

Vedanta

363 JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2012

I-ness and Egoism

Clement James Knott

Gnana Marga

Swami Bhajanananda





*We wish our readers
everywhere,
a Peaceful Christmas
and
a Joyous New Year.*



Divine Wisdom

A DEVOTEE: "Sir, how can one see God?"

MASTER: "Can you ever see God if you do not direct your whole mind toward Him? The Bhagavata speaks about Sukadeva. When he walked about he looked like a soldier with fixed bayonet. His gaze did not wander; it had only one goal and that was God. This is the meaning of yoga. "The chatak bird drinks only rain-water. Though the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Godavari, and all other rivers are full of water, and though the seven oceans are full to the brim, still the chatak will not touch them. It will drink only the water that falls from the clouds. "He who has developed such yoga can see God. In the theatre the audience remains engaged in all kinds of conversation,

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Is Buddha Relevant for Us ? (cont.)

Right Concentration

Right concentration is the eighth and last step in the attainment of *Nirvana* according to Buddha. Concentration is the key to progress in any field of life. Concentration does not give us anything new but unlocks all potentialities, removes obstructions and reveals truth. According to Swami Vivekananda concentration is the key to all knowledge and is the very essence of education. He says: "Concentration is the essence of all knowledge, nothing can be done without it. Success in life mostly depends on the power of concentration. Clear thinking and intellectual understanding are very easy for a concentrated mind. The difference in their power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man. The end and aim of *Yoga* is to realize God."

Concentration is the act of focussing and keeping the mind steady unwaveringly for a period of time. The mind untrained in concentration moves in a scattered manner which the Buddha compares to the flapping about of a fish taken from the water and thrown on to dry land. It cannot stay fixed but rushes from idea to idea, from thought to thought, without any control. According to Him a distracted mind is also a deluded mind.

Samadhi is another name used for right concentration. Right concentration in the eightfold path means wholesome concentration, i. e. concentration on wholesome thoughts and actions. The concentration of a thief in the act of stealing or of a murderer in the act of murder cannot be called right concentration. Concentration means focussing the mind only on

thoughts that lead to *Nirvana*. According Buddha that is right concentration.

Right concentration without purity is impossible. For the attainment of concentration moral discipline must be practised and the various impediments must be severed. After that the meditator must seek out suitable instruction from a qualified teacher. The teacher, after studying the mind of the student, instructs him in various suitable subjects to meditate upon. Both Hinduism and Buddhism emphasize the necessity of a teacher. After that the meditator on the path of *Nirvana* strives for developing right concentration on the object given by his teacher.

Buddhistic meditation manuals classify the subjects of meditation into a set of forty, called "places of work" (*kammatthana*.) These forty may be listed as follows: ten primordial qualities (*dasa kasinas*); ten unattractive objects (*dasa asubha*); ten recollections (*dasa anussatiyo*); four sublime states (*cattaro brahmavihara*); four immaterial states (*cattaro aruppa*); one perception (*eka sanna*); one analysis (*eka vavatthana*).

Of the ten primordial qualities four represent the elements "the earth, water, fire, and air;" four represent colours "the blue, yellow, red, and white;" the other two are "the light and the space."

The ten "unattractive objects" are corpses in various stages of decomposition. Here the object of the meditator is to develop dispassion so that he or she may not be deluded by passions like lust, anger, jealousy, hatred etc.

Of the ten recollections the first three are devotional meditations on the qualities of the Triple Gem - the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. The next three meditations are on morality, generosity, and the divine qualities in oneself. Then one

is advised to focus on death, contemplation of the unattractive nature of the body, mindfulness of breathing, and lastly, the recollection of peace.

We live in a world where we come into contact with men and women of diverse natures. Accordingly we need to develop a strategy to interact differently. In general all human beings can be divided into four categories: the good, the miserable, the happy and down right wicked. Hence we need to develop four types of spiritual attitudes towards these four types of human beings.

These four sublime states, also called the four *Brahmaviharas*, are “friendliness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.” These four should be developed and extended until they envelop all living beings. Meditation on loving kindness counters anger and ill will; mindfulness on various bodily parts reduces lust, and the recollection of the Buddha to inspire faith and devotion; and meditation on death to arouse a sense of yearning for *Nirvana*.

Then there are the four immaterial states of meditation. These can be practised only by an advanced meditator. These are: “infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither-perception-nor-non-perception.” These last four meditations become possible only to those who practised the previous seven steps and advanced much in concentration.

The Stages of Concentration

Control of the mind is a most difficult task. Concentration is not attained all at once, but develops in slow stages. Restlessness is a common problem faced by all beginners. Buddhism generally encourages a beginner to start focussing on breathing, bodily movements and finally on thoughts, ideas and feelings arising in the mind.

At the beginning there would be enthusiasm and excitement. However, once the initial excitement subsides and the aspirant begins to settle into the practice, five hindrances are likely to arise. They are desire, anger and resentment, laziness, agitation, and doubts. These five hindrances pose a formidable barrier, but with patience and practice they can be overcome. But as the aspirant goes on striving along the path of concentration, his exertion activates five mental factors which come to his aid. These five are: initial application of mind, sustained application of mind, rapture, happiness, and one-pointedness of the mind.

With sustained practice these five factors counteract the five hindrances. Each absorption factor opposes a particular hindrance. Initial application of mind, through its work of lifting the mind up to the object, counters dullness and drowsiness. Sustained application, by anchoring the mind on the object, drives away doubt. Rapture shuts out ill will, happiness excludes restlessness and worry, and one-pointedness counters sensual desire, the most alluring inducement to distraction.

The Four *Dhyanas* (or *jnanas*)

Then comes meditation on the four *Dhyanas*. The Four *Dhyanas* or Absorptions are the means to experience directly the wisdom of the Buddha's teachings. In particular, through Right Concentration one can attain *Nirvana*.

In the first *dhyana*, passions, desires and unwholesome thoughts (*akusala*) are released. A person dwelling in the first *dhyana* feels rapture and a deep sense of well-being. In the second *dhyana*, intellectual activity fades and is replaced by tranquility and one-pointedness of mind. The rapture and sense of well-being of the first *dhyana* are still present. In the third *dhyana*, the rapture fades and is replaced by equanimity (*upekkha*) and great clarity.

In the fourth *dhyana*, all sensation ceases and only mindful equanimity remains.

In some schools of Buddhism, the fourth *dhyana* is described as pure experience with no “experiencer.” Through this direct experience, one perceives the individual self or “ego” to be an illusion.

The Four Immaterial States

According to Theravada after the Four *Dhyanas* comes meditation on the Four Immaterial States. This practice is understood as going beyond mental discipline.

In the four Immaterial States, one first refines infinite space, then infinite consciousness, then non-materiality, then neither perception-nor-not-perception. The meditation at this level is subtle and difficult.

At the end of all these meditations the disciple emerges as an *arahat*, one who in this very life has been liberated from all bonds. The *arahat* has walked the Noble Eightfold Path to its end and lives in the Bliss of *Nirvana*, “Destroyed is birth; the holy life has been lived; what had to be done has been done; after this there is no rebirth, no coming back to any state of being.”

(To be continued)

Swami Dayatmananda

Oh, devotees of the Lord, display exemplary lives; let others learn from you how to live pure, selfless lives, desiring nothing else but the love of the Lord. Usher into the world a new age, in which people will learn to love the Lord and find peace and strength in Him. Let your deeds speak - not mere words, not theories.

Swami Premananda

Gnana Marga (cont.)

Atma-vicara or self-enquiry

The most important spiritual exercise which is a characteristic and a unique feature of *Jnana-marga* is *atma-vichara* or self-enquiry. It is a purely subjective technique which dispenses with every kind of object and objectification. It is an attempt to turn away from all objects and move backward into the self. This is the technique in which the negation process of *neti, neti* finds its most practical application. In the quest for the true Self every other thought and knowledge is discarded; the very tendency of the mind to conceptualize is given up.

Obviously, then, *atma-vichara* is not *manana* or reflection but a direct penetration into the self. It is not an attempt to convert an indirect knowledge into direct experience. It begins with the most immediate and incontrovertible experience of one's existence as the ego, and then seeks the foundations of this awareness; as such, it is a movement through *direct* experience from beginning to end.

Atma-vicara is not thinking about oneself, or brooding over one's past. That kind of thinking can give more knowledge about the ego but never about the transcendental Self. It should be noted that the Buddhists also begin their spiritual quest with the ego but then, through logical reasoning, reach the conclusion that there is nothing but emptiness beyond the ego. This shows that *vichara* should be conducted only after gaining a sound understanding of the doctrine of *Atman* enunciated in *Vedanta* scriptures.

Vichara as a technique of self-discovery was first developed by the *Upanishadic* sages. Its most authoritative source is

Yajnavalkya's last instruction to his wife: "How to know the knower?" Though Yajnavalkya did not give a clear-cut answer to the question that he raised, self-enquiry must have been practised for centuries. The credit for reviving this ancient tradition in modern times must go to the south Indian sage Ramana Maharshi. Through his spiritual realization he gave the tradition a much needed authenticity. He distinguished self-enquiry from other methods of spiritual practice and gave it an independent status. He showed how by questioning oneself "Who am I?" it was possible to follow the trail of one's I-consciousness to its source in the *Atman*.

It is, however, good to remember that self-enquiry is not an intellectual process. It is essentially an intuitive process and, unless *medha* or intuition is developed through the practice of complete continence, it is not possible to carry self-enquiry beyond a certain inner limit.

Pratibodha technique

If we carefully study our thoughts and actions, we will find that they are mostly going on unconsciously, without our being aware of them. It is because a major part of our daily life is spent in an unconscious drift that we commit mistakes, fail in our efforts and succumb to inner impulses and external circumstances. One of the first steps in spiritual life, therefore, is to practise constant self-awareness. This constant self-awareness is known as *pratibodha*.

The *Kena Upanishad* (2. 4) says: "*pratibodha veditam matam*," which Shankara explains as: "The Self is known when it is grasped as the witness of each state of consciousness." This means that behind every thought and action there stands the silent witnessing self. By constantly holding on to this inner witness we

can remain fully conscious and alert in the midst of all our activities.

What happens when we practise this *pratibodha* technique? First of all, it enlarges our self-awareness. How does this take place? Between every two thoughts there is an interval when the self, remains in its own true nature as the self-luminous witness. As we practise the *pratibodha* technique, this interval lengthens and brings about a transformation of our consciousness. The second effect of practising *pratibodha* technique is a remarkable increase in our self-control. The *Atman* is not merely the source of consciousness but also the source of power; the *Upanishad* itself says, "Through *Atman* one gets strength." When the inner Self shines forth, it radiates such power that all thoughts, impulses and emotions spontaneously get controlled.

It is the *pratibodha* technique that goes under the name Vipassana (or *vipasyana* in Sanskrit) in Southern Buddhism. This ancient technique which had remained obscure for centuries was revived, developed, adapted to modern times and popularized by the Burmese Buddhist monk Mahasi Sayadaw and the Burmese government official U. Ba Khin in the early forties of this century. At present thousands of people in Burma, Ceylon, USA, Europe and Australia are actively practising Vipassana. The method of 'choiceless awareness' taught by the late J. Krishnamurthy is also only a modernized version of the *pratibodha* technique.

Sabda-aparoksatva

Another doctrine of spiritual experience held by *Advaita*, and by no other school or sect, is the *sabda-aparoksatva vada*. According to this theory, spiritual experience has nothing to do with meditation or any other practice. If a person's mind has been

sufficiently purified, the direct experience of *Brahman* takes place in Him as soon as he hears the great statements of the *Upanishads*.

The original proponents of this doctrine derived it through their interpretation of Yajnavalkya's *Upanishadic* exhortation: "The self is to be seen, is to be heard of, reflected upon and enquired into. Through the direct perception of the self, through hearing, reflection and transcendental knowledge (*vijnana*) all this becomes known." From Shankara's commentary on this passage it is clear that he regarded a combination of all the three means - *sravana* (hearing), *manana* (reflection) and *nididhyasana* - as necessary for the realization of *Brahman*. He says: "When these (three) are combined, then only true realization of the unity of *Brahman* is accomplished, not otherwise - by hearing alone."

In spite of Shankara's clear statement, his followers were divided into two camps on the interpretation of the above passage. According to the *Bhamati* school founded by Vacaspati Misra, *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* are all a chain of causes, contributory to the knowledge of the oneness of *Brahman*. Thus, *sravana* is the cause of *manana*, and *manana* is the cause of *nididhyasana*. These three are the causes of the knowledge of the said oneness, without any principal-subordinate relation among them. This view is evidently closer to Shankara's commentary. But the *Vivarana* school of *Prakasatma Yati* holds that *sravana* is the principal cause, whereas *manana* and *nididhyasana* are subsidiary and serve only as aids to the former.

The real source of the controversy is, however, deeper than the one stated above. It is centred on whether a sense organ is necessary or not for direct perception of *Brahman*. According to the *Bhamati* view, perception is possible only through an instrument, for, if the sense organ is defective, perception too will be defective. The mind is a sense organ, and only by exercising the mind through meditation can direct perception of *Brahman*

take place, not through hearing of scriptures alone which can produce only mediate knowledge. Opposing this view, the *Vivarana* school holds that the immediacy of cognition depends upon the object of knowledge and not the instrumentality of a sense organ. The mind is not a sense organ as it is necessary for all kinds of knowledge (not merely perception). Hearing can convey immediate knowledge if the object is immediate. There is no object more immediate than the *Atman*. So scriptural statements can produce direct perception of *Brahman* through a sufficiently purified mind. This point is illustrated by the story of the 'ten fools' who crossed a swollen river. On reaching the other bank they started counting their numbers. Since the counter forgot to count Himself, the counting always showed only nine. Then a passer-by pointed to the counter and said, "You are the tenth man." As soon as they heard it, true knowledge of their number dawned in them.

Nididhyasana

If in the *Vivarana* school *sravana* is considered the door to *advaitic* experience, *nididhyasana* is considered the door to that experience in the *Bhamati* school. This leads to the question, what is *nididhyasana*? Unfortunately, a satisfactory answer useful to a *sadhaka* is not found in the traditional works on *Advaita*. According to Shankara, *nididhyasana* is only "determined meditation." Suresvaracarya, however, does not regard *nididhyasana* as meditation. He points out that the use of the term *vijnana* in the place of *nididhyasana* in the second line of Yajnavalkya's exhortation mentioned above shows that *nididhyasana* is not meditation but higher knowledge. Meditation is an act, whereas *nididhyasana* is a "knowledge situation."

Suresvara holds the view that both *sravana* and *manana* should be observed till *vijnana* (understanding of *Brahman*)

manifests itself, which is what *nididhyasana* really means." *Nididhyasana* is the culmination of the processes of *sravana* and *manana* and is the understanding of *Brahman* (depending upon others)." In other words, *nididhyasana* means the understanding of the meaning of the *Sruti*, *vakydrtha* or "sentence-sense." This *vakydrtha* is not the linguistic expression of liberation. It is only indirect knowledge and is the precedent of direct or immediate realization of *Brahman*. The person who wants to be liberated should, after acquiring knowledge of *vakydrtha*, proceed to remove his ignorance in order that he should attain the knowledge of the *avakydrtha* (the Reality) beyond the sentence-sense.

At this point it may be useful to state the *prasamkhyana* theory of Mandana Misra, the author of *Brahmasiddhi*. According to Mandana, knowledge of *Brahman* springs from *prasamkhyana* or "continuous meditation" - not directly from *mahavakya*. The *Upanishads* convey *vakyartha* through the process of *sravana* and *manana*, but this *vakyartha* is mediate and relational knowledge. Hence it does not culminate in the awareness of the real nature of *Brahman*. *Brahman* is *avakydrtha* which is absolute and immediate. This is attained only through the continuous meditation on the *vakyartha*. *Prasamkhyana* is the repetition of *sravana* and *manana*. Suresvara criticizes Mandana's view. Suresvara holds that repetition of mediate knowledge does not produce immediate knowledge. He says: "since according to Mandana *sravana* and *manana* produce only mediate knowledge, *prasamkhyana*, which is a mere repetition of this mediate knowledge, cannot produce any new knowledge, that is direct realization of *Brahman*." Suppose a person infers the existence of fire in a distant hill from the smoke rising there. By repeating that inference can he directly see the fire? No.

It is obvious that if one understands *nididhyasana* as meditation, it will be the same as the *prasathkhyana* of Mandana. In fact, that is what Vacaspati does. But Suresvara rejects *prasamkhyana* as a direct means to *Brahman* experience. So he interprets *nididhyasana* not as meditation but as the intuition (*vijnana*) of the real meaning of the *mahavakyas* which falls short of direct realization of *Brahman*.

It is doubtful whether Yajnavalkya, when he instructed his wife Maitreyi about the Self, had in mind *samanadhikaranya*, *sambandhatrayajnana* and other abstruse principles of logic. In all probability, Yajnavalkya originally meant *nididhyasana* to be either a process of penetration into the self through *vichara* or an intensification of the intuitive awareness "I am *Brahman*."

Conclusion

We have only given a bare outline of the different spiritual techniques belonging to the path of knowledge. The details are to be learned from a competent guide. It is a matter of deep regret that although the philosophy of *Advaita* is being popularized in India and the West by religious preachers and academic teachers, the same amount of interest is not seen in learning and propagating the specifically *advaitic* forms of *sadhana*. It is as a corrective to this lopsided situation that we should view the increasing popularity of Zen, Vipassana, TM, Choiceless Awareness and several other techniques which have brought meaningfulness and succour to hundreds of thousands of people in modern times. Seen in a larger perspective, all these new methods, in spite of the propagandist exaggerations of their exponents, belong to the broad path of *Gnana-marga*. □

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I-ness and Egoism

I-ness and Egoism.

Sri Sankara has indicated to us that, since the universal Self is felt through our sensation of I-ness and since it is immediate in all of our experience, the non-self and its characteristics (i.e. including the differentiated ego and its accretions) may illusory be imposed on the self. The world of appearance is subjective not objective. True perception is an attribute of pure being. Ultimate reality is one, uniform, self-luminous and the witness is within. Sankara posits the divine Supreme as, "the absolutely real Being, exalted, eternal, all-penetrating, free from change, all sufficient, indivisible, self-luminous."

The sense of I-ness is the link between the inborn, undifferentiated ego and the self-created, differentiated ego. The undifferentiated ego originates in the divine Supreme and it manifests its attributes through the developing mind of the individual. In its pure state it is not part of the human mind. Increasing consciousness of the inborn ego draws the individual towards the unity of the cosmic Being. This self-awareness is diminished if the other ego is allowed to gather a momentum of its own, thus increasing attachments to the physical world within and the material world around us, and thereby diverting the individual away from the path of spiritual realization.

This process continues through the formative years of the individual; shaping and evolving the sense of I-ness. It is a transitional mode with a changing balance between the opposite aspects of the ego until one aspect becomes dominant and the person accepts that his character is set and his chosen life-goals

are not going to change. If neither aspect becomes dominant then the person's sense of I-ness can become uncertain and confused.

The expression of the sense of I-ness is a crucial element in personality development in our formative years. It becomes necessary in order to provide a datum for establishing our relationships with the physical, material world around us and with other people. It also ensures the continuity of memory and beingness. This datum gives us our living sense of I-ness, without which we would not know whom we are from one day to the next. Your sense of I-ness can be your best friend.

A sense of I-ness is necessary before one can create for oneself a personal ego. It manifests as our awareness develops, distinguishing childhood from infancy. It is a vital part of one's early learning and social training, when the infant is dependant on the family for satisfying his or her needs. As he becomes able to do things for himself, so he becomes able to think about his needs and wants. As he grows in thinking and feeling about himself and about his family and friends, so his sense of I-ness develops as an individual and as a part of the family group. When he reaches the stage of making his own decisions and making his own way in the world, then the roots of self-centred egoism begin to take hold. He may embrace materialistic ambition as his career ideal, to the detriment of his religion or ideals of public service. He may let religious faith take over part of his developing personality, so reducing his area of personal responsibility, or he may use religion as part of his ego to boost his ambitions in the world.

The manifesting of the true sense of I-ness is an affirmation of the positive aspects of beingness. It is the opposite of the negativity of self-centred egoism. Realization of it manifests the integrity of the individual being as a miniature and part of the almighty cosmic Being. It is an expression on the human level of

the universal principal of non-duality: "All is One, One is All."

When the sense of I-ness has been realized and integrated into the psycho-physical being, we not only stabilize the inner location of the self, we also stabilize the viewpoint from which we view the outer world, thus enhancing our perceptions and awareness for the purpose of spiritualizing the mind in the direction of our ideal of realizing the self.

The sense of I-ness does not supersede the inborn undifferentiated ego; it is a manifestation of it by means of attributes of the feeling body through the inner centre of feeling, whereas the self-centred ego is largely a product of the mental body, generating false intentions and purposes.

I-ness is the self-recognition and manifestation of aspects of the undifferentiated ego, when it is evolving from it's innate phase into the phase of individual personal development. As it develops, it can be expressed through each of the four Yogas; through the body, the heart, the mind and the spirit in their particular fields of reality or of assumed reality.

The ego and egotism

Every choice that we make and every action that we do knowingly and voluntarily has a trace of ego in it, though we may be unaware of it as such, accepting it as if we had no choice: "That is just me, isn't it?" We need to raise our awareness of the various elements of one's own ego.

Sri *Ramakrishna* has told us: "Self or ego leads away from the ford, but the ego of divine love, the ego of Godward knowledge, the ego of the child, leads to God. The ego of knowledge, i.e. of the higher self, is kept (by fulfilled adepts) for the purpose of teaching others the saving truths of religion (it is) a slight trace of individuality to mark his separate existence from

the Deity."¹ So we all have two kinds of ego; the inborn undifferentiated ego and the adult differentiated, self-created ego that can subvert it, if it is allowed to do so. To attain realization, we need to reconcile these two fundamental tendencies that are pulling us in opposite directions. This interface manifests through the developing of the sense of I-ness.

The capability for the expanding of the self-created ego is necessary in the make-up of our beingness for enabling discovery of new means and methods to ensure the survival of the individual in whatever circumstances he may find himself or herself. Every individual has a choice as to how he applies this capability to himself. It is a gift of the divine Creation and can be regarded as a protective mode intended to ensure the enhancement of human consciousness and the realization of the individual self, *Jivatman*. The differentiated ego, being self-created and unreal, dies with its creator, but the undifferentiated ego, being of the same nature as the source of Creation, continues on to the realization of the ideal of the divine Life.

The developing ego is commonly mis-identified at an early age. This misidentification is a consequence of the denial of the spiritual nature of it during the formative years of the young person. He identifies with the body or the thoughts or the emotions; any of these things but not with the true source. This denial of the spirituality of the inner being also leads to the denial of the inner centre of feeling. In such circumstances, the suppressed innate ego is left with the body and the mind for means of expression through thought and action but lacking in sufficient feeling to attain personal and spiritual maturity.

Unfortunately, many young people do not find sufficient opportunities to develop their latent sense of I-ness beneficially, and so limiting their own capabilities. As they grow in years, their

¹ *Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 201 & 206.

expectations that their talents and efforts will mature to fulfil their life goals do not always materialize. They become used to living with a fragmented personality, knowing that something is lacking in their make-up, but not knowing what it is or what to do about it.

Inadequate development of the feeling body can make the person a "loner" who is emotionally immature and has difficulty in submitting himself to joining social or religious groups. He may find that he is in a conflict situation of whether to seek opportunities for his own personal and spiritual development or to submit to the demands of the groups of which he is a part. The "buddy culture" calls for a modified sort of egoism, since it expects the individual to contribute to the group ego as well as his own. This means acting sometimes against one's better judgement so as not to lose the respect and affection of other buddies. The group ego is a means of boosting personal egos and the group ego may suffer if there were a real disagreement among them. Once one has joined the group, it is not easy to opt out of anything significant without losing some buddies.

The active ego is in fact a set of egos, each of which has been acquired to suit a particular set of circumstances, whether in the home, the club, the office or for public activities. Some people have one predominant ego that can be switched on whenever required. If it is expressed knowingly, then it can become a false ego, where the person knows that his actions are insincere and are tailored to suit his immediate objectives.

The self-created ego can become like a subconscious entity that dictates what one thinks and does. It is created by the individual because he thinks it will advance Him as a successful person in the groups of which he is a member, whether social, educational, political or financial.

In cultures that are secular or founded in materialism, the true function of the ego is much devalued. It is much misused as a tool for self-aggrandisement by power seekers who suborn the vital spiritual purpose in order to establish instead their own methods to manipulate power and control, whether on a world-wide scale or on a personal basis. This has a degrading effect on the character of the prevailing human culture as a whole. The obsessive egoist, who is devoted to increasing his own personal gains, admits no limit or restraint on his ambitions and he is capable of degrading the prevailing culture for his own advantage, regardless of the needs and wishes of the vast majority of people.

Creating the self-centred ego is a continuing act of separation from the Source of creation. The egoist is separating himself from those parts of the creation that are not beneficial to him. Those aspects that are beneficial to him, he thinks he can control either overtly or covertly. To the ego, control is reassuring, so gaining control becomes a survival mechanism for him. The egomane becomes obsessive; he becomes a "control freak," afraid of losing control but also in fear of being controlled by others or of losing anything he has. When he sees something that he cannot confront, or that is contrary to his obsessive beliefs, then the veils of ignorance, *avidya*, close down over his mind and occludes them into *maya*. So the compulsive egoist can be motivated by suppressed fear in the subconscious. Some modern psychologists tend to ascribe wrongly the significance of self-created differentiated egos. This is because they are unable to accept the fundamentality of the undifferentiated, Godward ego and the individual sense of I-ness or any other concept arising from it. This is evidently an indication of the psychologist's own state of being.

The choice of how we intend to use the capabilities of the ego is always with us, whether we are aware of it or not. Some people identify themselves with their ego: for them everything is, "I, Me, or Mine." Their life-style is the product of their self-centred ideas, such as, "I am free, I can do as I like, and I want that," or just, "I am the greatest." Their fame or infamy lasts for them for the duration of a lifetime, but the effects of their obsessive, misguided ideas and actions can be long-lasting and widespread and difficult to eradicate.

The undifferentiated ego is pure spiritual innocence that has been embodied in human form. By itself it would not be fitted to exist in the physical world. It is guided initially by instincts and other memories of previous existences. There has been a small number of instances in recorded history of sensitives, men and women, who have continued in this condition of spiritual innocence for most of their lifetime, but were also able to sustain a normal domestic and family life. However, for most of us, we are confronted only too soon with the needs of the world and the family in which we find ourselves. Our early training and education teaches us how to adapt to the environment and the culture that we are spending our lives in. This process of adaption imposes modifications on the ego.

The nature of the innate ego is unchanged but that person's perception of it is obscured by the expanding differentiated ego. The egoist has blinded himself to the nature and the capabilities of his own being. But why is it that the being allows the bloated ego to obscure perception of the true self? It is due to the negative modes of the mind imposed on the unaware individual and on his communal culture for the purposes of constraint and control by hostile or incompatible elements. This is the genesis of the divided self.

The divided Self.

The need for the differentiated ego arose when the cosmic Being, the source of the Creation, became separated from the individual human self. The individual became cut off from the one true Spirit, the source of his beingness and power, by negative inhuman influences. His consciousness of himself as part of the cosmic Being in the continuing creation was subverted and knowledge of it was relegated to the subconscious where it has been awaiting re-awakening in a more civilized era with a higher level of awareness.

The resulting void in the human psyche was filled in many cultures over the millenia by increased mental activity and action and also by a need for individually created modes of survival due to the weakening of spirituality since God was being denied his true place as the immanent source in his continuing creation. This led to a burgeoning of the differentiated ego, with it's own survival mechanisms for the individual, but separating him from direct knowledge of the divine Supreme. This radical imposed change in the consciousness of humanity was supposed to ensure the survival of individuals as physical entities, but it did not ensure the survival of the groups to which they belonged. It evidently curtailed the survival of their cultures.

Thus, we have been left with this anomaly of the "Divided Self," with two egos pulling us in opposite directions; one of them towards the ideal of pure consciousness and the other towards the miasma of Godless materialism. The awareness of the true spiritual nature of beingness has been subverted by oppressive groups who seek to control or to deny spiritual knowledge and so to control material knowledge in order to achieve their own nefarious objectives. We can see all around us the consequences of this historic travesty of the fundamental truth of the divine purpose of Being.

I-ness and Contemplation for the Aspirant

The new aspirant can proceed firstly with meditation on the I-ness of the physical body. This opens the way to the I-ness of the heart and the mind. The physical body is a complex of many parts and each functional part, is, however small, necessary to the continued existence of the being as a whole. Each living cell of the body incorporates consciousness of the whole. We can consider and meditate on each of the functional parts as "I" without reducing the integrity of the whole body/beingness. This method of meditation affirms the I-ness of each part and of the individual being. It can also be included in the context of basic meditations, such as, "Who am I?" And "What am I?"

Every new aspirant needs to regenerate for himself his own sense of I-ness in order to become aware of his actual state of beingness. I-ness is a vital and fundamental part of his own beingness which indicates to him what differentiates him from other people and it also shows him what he has in common with them. Your I-ness is centred in what you are doing of your own volition in each instance and your intention for it at that moment. It is also influenced by your knowledge of what your peers and associates think about you and about what you do.

Our sense of I-ness does not always receive the attention it deserves in one's early years because it is "overlapped" by the undifferentiated ego of infancy and the differentiated ego of adolescence and maturity. If more attention was given to our sense of I-ness it would mean that less time and energy would be wasted on unnecessary expansion of the self-created ego.

By means of self-observation and assessment, the self-aware mind becomes more and more aware of its own capabilities. It is capable of separating itself into two parts and so becoming both the subject and object of contemplation. It can

fulfil these dual roles simultaneously. The process of realization of the mind does not happen suddenly. Because it is by nature heuristic, i.e., serving to aid further discovery, it is a gradual revealing of the attributes and the powers of the being manifesting through the mind. The realized part of the mind also has the capability of functioning on two levels; a higher level and a lower level. The higher level is the way to the realization of the inner being, *Jivatman*, and the lower level is anything that prevents or which hinders that. As the undifferentiated ego becomes self-realized, it can diminish its contra-self; the acquisitive, differentiated ego, which is capable of degrading the being, if it is uncontrolled. The realized part of the mind is able to enhance the unrealized part of the mind, so each individual has the task of raising his own consciousness in order to achieve his ideal by his own efforts and by following the guidance of adepts who have trodden the pathway to realization before him.

The rehabilitation of the sense of I-ness is the return of the conscious being into the inner space of the self. It is the restoration of the primal state of the integrated being before the advent of the divided self. The divine Essence was previously manifesting through the vehicle of the human body/being but it was prevented from doing so by negative influences and so human consciousness was forced into the present phase of decline. Since the cosmic Being is itself timeless, realization of I-ness is a return to the state when human faculties were, in an ordered sequence and the consciousness of humankind was expanding through the power of the Deity, the divine Supreme.

The sense of I-ness can be regenerated by self-observation and assessment of one's doingness and the associated feelings, through the inner centre of feeling. In the contemplation of doingness, the experiencing of oneself through actions is not for

the purpose of becoming attached to the effects or the results of the actions. It is to enable us to observe the movements of the spirit that is the inner being. For the divided self, the main purpose is to re-create and bring into being the memory track of the sense of I-ness and to maintain through the memory this continuum on a conscious level without any breaks or blanks in it. This is in order to provide a conscious datum for continuing the aspirants progress in spiritualizing his body-mind, thoughts and feelings in the direction of his ideal of realization. I-ness manifests through doingness and through attitude.

Contemplation of I-ness involves being the self observing the self through one's doingness and associated feelings. It is necessary to co-ordinate one's doingness with one's perceptions and thoughts. This may seem obvious: So it is, but how often do we find ourselves doing one thing whilst thinking or seeing or listening to something else that is completely different?

Contemplation of I-ness is not a search for identity: It is a stage in the quest for the realization of self-awareness. Self-awareness can be directed to any functional part of one's being in the physical body, the mind and the feelings through the practice of *Yoga*. It enables us to establish our own rhythm and pace of purposeful thought, movement and action in our quest for our ultimate ideal. The self-conscious watcher and witness of the movements of the inner being can reflect the attributes of the Deity in truth, self-respect, certainty, compassion and love. The person who has subdued his own ego is afraid of nothing. He knows that nobody can harm the one who has realized the true self of the inner Being. What a joy it is to meet someone who enjoys the sublime gifts of the undifferentiated, inborn ego and is firmly rooted in his or her own spiritual beingness and is both able and willing to give judiciously to other seekers the life-giving gifts of self-awareness. □

Cultivation of Strength and Fearlessness (cont.)

Methods of Cultivating Mental Strength

But when by strength one understands only physical force, it creates problems for Himself and for others. Unfortunately, a large number of people have always understood only physical strength and brute force by the word 'strength.' This mistaken idea caused many tragedies in history. People who considered themselves strong destroyed others and eventually themselves. In our times what is called the "armament race," which poses a threat to human civilization, is the most problematic development of this concept of strength. If by strength were meant only physical force, one could not advocate its universal cultivation. We have therefore to understand the concept in its all-comprehensive connotation.

You may have a body as strong as that of a rhinoceros. What of that? That is mere brute strength. But that strength gets a new meaning, when it is guided, controlled and directed by a strong mind.

Mental strength is any day a superior force to the physical strength. A mentally strong man may or may not be physically as strong. But as a human being he will be always more effective than the person representing merely physical strength.

Gandhi, unarmed, challenged the mighty British imperial rule, and the British had to quit India. That is a classic example how the strength of mind can be an effective force in changing the course of history. It will be found in life that he who fails to cultivate mental strength leads a kind of vegetating life, wherever he may be placed. But he who has taken care to develop mental

strength turns everything to good account. He faces life in a frontal manner, battles with adversity manfully, and is never afraid. In victory he is humble and generous. In defeat he is introspective and optimistic. In trials he is alert and dexterous. His very life manifests a new winning quality, which the man without mental strength totally lacks. Until a man develops mental strength, he cannot even be distinguished from an animal. And on mere physical level, what chances has man to shine brighter than an animal?

Therefore anyone, seeking to live a life worthy of a human being, while cultivating physical strength, should take even greater care to cultivate mental strength.

The cultivation of mental strength too has two aspects: negative and positive. Negatively speaking, cultivation of mental strength means stopping wastage of mental energy. Without doing that, obviously, the mind cannot be strengthened. Positively speaking, it means feeding the mind with wholesome food.

We are cautious about spending money but often reckless enough about spending a more precious wealth - our mind. If one loses his mind, of what use will be all the wealth of the world to him? Even his dearest ones will be anxious to get him shut up in a mental home. Mental energy is wasted in various ways such as:

1. Indiscriminate reading.
2. Purposeless controversy.
3. Garrulousness.
4. Inquisitiveness in others' affairs.
5. Finding fault with others.
6. Overambitiousness.
7. Egotistic concern for perfection in others.
8. Lust, anger, jealousy, hatred, avarice, and arrogance.
9. The habit of harbouring grudge against others.

10. Daydreaming and night-waking.
11. Indulging in fantasies and emotional kite-flying.
12. What is called "giving bits of one's mind to others."

Drainage of mental energy will have to be stopped by giving up these habits. While indulging in these habits one cannot have a strong mind, and a man of weak mind cannot be physically healthy for long. Modern psychologists are all agreed that in human life there is a close psychosomatic relationship. "Psyche" means mind, "soma" means body. How close is that relation we shall illustrate: A young woman of thirty years of age had enjoyed a fairly happy married life until the depression of the early thirties. At that time her husband's financial security was threatened. Then her very successful father-in-law died. This woman was apprehensive lest her widowed mother-in-law should request help from the husband. The mother-in-law appeared in the picture which created serious tension in the young wife. She had a nervous breakdown and all the symptoms of serious mental disorder. She was stabilized by attaining a higher philosophy of life. She realized that the mother-in-law would not be a burden to her even if worse came to worst. She was also convinced that the life of consecration can alone remove her egocentric, selfish attitude. It took several months for her to establish herself in this new way of thinking. In the meantime, she systematically went through spiritual exercises of concentration, meditation, and so forth, and gradually developed will power.

Such is the close relation between mind and body. It is a well-known fact that mental strain and maladies cause many physical ailments. For developing mental strength one must know how to look after one's own mental health. How can we do it? There are certain simple and safe ways by which we may do effective mind-husbandry to ourselves and our family members,

without having to rush in a panicky way to "be analysed." In America, among sophisticated millionaires, getting regularly analysed has become one of the norms of high fashion. But, for various reasons, it is a very expensive and problematic fashion. Once you get into getting analysed, you never get out of it, for where is the end of that kind of analysis until you are in the coffin, well-advanced in the way of all flesh? Therefore, it is wisdom to learn certain authentic simple methods for taking care of one's mental health, by which you can never injure yourself.

In life's journey, conflict within ourselves and with environments generate wrong emotions in our minds, such as hatred, jealousy, lust, anger, avarice, pride etc. What we call impurities of the mind are nothing but wrong movements of our mind. These wrong emotions of the mind are like the garbage of the mind. We all know what will happen to our homes if we cannot throw out garbage from our kitchens for a week. But many of us do not seem to realize what happens to our minds if we do not throw out our mental garbage for months and years. It is known only when we develop some chronic mental troubles causing worry for everybody. But need we push the situation in that blind alley at all? What is needed is to develop the habit of introspection and learn how to detect the wrong movements of the mind, and also the method of their removal.

Patanjali, the father of Hindu psychology, suggests that these impurities of the mind which drain our energy and cause various types of mental ailments can be removed by practising these four disciplines:

1. Friendliness toward the happy.
2. Compassion to the miserable.
3. Delight in the good.
4. Indifference to evil.

If we practise friendliness toward the happy, we snail strike at the root of our instincts of jealousy and hatred which eat away the inside of man. Compassion to the miserable will expand our heart and purify the mind when practised with humility and consecration. Delight in the good will augment our own goodness, destroy our subtle evil tendencies. Indifference to evil will save us from such contagion from outside against which we have not yet developed sufficient resistance within ourselves.

Along with these if we would also daily offer the fruits of our thoughts and actions to the Lord during the practice of our devotions, then we have a fair chance of stopping the wastage of the mind, and also destroying the causes of possible mental maladies. When we practise these simple disciplines it becomes easier to bring the mind under control. The cultivation of mental strength is possible only in a controlled mind. How do we control the mind?

Control of the mind is a vast subject by itself. For our present purpose we shall discuss only one point. There are various methods of controlling the mind. But the most fundamental is this: we have the *indriyas* or sense-organs and also our *buddhi* or discriminating faculty. When we ally our mind with the discriminating faculty and refuse to dance on attendance to the sense-organs, then the mind stands controlled. It cannot be done in a day. But it can be done.

Now the mind in which wastage has been stopped, which has been cleansed and controlled, should be fed with wholesome food. Indeed this threefold process of mind-husbandry should continue simultaneously, one process helping the other. The wholesome food for the mind is nothing but the noblest, highest, and purest thoughts of the world coming from any quarter or any source. "We must have," as Swami Vivekananda says, "life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas."

Even if we assimilate five such ideas and make them part of life and character, our minds will be strong.

In Mahatma Gandhi's Autobiography we read, to start with, he was a man of weak mind, like any ordinary human being. But he took to feeding his mind with a few great ideas - truth, non-violence, fearlessness, selflessness, all based on faith in God. And eventually he developed one of the strongest minds of our age.

In one context Swami Vivekananda points out the technique of feeding the mind with great life-giving ideas. He says: "Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them that they are all glorious children of immortality, even those who are the weakest in manifestation. Let positive, strong, helpful thoughts enter into their brains from very childhood. Lay yourself open to these thoughts and not to weakening and paralysing ones. Say to your own mind, 'I am He, I am He.' Let it ring day and night in your minds like a song, and at the point of death declare: 'I am He.' That is truth; the infinite strength of the world is yours."

In one of his lectures in California, Swami Vivekananda narrated how, in his days of wandering in India, his mental strength saved his life on many occasions: "Many times I have been in the jaws of death, starving, footsore and weary; for days and days I had had no food, and often could walk no further; I would sink down under a tree and life would seem ebbing away. I could not speak, I could scarcely think, but at last the mind reverted to the idea: 'I have no fear, nor death; I never hunger nor thirst. I am It! I am It! The whole of nature cannot crush me; it is my servant. Assert thy strength, thou Lord of Lords and God of Gods! Regain thy lost empire! Arise and walk and stop not!' And I would rise up, reinvigorated, and here am I, living, today. Thus, whenever darkness comes, assert the reality and everything

adverse must vanish. For, after all, it is but a dream. Mountain-high though the difficulties appear, terrible and gloomy though all things seem, they are but *Maya*. Fear not - it is banished. Crush it, and it vanishes. Stamp upon it, and it dies."

Cultivated intellectual powers may constitute one of the elements which will strengthen the mind, when it has been otherwise well taken care of. And so intellectual powers should be carefully cultivated. The key to the cultivation of intellectual powers is the practice of concentration. Those who leave their mark in history, who have been great teachers or benefactors of mankind were all men of concentration.

Observance of truth and purity of character in thought, word, and deed immensely enhance the strength of mind. The true and the pure may not be gifted with many endowments, but they will shine like the richest treasure of humanity. Their words may not be loud, but even their whisper will demolish mountains of falsehood. Even their detractors will trust them.

Finally, there is one singular method of gaining strength of mind, which is incredibly simple, so simple that one almost hesitates to tell it. It is the repetition of God's name: *japam*. God is the source of all strength. And God and His name are non-different. Hence God's name is also the source of all strength. He who repeats the name of the Lord daily, regularly, with faith and love, his mind not only never lacks strength, but it always continues to increase it, being spiritually connected with the very source of all strength and power in the world. This is so simple a method, and we are so sophisticated, that we may not believe this. But, to be sure, this is one of the greatest facts of life. It is open to all to try and see this. In a very unassuming teaching, *Sri Ramakrishna* says: "Clap your hands in the morning and evening and say: 'Haribol, Haribol.'" These words mean, "Chant the name

of God, Chant the name of God” and also “God is my strength, God is my strength.”

The practice of the following Vedic prayer can be greatly helpful to the followers of all faiths in cultivating strength on all levels, physical, mental and spiritual: "O Lord, Thou art the embodiment of infinite energy; do Thou fill me with energy. Thou art the embodiment of infinite virility; Thou art the embodiment of infinite strength; do Thou bestow strength upon me. Thou art the embodiment of infinite power; do Thou grant power unto me. Thou art the embodiment of infinite courage; do Thou inspire me with courage. Thou art the embodiment of infinite fortitude; do Thou give me fortitude." This prayer should be especially taught to children at home so that they may grow not only with a penchant for strength and fearlessness but also for faith in the divine response to their earnest prayers.

Methods of Cultivating Spiritual Strength

While mental strength is superior to physical strength, there is a strength which is higher than even mental strength. It is the spiritual strength. There is no strength higher or greater than spiritual strength. Spiritual strength may therefore be said to be the ultimate strength. The indestructible and real element in man is the *Atman*, which is the reservoir of all power and splendour. Therefore strength born of the realization of *Atman*, or one's experienced relationship with God, is the greatest and the most abiding strength. Once gained, it cannot be lost. It only increases. Strength of body and mind are almost nothing in comparison to the strength born of realization of God or *Atman*. It is the attainment of such strength which enabled the Sikh Guru Tej Bahadur Singh to declare: "I have given my head but not my valued treasure, my *dharma*."

True spiritual life becomes the conduit for the expression of the power of reality itself. The *Upanishad* teaches: "The *Atman* cannot be realized by one who is devoid of strength." Again, elsewhere the *Upanishad* says: "Through realization of the *Atman* one attains strength." On the basis of such teachings of the *Upanishad*, Swami Vivekananda gives us the equation: "true spirituality is strength, and true strength is spirituality. That strength which does not eventually lead us to the attainment of illumination is not true strength but an illusion of it. Without moving towards reality step by step we cannot have real strength. Those who seek God may appear to be very innocent people. In reality they constitute the most enduring strength of a society."

One basic factor in cultivating spiritual strength is the observance of continence. Maximum spiritual strength can never be developed without absolute continence. The gap in continence will be reflected in the gap in spiritual strength. Therefore the highest type of spiritual strength is always seen among great monks and nuns. Married men and women - when they live perfectly chaste lives and live a truthful life in the righteous path - can develop tremendous spiritual strength. There are any number of such cases in Hindu legends and history. Take only the human aspect of the character of Sita, the well-known heroine of the epic *Ramayana*, who stood alone against all the evil forces that surrounded her after she was kidnapped by Ravana, by the sheer power of her chastity. Chastity is the most valued idea in the householder's way of spiritual life in India. Swami Vivekananda says in one place, unless in a society married people live chaste lives for many generations, that society cannot produce great monks and nuns. When the spiritual strength comes to one after the attainment of the vision of God or realization of the *Atman*, then he stands metamorphosed. Through Him courses a superhuman strength and this distracted world is vitalized with

a new power. Such a man may be physically sick, his position in the world may not be of any account, he may have no learning, but with the influx of spiritual strength he will do things not possible to be done by muscular men, generals, dictators or intellectuals.

Thus we find manifest in some of the mystics of the world an amazing superabundant vitality, a 'triumphing force' over which circumstance has no power. It so happens to them sometimes by a certain alchemy of realization. Their erstwhile passivity drops off and they enter into history like rivers of power, and transform the future of man. The lives of St. Paul, St. Joan of Arc, St. Teresa, St. Catherine of Siena, Sankaracarya, Vivekananda, and a host of others will bear testimony to this fact. A superabundant vitality, an enthralling enthusiasm, invincible will, all these can issue only from spiritual strength. These are beyond the reach of mere mental or physical strength. Just as a river attains its fulfilment when it flows into the ocean, in like manner streams of physical and mental Strength attain their oceanic fulfilment when they flow into and become one with spiritual strength.

St. Paul - what was he? An obscure Roman citizen, without money, influence or even good health. But when, through spiritual realization, it came to be the case of 'not I, but Christ in me,' he went forth into the world alone to set the colossal foundations of the great Roman Catholic Church.

St. Joan of Arc was a child of a peasant class. But suddenly we find her leaving her sheepfold to lead the armies of France. How did this happen? We are told that she was propelled by the voice from above. She felt herself charged with a superhuman power. Having become united with infinite life, that is divinity itself, she became the medium of its mighty expression.

St. Teresa was a chronic invalid, then over fifty years of age. But when the inward voice prompted her to go forward on the path of destiny, she unexpectedly left the convent and started a startlingly new life, coursing through Spain and reforming a great religious order in the teeth of the ecclesiastical world.

More surprising was the life of St. Catherine of Siena, an illiterate woman of humble extraction. After a few years of life in a retreat, where she had the experience of the mystic marriage, she emerges from the cell of self-knowledge to dominate the politics of Italy.

Such examples can be multiplied. Let me give you only two examples from India. Sri Sankara, the great mystic philosopher of India, died at the age of thirty-two. But by that age the work he had done was just fantastic. After attaining the highest spiritual realization of the identity of *Atman* and *Brahman*, he wrote commentaries on the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Brahmasutras*. Besides these he composed many hymns and other original treatises on the philosophy of nondualism. This itself would have taken several lives of an ordinary person. But Sankara did many things more which left an indelible impress on the history of Hinduism. He crisscrossed India a couple of times on foot, propagated the message of *Vedanta* - for which he had to fight many a battle with other contending philosophies - set right the methods of worship, and organized Hindu monastic orders, trained disciples to carry forth his work, and passed even before he was fully young, so to say.

Swami Vivekartanda's life is another object-lesson of what spiritual strength can achieve. He lived only for thirtynine years. The power-potency of his teachings has already not only influenced in depth the spiritual thought-current of the world, but his global ministry has also been quietly "helping to prepare the way for the united pilgrimage of mankind towards self-

understanding and peace." By the strength of his spirituality he introduced in the life-stream of the West a saving power, that is *Vedanta*. In India he galvanized the whole nation and set it on the path of new adventures and attainments. His life-work has just begun to fructify.

Methods of Cultivating Fearlessness

The concept of strength is intimately associated with the idea of fearlessness. Fear impedes the inflow and outflow of strength. Want of strength again causes fear. Nothing can degrade a man so much as fear. There is not a single sin or crime which men cannot commit out of fear. Out of fear civilized human beings can become thoroughly barbarized, and commit the worst of crimes. When this is done collectively, we may call it a war - such acts might even be called as patriotic or heroic. But basically an act of fear is below the dignity of man. And there is such strange binding mutuality of fear in the world of today. America is afraid of Russia; Russia is afraid of America. Arabs are afraid of Jews; Jews are afraid of Arabs. Labour is afraid of management; management is afraid of labour. Black people are afraid of white people; white people are afraid of black people. Fear is cultivated on levels international, national, social, individual, racial, or religious. At least half of the difficulties and problems of mankind originate in fear.

Fear leads to suspicion, suspicious to anger, anger to violence, violence to disaster. Fear can rob us of the finest qualities of our head and heart. It can destroy our sanity, our capacity for right thinking and action, and make brutes of us. Even what we call enlightened self-interest, for which we think any action is justifiable, is nothing but gilded fear. On the personal level how many odd fears do we not have: fear of the known, fear of the unknown; fear of death, ghost, disease; fear of poverty or money,

enemy or friend; fear of darkness, fear of light; fear of old age, past, present or future; fear of taxation, examination; fear of losing what we have, of not getting what we want - so much so our very lives appear to be relay-races of fears, defined or undefined, real or imaginary. And fear expresses and impresses itself in our lives in an infinite variety of ways, and saps our strength almost imperceptibly.

Therefore it is a necessary precondition for true cultivation of strength that we take special care to eradicate fears from our minds. And fear has to be removed from individual minds for its roots are there alone. There is no fear hanging anywhere in the sky or standing somewhere in a dark corner. Even the bomb which may fall from the sky originates in the fear of individual minds. National fears are but collectivized individual fears. If a fearless man arise in a nation he can volatilize a whole mass of national fears by his personal example. This we saw in India in the example of Vivekananda which was later followed by Gandhiji. When the Indian people lost fear of the British bullets, the British had to leave India.

Now, where is the root of fear? According to *Vedanta*, the root of fear is in our ignorance of the true nature of the Self. Because we do not know that the core of being or the *Atman* is infinite, immortal and indestructible, we are afraid of death. And from our ignorance of the true nature of the *Atman*, which is one, indivisible, homogeneous consciousness arises the concept of otherness, that is, the sense of differentiation. From the sense of differentiation arise the ideas of competitive exclusive self-interest, and fears of various sorts.

In the *Upanishad* it is taught: "If the aspirant makes the slightest differentiation in it, there is fear for him." Again says the *Upanishad*, emphasizing the same idea in another way: "It is only from the idea of the existence of a second one that fear arises."

The cause of fear being so, its final solution is possible only through the realization of the true nature of the Self, which also means direct realization of the fact of the unity of existence. When we experientially know that "All this is verily *Brahman*" and that "This individual self is *Brahman*" then there remains none or nothing outside the Self to be afraid of. In other words, true fearlessness cannot be attained except through the attainment of illumination.

You know the old story of Alexander and the Hindu sage. Swami Vivekananda narrates this in one of his lectures: "An emperor who invaded India was told by his teacher to go and see some of the sages there. After a long search for one, he found a very old man sitting on a block of stone. The emperor talked with him a little and became very much impressed by his wisdom. He asked the sage to go to his country with him. "No," said the sage, "I am quite satisfied with my forest here." Said the emperor, I will give you money, position, wealth. I am the emperor of the world." "No," replied the man, "I don't care for those things." The emperor replied, "If you do not go, I will kill you." The man smiled serenely and said, "That is the most foolish thing you ever said, Emperor. You cannot kill me. Me the sun cannot dry, the heat cannot burn, the sword cannot kill, for I am the birthless, the deathless, the ever-living, omnipotent, omnipresent Spirit."

Such fearlessness can spring only from attained illumination, when a man directly perceives that his being pervades the universe and that infinite strength and power are behind him. We may not know it but behind everyone of us is God's infinite power. We are conduits of his power. How can a gun be afraid of a bullet? Yet we are. That is *maya*. That is the tragedy. We must volatilize this illusion in order to become fearless. As human beings who are not yet illumined we of course cannot have the fearlessness of illumined souls. But this we can

surely do: we can intellectually and emotionally make the ideas of immortality of the soul and the unity of existence our own by constantly thinking of them, and thus driving out of our minds all contrary ideas. When these ideas will sink into our subconscious, our tendencies will take shape accordingly and fear will gradually leave while courage takes over. Swami Vivekananda says that there are two sorts of courage: one is the courage of facing the cannon, and the other is the courage of spiritual conviction. One is the physical courage, and the other is the spiritual courage.

We have discussed how spiritual courage may be attained. Let us take our stand on the spirit and dare to live its implications and spiritual courage will gradually flow forth within us.

Meanwhile we are indeed more concerned with the attainment of physical courage. It is shameful, it is degrading, it is stupid to live in constant fear of one thing or other on the physical plane. The most effective method of cultivating fearlessness on the physical plane is to "face the brute!" This teaching comes to us from Swami Vivekananda's life. It so happened in his early youth, when one day he was returning from a temple of the Divine Mother in Varanasi, he was pursued by a troop of monkeys and so he was about to run fearing that they might attack him. Suddenly he heard the voice of an old sannyasin calling out to him. And what the old monk said became an object lesson for Vivekananda's whole life, and it should be an object lesson of our life too, if we want to be bold and fearless. The Sannyasin said, "Stop; always face the brutes!" Vivekananda turned, his fear gone. Seeing him defiant, the brutes fled. In a lecture given in the city of New York, years later, he referred to this incident and pointed out the moral of the story, saying: "So face nature! Face ignorance! Face illusion! Never fly!" As long as we, out of fear, leave the causes or fear behind, so long we remain

its victim. Then its poisoned arrow will pierce us from the back and we will not know when we will be down and out. But when we turn round, the cause of our fear becomes the victim of our courage and it can no longer inflict on us that amount of harm, if at all it can.

In every single case of fear we must, to the point of recklessness, turn round and stare the fear in the face with glowing eyes. It may be an ugly face, a ferocious face. Or there may be no face at all! When we turn round we may see there is nothing whatsoever, except the fertile imagination of our heated brain. Even in case of a real cause of fear, the only way to handle it is to call forth courage and strength and subdue it with dexterity. On two occasions the Holy Mother, the consort of *Sri Ramakrishna*, faced causes of fear with dexterity and courage and triumphed over them.

Once while she was on her way to Calcutta on foot from Jayrambati, she found herself alone - her companions had left her behind - in the gathering darkness of night in a vast meadow notorious for cases of plunder and murder. Suddenly a husky man with a big stick shouted at her in a most unfriendly voice: "Who is there?" "I am your daughter Sarada," she said. And the dacoit who would have plundered her, melted in affection to hear her sweet voice. The result was he, with his wife who soon joined him, guarded her all night after seeing that she got her night's food from a shop. On another occasion, at Jayrambati, she was pursued by a cranky man. She ran around a haystack several times. Then it occurred to her, "Why am I running? Am I not Shakti Herself?" She turned round, threw the man on the ground, and putting her knee on the chest of the man, gave him such slaps that his crankiness was cured at least for the time being.

(to be continued)

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The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and M. (cont.)

While anyone reading the Gospel of John or Matthew in the Bible can shift the focus from Jesus to Saint John or Matthew, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* avoids that possibility. While classifying the teachings of Jesus according to St. Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, can create doubt in the mind of a reader as to which version is more or less authentic, by keeping himself in the background, M. leaves no room for any such question about the accuracy of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. For example, the above incident of Martha and Mary is not mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark; it is mentioned in the Gospel of John simply as two sisters living at Bethany. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* avoids that ambiguity. At any rate, we prefer to call *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as the *Ramakrishna-Bhagavatam*, M. , however, gave the title, *Kathamrita*, to his original Bengali version, or the nectar-like utterances of *Bhagavan* Sri Ramakrishna. Others, like C. Rajagopalachari, a saint, statesman, and scholar of the 20th century India, wrote a series of articles in a Tamil magazine in 1950, explaining the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Later, Ramakrishna Math in Chennai (Madras) made the English translation of them in a book form under the title '*Sri Ramakrishna Upanishad*.' The term '*Upanishad*' means knowledge (of the Ultimate Reality, *Brahman*) received by the student 'sitting close to' the teacher. Now, there was no one closer to Sri Ramakrishna than M. , who recorded the utterances of the Master exactly as he spoke, meditated upon them and only then wrote them. Rajaji, as his countrymen affectionately called him, had done a superb job indeed, using the same stories to illustrate the Master's

teachings as in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and in a style equally lucid, charming, and spiritually uplifting, as that of M. At any rate, it appears to us that the terms, *Kathamrita*, *Ramakrishna Upanishad*, and *Ramakrishna-Bhagavatam*, are not contradictory, rather they are complementary with each other and mean the same thing. Swami Vivekananda in a '*Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna*' calls Sri Ramakrishna "truth immutable (*Brahman*), beyond nature, yet nature's glory." For, when one tries to describe an incarnation of God like Rama, Krishna, or Ramakrishna, it is impossible to describe them by any one straightforward term. That is why many Hindu households chant 108 names of Rama; actually there would be infinite names of someone who is quite indescribable.

Not surprisingly, when someone asked M. about Sri Ramakrishna, he would go into an ecstatic mood and would say: "the Master was like a five-year old boy always running to meet his Mother (Kali); the Master was like a beautiful flower whose nature was to bloom and spread its fragrance; the Master was like a bonfire from which other lamps were lighted; the Master was like a celestial vina always absorbed in singing the glory of the Divine Mother, and so forth. After trying to describe Sri Ramakrishna in so many ways, he would say that all these similes were inadequate. Truly, the Infinite cannot be expressed by a finite mind in words. Sri Ramakrishna's allegory of a salt doll that went into an ocean to measure its depth but could never come back to report its depth, aptly describes the reason for M.'s inability to illustrate the indescribable *Bhagavan* Sri Ramakrishna.

In later years people would flock to M. to know about Sri Ramakrishna and for their peace of mind. He, however, would talk to them only about God. When they protested and requested Him to talk about Sri Ramakrishna, he would quote the

conversation between a disciple and a preceptor in the *Kena Upanishad*: The disciple said, "Teach me the *Upanishad*," and the preceptor replied, "I have told you the *Upanishad*." The fact is that M. was so much saturated with the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna that whatever came forth from his lips was nothing but about the Master, which to Him was no less than God-personified.

Once M. told Sri Ramakrishna of his desire to renounce the family life and become a monk. The Master discouraged him from doing so, for he envisioned a different path for him. He told him that since he was already well established in God, there was no more need for renouncing the family life; being fully established in God means, by implication, renunciation of the world. On another occasion the Master told a householder devotee who wanted to renounce the family life: "God binds the *Bhagavata* Pundit to the world with one tie (the tie of a family); otherwise who would remain to explain the sacred book?" (The Gospel, 718) Was not Sri Ramakrishna hinting to M. what his future role would be? For, the Master saw in M., the householder, the most appropriate instrument for recording his message, and for giving to humanity the *Ramakrishna-Bhagavatam*, which *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* really is, the essence of *Vedas*, *Vedanta* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. In fact it would be wrong for us to assume that great saints thought that between the lives of a monk and a householder, the former in any sense was more desirable and superior in spiritual accomplishments. As Swami Vivekananda has said in one of his talks on *Karma Yoga* (Complete Works, Vol. 1) that 'Each is great in his own place.' The Swami asserted that the life of a householder is as great as that of a celibate person who has devoted to religious work, contemplation and meditation. The householder marries and carries on his duties as a citizen, takes care of his family, older parents, and needy relatives, while the duty of the other is to devote his energies

completely to religion and to the realization of God. In the Hindu tradition a monk doesn't work for a living; it is the society that supports monks and nuns. Therefore, householders have a great role to play in supporting *sannyasins* and *sannyasinis* (monks and nuns), and also many nonprofit institutions.

Although Sri Ramakrishna dissuaded M. from renouncing the family life, M. lived the life of a "hidden yogi," practicing inner renunciation, without being indifferent to the household responsibilities. He was a very successful teacher too, and brought many sincere young disciples who were students in his school to know Sri Ramakrishna. Because of this, those disciples teased him for being a 'kidnapping teacher.' Some among them became monks: Rakhai (Swami Brahmananda), Subodha (Swami Subodhananda), Sarada (Swami Saradananda), and Baburam (Swami Premananda). In fact Sri Ramakrishna was very much aware of M.'s devotion, and therefore, he would himself tell some of the young boys, who found it difficult to come to him often all the way from Kolkata, to meet M. and get spiritual instructions from him.

While The Gospel remains the foremost scripture for millions of devotees of Sri Ramakrishna throughout the world, we must not ignore other sources from which to better understand the teachings of the Master. Swami Saradananda, one of Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples and a brother monk of Swami Vivekananda, wrote *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* that records many things that are not mentioned in the Gospel. The author published the book originally in Bengali, and he called it *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*. A Swami of the Order translated it into English. This book, unlike the Gospel, gives a biography of Sri Ramakrishna, including his teachings, his relations with the reform movements of the time, like the Brahmo Samaj, and his training of his monastic disciples, especially of Swami

Vivekananda. Recently, Swami Chetanananda, head of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis (USA) has retranslated the Bengali version for which the title is: *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*; of course, the descriptions remain the same except for minor changes in style. Not the least, of course, is *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, which need a special mention. The late Swami Lokeswarananda, one of the great and brilliant Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, says: The words of Sri Ramakrishna are the scripture; and the words of Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) are the *bhashya*, the commentary. If we study both the Gospel and the works of Swamiji, we will be able to have a perfect picture of Sri Ramakrishna. From this author's perspective, reading *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* or *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, will add golden luster to "a perfect picture," enlarge our perspective, enrich our spiritual life, and also give peace and comfort to the hearts of many earnest devotees.

In his latest book, *Mahendra Nath Gupta* (M.), Swami Chetanananda calls M. an ideal householder for being completely free from family attachments; so much so that he made his house a veritable hermitage. As the Swami put it: "M. made his house an abode of God and he lived there as a sthitaprajna, a man of steady wisdom of the *Bhagavad Gita* (2: 56), being neither perturbed by adversity nor ever longed for happiness, and was free from attachment, fear and wrath.

Although he took Sri Ramakrishna's advice as a command not to become a monk, he had utmost respect for the monks. When a monk would come to visit him, he would leave his work and stand near him like a servant, and served him with refreshments. Though outwardly M. was a householder, inwardly he himself was like a monk, full of devotion to God and renunciation of things of the world. Sometimes he would get up at night and, taking his bedroll, would go out to sleep with the

homeless people on the open verandah of the Calcutta University Senate Hall. Like his Guru who during the early years of his *Sadhana* cleaned the toilets of a Pariah to expunge his pride of being a Brahmin, M. tried to wipe out the idea of having a home and possessions from his mind. Besides, having lived with the Master, observing him in different moods, and meditating on every word that he spoke, M. became like his Master, a highly renounced yogi. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "If you meditate on an ideal you will acquire its nature." (The Gospel, 657) M. thought of the Master day and night, so he became like him.

Like his Guru, he saw no sacrifice too great to realize God. After all, as the *Katha Upanishad* put it: "Sharp like a razor's edge, the sages say, is the path to Reality, difficult to traverse." The following incident will illustrate this. Once Swami Atmananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, was visiting him. As he was eating the refreshments, the Swami noticed some people entering the house barefoot with towels on their shoulders. He also heard some people crying upstairs. When the Swami asked the reason for all that, M. said, "A girl (his own daughter) of this house has passed away, so those people have come to take the body to the cremation ground." Swami Atmananda was amazed and dumbfounded to hear that and blessed M. for serving a monk despite being in the midst of such enormous grief. "Blessed you are," he said, "Victory to the Master!"

This attitude of M. reminds this author of Sri Ramakrishna's parable of a *jnani* farmer who remained calm after learning of the death of his only son. When the farmer's wife scolded him for not weeping at all, the farmer said that he had dreamed the previous night that he was a king of a great kingdom and had several beautiful princes. On waking up all that vanished, the kingdom, the princes, etc. Since the dream state is as unreal as the waking state, the farmer didn't know whether he

should weep for the lost kingdom and the princes that he saw in the dream or for this son who had died in this waking state. (The Gospel, 651- 52) There is no doubt that M. literally personified that *jnani* farmer, though he was his Guru's foremost *bhakta*, a devotee as well.

Sri Ramakrishna passed away on August 16, 1886. Originally M. didn't want to publish his recordings at all; he wanted to use his diary as a means of meditation on the Master. But in 1889, the Holy Mother asked M. to read out to her from his diary. After listening to what M. had written, she remarked: "It is as if I am hearing Thakur's (Master's) own words. " She sent him a word that he must publish it, which M. took as her command. In the same year M. sent a portion of his material to Swami Vivekananda who was thrilled and wrote: "Your words are like nectar bringing life to scorched souls." Thus reinforced, a short version of the Gospel came out in English in 1897. Later starting from 1902, M. started publishing his recordings in Bengali under the title, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. The last and the fifth volume came out posthumously in 1932, just two days after M. 's passing away. □

Programme for January - February 2012

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

Jan	1	No Talk	
Jan	8	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 1	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	15	Swami Vivekananda's Puja	
Jan	22	Raja Yoga 5	Swami Shivarupananda
Jan	29	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 2	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	5	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 3	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	12	Day Retreat	
Feb	19	Sri Ramakrishna's Puja	

Swami Vivekananda's Puja

Sunday 15th January
at Bourne End at 4.00 pm

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda at
the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 12th February
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

Sri Ramakrishna's Puja

Sunday 19th February
at Bourne End at 4.00 pm

continued from the front cover

about home, office, and school, till the curtain goes up; but no sooner does it go up than all conversation comes to a stop, and the people watch the play with fixed attention. If after a long while someone utters a word or two, it is about the play. "After a drunkard has drunk his liquor he talks only about the joy of drunkenness." Nityagopal was seated in front of Sri Ramakrishna. He was always in ecstasy. He sat there in silence.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, December 27, 1884

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The very appearance and movement of those who earnestly call on God become something uncommon and impressive. Their very presence brings happiness. Their faces are always happy, their hearts are pure, and their minds are free from likes and dislikes. They are ever eager to remain merged in the Bliss that is God. To them worldly good and evil lose their distinction - both are equal to them.

Swami Ramakrishnananda



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