of my departure, I again repeated my earnest request and got the reply, "My child, nothing can be done in this matter until Mahapurush has come back from Dacca."

Though my association with Maharaj was but brief and never very intimate, it taught me many things and was highly inspiring. True, the main purpose of my visit was not fulfilled; yet I went back to the field of my work with a new delight and a new spirit. On my reporting to him my safe arrival at my home town, he immediately wrote back conveying his blessings. Alas! this was to be his last communication to me. Within a few days he shuffled off his mortal frame. □

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, October 1958

All our power comes from renunciation. Only when we have given up our life do we begin to live. At present we are like prisoners. We may get a glimpse of freedom now and then but the world falls upon us when we are off our guard and drags us once more into our prison cells. As soon as a man finds out, however, that these little pleasures of the flesh are nothing compared with the infinite pleasures of the spirit, he wants to renounce, not for the sake of renunciation but because he has found something better. He realizes the hollowness of the worldly enjoyments and can be satisfied with the higher enjoyments only. Renunciation means giving up a lesser thing for a greater one. Those who give up the world for a spiritual life, are giving up the uncertain for the certain, the passing for the permanent.

*Swami Ramakrishnananda*

## Programme for May - June 2011

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

**Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre**, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - [www.vedantauk.com](http://www.vedantauk.com)

May	1	Selection from the Upanishads 18	Swami Dayatmananda
May	8	Selection from the Upanishads 19	Swami Dayatmananda
May	15	Imitation of Christ 15	Swami Shivarupananda
May	22	Selection from the Upanishads 20	Swami Dayatmananda
May	29	Selection from the Upanishads 21	Swami Dayatmananda
June	5	Selection from the Upanishads 22	Swami Dayatmananda
June	12	Imitation of Christ 16	Swami Shivarupananda
June	19	Imitation of Christ 17	Swami Shivarupananda
June	26	Day Retreat	

### Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda  
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 26 June from 10.00 am  
until 7.00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

### Vedanta Study Circle in Cheshire Area

May 15 at 11.00 am

The Right Way of Studying the Bhagavad Gita

*Swami Dayatmananda*

June 19 at 11.00 am

The Bhagavad Gita as a Guidebook for Daily Life

*Swami Dayatmananda*

For information contact Mr Aswani (tel: 01625 527075)

between 9.30 pm - 10.30 pm

*continued from the front cover*

*one thing? You have killed the elephant and you have revived it. But what has that done for you? Do you feel uplifted by it? Has it enabled you to realize God?' Saying this the Lord vanished.*

*"Subtle are the ways of dharma. One cannot realize God if one has even the least trace of desire. A thread cannot pass through the eye of a needle if it has the smallest fibre sticking out.*

*"Krishna said to Arjuna, 'Friend, if you want to realize Me, you will not succeed if you have even one of the eight occult powers.' This is the truth. Occult power is sure to beget pride, and pride makes one forget God.*

*"Once a cross-eyed rich man came here. He said to me: 'You are a paramahansa. That is good. You must perform a swastyayana ceremony for me.' What a small-minded person he was! He called me a paramahansa and yet wanted me to perform that ceremony. To secure welfare by means of the swastyayana is to exercise occult power."*

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, September 21, 1884*

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Teach yourselves, teach everyone his/her real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

*Swami Vivekananda*



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