

# Vedanta

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**Sin, Jesus Christ And Vedanta**

*Swami Sunirmalananda*

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**The Direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna**

*Swami Bhuteshananda*

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## Divine Wisdom

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### Teachings of Swami Brahmananda

Why do I insist that you devote yourselves heart and soul to the Lord? When we were your age, Sri Ramakrishna kept careful watch over our spiritual practices. In youth the mind is like unbaked clay, and can be moulded into any shape. Your minds are still young and pure; they have not been baked in the fire of worldliness; therefore, they can be easily directed towards God. If the mind is moulded now, you will achieve your purpose; you will not be troubled by distractions.

The mind is like a package of mustard seeds. If the seeds are once scattered, it is difficult to gather them up again. Likewise, when the energies of the mind have been scattered, as one grows older it is very difficult to collect them and turn the mind toward God.

Make God the be- all and end- all of your life. Devote yourself sincerely to realising him, and you will be free from all sorrow and pain. You will inherit eternal happiness. Man seeks happiness in the world, but does he find it? In his mad pursuit he toils hard and runs hither and thither after many objects, only to find shadows after all. His life ebbs; he dies in vain. Leave these fleeting pleasures of the world behind you; give your mind to God, be devoted to him, and you will find real happiness. Devote your mind to the world and to the pleasures of the world, and great will be your suffering; devote your mind to God, and great will be your joy.

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## Editorial

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### Prayer

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*Om, Lead us from the Unreal to the Real.*

*Lead us from Ignorance to Illumination.*

*Lead us from Death to Immortality.*

*Om Peace, Peace, Peace.*

*Prayer is the wing wherewith the soul flies to heaven, and meditation the eye wherewith we see God. (St. Ambrose).*

*A Devotee: "Then what is the way, sir?"*

*Master: "Prayer and the company of holy men. There is another way: earnestly praying to God. God is our very own. We should say to Him: 'O God, what is Thy nature? Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must show Thyself to me; for why else hast Thou created me?'"*

There is none who does not pray at some time or other in his life. Every breath of every creature is a prayer for life, knowledge and happiness; every desire is an unarticulated prayer to a higher power. So long as we are imperfect our every wish is an ardent prayer.

In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* we find the word 'Prayer' occurring more than ninety times. Sri Ramakrishna gave great importance to prayer as a spiritual discipline. Again and again he has given us the assurance, 'God listens to prayer if it is sincere.'

Prayer plays a very important role in human life. It is an expression of a want, a desire for fulfilment. So long as there is a feeling of limitation and helplessness our life is an act of ceaseless prayer.

What is prayer?

Prayer is an appeal by the finite to the Infinite, by the visible to the Invisible. It is also a communion with God; it establishes

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a relationship between the soul and the omnipotent Almighty. Prayer is really religion in practice.

Prayer is man's natural function. Even the primitive people used it. Every religion preached it. Even rationalistic Buddhism had to bend before it.

Prayer is a most intimate conversation between God and man. Prayer, said William James, is the 'intercourse with an Ideal Companion'. It is talking to God directly. Great mystics remain in the state of perpetual prayer. To them God is more real than the external phenomena. Other men take God on faith and pray to Him.

Prayer is a consistent and continuous out-pouring of the devout heart at the feet of the Most High. It unites man with God and leads him from the worldly life to the spiritual life. A life of prayer enables man to establish a personal relationship with God, and enter into close communion with Him. As one proceeds in such a life, one realizes that one's relationship with the Eternal Spirit becomes more and more abiding and tangible, and one's heart gets attuned to the Silence.

Prayer is faith in exercise. A man prays for material or spiritual benefit, for expressing his gratitude or for strength to carry out his responsibilities.

Prayer is an act that creates a mental condition which does away with the dead-weight of life and helps the soul to soar high to discover subtle and higher truths.

Prayer is total and complete resignation to God. Faith is recognition of a Higher Power and Its loving expression, while prayer is resignation to that Higher Power and utter abandonment to Its will. The devotee lets go of his ego completely and says, 'Not my but thy will be done', 'Not I but Thou'.

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Prayer is not mere wishful thinking. It calls up the latent powers in us and gives us the strength to overcome our lethargy and other obstacles.

Swami Vivekananda explains: "By prayer one's subtle powers are easily roused, and if consciously done, all desires may be fulfilled by it; but done unconsciously, one perhaps in ten is fulfilled".

Prayer makes a man thoughtful, introspective, humble; and above all he rouses faith in himself and becomes steady and strong. Prayer helps us overcome temptations to sin; helps us in strengthening of our will, and our capacity for development of character, service to others, and finally devotion to God.

Prayer is indispensable. A life without prayer is a life without a heart. Prayer plays the most important part in man's life. All greatness is the result of ardent prayer. Prayer itself is an independent path to God.

Are prayers answered? All prayers? Is there a right way to cultivate prayer? These points will be discussed in our future editorials.

*(to be continued)*

Swami Dayatmananda

Give up worldly enjoyments and completely resign yourself to the Lord. You cannot love God and the world at the same time. If you want God, shun temporal pleasures. Ask yourself: "What is it I want? Do I want this fleeting life of transient pleasures, or do I want the eternal bliss of everlasting life?" When a man has renounced all worldly cravings and regards God as his own, God is very near. Such a man binds God to him with the fetters of love. Think of him as your very own. Pray to him, "Lord, reveal yourself to me !" God cannot remain unmoved by the pleas of such a devotee. He hastens to him and takes him in his arms. Oh, how inexpressible is that joy! How boundless that bliss! Only he can know who has had that experience, compared to which all worldly pleasures seem insipid and worthless.

Swami Brahmananda

## Sin, Jesus Christ and Vedanta

Swami Sunirmalananda

**A**pple did it

It's a beautiful morning. You wake up with pleasant feelings, with excellent plans for the day. But the very first person you meet remarks: 'Ah! You are so ugly!' or, 'Oh! You are worthless'. How will that day go for you? One negative thought, and your life can be ruined. Now, imagine your being constantly called a sinner. First of all, you yourself aren't happy with your life, and are constantly ashamed about some of your past deeds – quite unnecessarily though. Though they may be trivialities, they keep on haunting you. Adding insult to injury, you are branded a sinner. To add more insult to injury, you are told that you are damned eternally. To add chilli powder to the the injury, if you are told that this is the only life, the only chance for you, and that you have misused this 'only chance' by being a sinner, how would you feel? Imagine your fate on the Judgement Day, when 'He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.... Then shall He say unto them on the left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...." And these shall go away into everlasting punishment.'<sup>1</sup> How will you feel? It's no wonder psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts and others are having a roaring business now. It's no wonder, again, that antidepressants are sold like chewing gum as was in the past. There is existential hollowness, though superficial peals of laughter cover it.

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Sinners! This very word is terrible, and it seems to have been with us since the 'beginning'. Who is to blame? Yes, that cursed apple is to blame, for, 'Through their disobedience, Adam and Eve effectively decided matters for their entire progeny. For the sin-nature and the ensuing threefold death has as a consequence been passed on ever since to all mankind through the process of normal human procreation (with the sole exception of the virgin-born Messiah). For this reason, every other human being is steeped in sin at birth....'<sup>2</sup> Further, 'As soon as they sinned, Adam and Eve instantly experienced spiritual death, physical death and eternal death.... Through their disobedience, Adam and Eve effectively decided matters for their entire progeny.'<sup>3</sup> Thus we are all born sinners. However, that is not the end of the story.

### The Thirty Coins.

It would be too cruel to say this, but the evil intention of Judas Iscariot, who gave away Jesus Christ to the priests of the Sanhedrin for thirty pieces of silver,<sup>4</sup> became indirectly instrumental in saving humanity from sin. Even evil intentions finally yield good results, perhaps. Nobody would ever praise Judas for his evil deed; he threw away the silver pieces and hanged himself. Yet, his evil act was part of a divine drama to save humanity from sin, because Jesus is said to have died on the cross for humanity's sake. The 1st Corinthians says: 'For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive.'<sup>5</sup> Thus, two individuals were responsible for something vital and supremely important in human life. While Adam, though being our progenitor, made us sinful, his exact opposite, Jesus, saved us from sin. 'For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.'<sup>6</sup> So far so good. But the story is not yet over.

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Christians are not yet totally free from sin, or so they say, for the simple reason that there are still churches, priests, bishops, and confessionals in all catholic churches. There are still thousands of priests listening to and digesting horrible stories of sin regularly (though nowhere in the Bible is there mention of such a system), and granting absolution continuously. Also there are thousands of churches of other denominations doing some different things for the same reason. Let's not forget that there are still billions waiting for the Judgement Day – in the graves and outside them. When that day comes, this is what is going to happen. St Matthew is eloquent here when he says: 'Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!'<sup>7</sup> The Eastern Orthodox Church, whose concept of sin is better, goes a step further to say that there shall be not one but two "last" judgements. The first, forty days after death, when the soul will be sent to a suitable waiting place to wait for the second Christ's arrival. The second, when there comes the Second Christ and the general judgement takes place. Protestants have their diverse opinions about the judgement day, but the generally accepted view is that all the dead from throughout human history will be resurrected and divided into the purgatory goers and the heaven goers. So, the story is not at all over.

### The Way to Salvation

Isn't all this complicated? Because Eve induced poor Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, we are all born sinners. Somehow we

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were saved by Christ's sacrifice, but here come our own mortal sins to torment us. Though priests (Catholicism) and the 'justification by faith alone – *Sola fide*' (Protestantism)-seem to save sinners, there is the final judgement waiting. If someone thinks that meritorious deeds can save the sinner, the Protestant will say no. You cannot win God's grace by any means. God bestows His grace according to His will. (Even the Catholics say this.) At the most, according to Protestants, you have a little free will to either reject or accept that grace. Of course, meritorious deeds are good, but they are not conditions of justification. As the faith declares: 'Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification.'<sup>8</sup> He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.'<sup>9</sup> This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law, or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us.'<sup>10</sup> Catholics hold that God's grace acts in two ways. Sanctifying grace works from within and 'sanctifies' during baptism, when the soul becomes the child of God, but, one mortal sin, and the person becomes a sinner again – and is cut off from grace. Actual grace gives a boost to the will to act. (Some thinkers reverse the actions of the two types of grace.) Yet, through sacraments (of which the sacrament of reconciliation or penance is vital), reconciliation with God takes place, grace comes again, and the soul can avoid sinning. Yet that does not end the story. God's grace, according to Catholics, is conditional (but not according to Calvin) and is not earned. Nobody can earn God's grace, for it's a free gift from God. So Christian scholars declare: 'Once we have repented of our sins and admitted them to our God, we must be absolutely convinced of our immediate restoration into the full good favour of God. [However] Confession does not necessarily mean that we will not experience any consequences stemming from our sins, for they

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may result in both natural repercussions and a course of divine discipline. But it does mean that we have been forgiven them immediately upon confessing them, and that our fellowship with our Lord has been restored.<sup>11</sup> It's like two individuals quarrelling and a middleman restoring peace. The quarrelling ones shake hands, but that does not end the anger.

Sometimes the thought comes: If we are condemned as sinners, if there is no hope, why religion, why churches, why all the trouble? Nothing will change because mortal sins are our undoing. If, on the contrary, Christ has saved us from sin, if we are freed now, why think of churches and religion and sin and purgatory? Again, if God's grace is His gift which is not deserved nor can be earned, why religion, why churches, why all the trouble? The situation is indeed sad. When one sees people seemingly happy – walking, talking and eating well – but with the negative thought that they are sinners, firmly rooted in the subconscious, one feels sorry for them. So, the Christian theologian's story of sin is not all that simple.

### Hamartiology: Science of Sin

Hamartiology is the science of sin. '*Hamartia*' is the Greek word for sin. Sinfulness, according to Christianity, is our natural tendency – born with Adam. What is this sinful tendency according to Christianity? Scholars in Hamartiology answer: 'By the term "sin nature" is meant the inherent, innate, indwelling sinfulness possessed by all of Adam's descendants (with the sole exception of the virgin-born Son of God), which leads to the committing of personal sins.'<sup>12</sup> Can we not shake off this sinful tendency, at least as Christ himself made the ultimate sacrifice for our sake? Christian scholars reply: 'The term "sin nature" itself is our shorthand for the corrupted physical body we now occupy.

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... If we say that we do not possess sin (i.e., a sin nature which is producing personal sins), we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.<sup>13</sup> Dr Robert Luginbill says in his introduction to the book, *Hamartiology: The Study of Sin*: 'A proper understanding of the biblical teachings about sin is crucial for every believer in Jesus Christ. Sin is a subject that while it is generally understood by Christians in the broad sense, is often not properly comprehended in its particulars. We must understand that Christ died for our sins and that our sins have been washed away by the "blood of Christ". We must also understand that personal sin separates us from God, and that, as long as we occupy these bodies of flesh, sin will always be "crouching at the door" in ambush for us. The failure to strike a proper balance between these two critically important realities, of sin forgiven positionally in Christ on the one hand, but, on the other hand, remaining an experiential problem for believers as long as we remain in this world, is at the heart of many incorrect opinions about the biblical subject of sin.'<sup>14</sup> What is forgiven, what is not, what is grace, what is not – is all confusing. To live inside the dark cloud of sin always, and eternally waiting for the Judgement Day to come, is perhaps more difficult.

### Christ and Sin

What did Jesus Christ himself do and say about sin? What was Christ's attitude towards sinners? To answer this, there is a wonderful parable. In this parable, Christ reveals his heart: here, one sees the most touching testimony of God's love for man. 'How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that

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sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.'<sup>15</sup> Why, because 'the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.'<sup>16</sup>

Jesus Christ never has harsh words for sinners. No condemnation ever! Yes, he seems to use some harsh words against the Pharisees and Sadducees – the so-called protectors of religion, but who were not.<sup>17</sup> These Pharisees and Sadducees have come in newer forms subsequently and have, down the centuries, been tormenting the innocent millions – threatening them of dire consequences for their "sins", and rendering them helpless by saying that neither their merits nor good deeds can bring God's grace. Further, they are doing the same things which their earlier counterparts did and whom Christ scolded severely. Jesus has very strong words for such middlemen. He has also used some harsh words to warn humanity against committing sins, because, 'Woe unto the world because of offenses!'<sup>18</sup> He appears to have "threatened" the negligent of consequences of eternal damnation.<sup>19</sup> This 'threatening' is seen in an instance when Jesus tells, as if narrating a futuristic parable, as to what the King would do when He comes to judge. His motive there is to awaken human beings to the service of the living gods, fellow human beings and to purify themselves. 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'<sup>20</sup> Yet Jesus is not cursing the sinner here. He never insults the fallen. He has supreme love and compassion. This is the difference between the prophet and the religion that developed around his name.

We have already narrated the most touching example of God's love for the lost sheep. Here's something which shows his compassion further. 'Then came Peter to him, and said, "Lord,

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how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?" Jesus saith unto him, "I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven."<sup>21</sup> If an ordinary individual is told to forgive "490 times" ('seventy times seven'), that is, hundreds of times, imagine how many times God forgives us seven trillion times seven, possibly? Eternally, possibly? Where then is the question of eternal condemnation? Where is the question of falling from grace at all? Jesus had harsh words against sin and sinful tendencies, and painted pictures of dire consequences, as our *Mythologies* do in order to uproot the deep-rooted sinful tendencies. His concern was to save people from the path of error and bring them to the path of truth. To humiliate sinners is the negative attitude. Being a prophet, Jesus would never have done that. The very advent of the Incarnation is a manifestation of love for the erring beings. So, Jesus, who walked on the land like a hero, only gave positive ideas. What were the positive ideas that Jesus gave? We saw two examples already. Forgetting the herd, God runs after the lost sheep and is satisfied only when it is brought back to the fold. Further, Jesus asks people to love all: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.'<sup>22</sup> These are positive words indeed. These inspiring words are to goad Christians to perform good deeds. So, when the Incarnation himself goads us to do good deeds, they are certainly pleasing to Him and are valuable. Thus when God is pleased, His grace flows, for a certainty. Further, while hamartiologists say that the very possession of the body means we are sinners, Christ seems to say that this body is there to serve others. Furthermore, God's compassion and love for the erring

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ones is so strong in these words: '...for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.'<sup>23</sup> If Jesus said these things, he also practised them, for the prophet's life and teachings are non-different.

### The Power of Faith

Jesus was strongly averse to judging others. While the Pharisees and Sadducees of the faith busy themselves in branding millions as sinners; and while the Church went to such an extent as selling indulgences to absolve people of sins, Jesus said: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.... how wilt thou say to thy brother, "Let me pull the mote out of thine eye," and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?'<sup>24</sup>

We have seen that both Catholics and Protestants say that God's grace can never be earned – thereby leaving millions of helpless people in the lurch, for neither are their good deeds of any value, nor will their merits bring His grace. It all depends on His will. Yet, in Jesus Christ, we see something different. This is how. Disease and suffering are due to sin. In his lifetime, Jesus healed hundreds of souls of numerous ailments. In several instances we see Christ healing the sick ones of impossible ailments, but remarking thus: 'Your faith has made you whole.'<sup>25</sup> Deep within the so-called sinner who is ailing, there is the element of faith, which Christ awakens. That faith heals. Here, faith does not mean that verbal acknowledgement, like 'I believe in the Bible.' It's not like a child's saying, 'I believe in ghosts.' It is a deep-rooted, innate power of the soul. This faith is strengthened through meritorious deeds, prayer etc.

The Centurion incident is remarkable – there is no better incident than this one. Though a man of great importance and

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power, the Centurion was humble, and his humility is made manifest in diverse ways. He had so many soldiers at his disposal; but yet, the Centurion had himself come to seek Christ's grace – not for his family – but for an ailing servant! He did not want Jesus to take the trouble to go all the way to his house, unworthy that the Centurion thought he was, but to bless the servant from where Christ was. Jesus was so pleased with the Centurion's faith that he praised him thus: 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'<sup>26</sup> Christ told him: 'Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.'<sup>27</sup> The servant was healed even without Jesus' going there at all, just because of the Centurion's faith. Here, again, we see how the merits of the Centurion made God shower His grace upon him. This is one of the most important incidents in Christ's life because a third person, a servant, who did not even know Jesus perhaps or have any faith in him was healed just because of his master's faith in Christ. Ramanuja's system of the path of Self-Surrender tells us how God's grace is showered on the individual who surrenders, and also upon his associates.

Such was the importance Jesus gave to faith. The Incarnation or prophet comes only to establish faith – faith in oneself and faith in God. Here, we see Christ insisting on faith in oneself. He seems to say: 'Your faith has made you whole! Have more faith, and you can overcome more difficulties and win the war of life.' The importance which Jesus gave to faith is most evident in this incident. Once, his disciples could not heal or drive out the devil. They wanted to know why they had failed. Jesus said: 'Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.'<sup>28</sup>

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Christ: The Vedantin

What does all this show? Is Christ pointing his finger at the powerlessness, helplessness and worthlessness of the sinful man, rolling in sins? Or is Christ showing to the world the power of the individual and the power of faith in oneself and in God, whatever his present state of life might be – blind or lame? The power of faith removes every obstacle, shows Christ! This was how Jesus looked at sin, the sinner, disease, suffering, and so on. This is called *Vedanta*. What does *Vedanta* teach? 'Ay, let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind every one, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. ... None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. ... Teach yourselves, teach every one his 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.'<sup>29</sup> These are Swami Vivekananda's immortal words. '*Amritasya putrâh* – children of everlasting bliss,' is what Vedanta calls living beings, while Christianity insists that beings are born in sin, are sinners, and are helpless creatures. Christ, however, was different. He showed the power of the individual to overcome obstacles. According to Vedanta, *shraddhâ*, faith, is proportional to the strength of the personality-as much the faith, so much is the power of the personality. Awaken this dormant *shraddhâ*, which has gone to sleep due to the evil effects of negative ideas, says Vedanta. Thus, giving positive ideas and making even the most worthless worthy of honour is one thing.

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Instilling negative ideas systemically and making the most worthy souls worthless is another.

If there is weakness, delivering weakness is not the solution, but delivering strength. If a person falls, cursing him is not the solution. This was the positive approach Jesus Christ had. He did not say, for instance, that 'blessed are the poor people'. He said: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'<sup>30</sup> What does this mean? Heaven, that is, God, who lives there, belongs to the spiritually weak, also the so-called sinners. How? They know they have erred, and are seeking God. This is the approach of all *avatars* and prophets towards life. Thus, till now we saw that the approaches of some theologians and Christ are different towards life and its fundamental questions. The sublime words of Christ about the 'sinful woman' say it all: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.'<sup>31</sup> He never condemned. He never discarded anyone as impure or bad. He embraced the weak and the miserable. This is Vedanta.

### Sin: A Different View

Sin never leaves Christianity, but the idea Christ had about it and the later Christians have about it, appear to be different. In fact, Christians have been spending a lot of time in arguing about certain things like the Immaculate Conception, for instance. If only they had compared Mother Mary with the mothers of other Incarnations like Sri Rama, Krishna, the Buddha, and so on, they would have easily understood the concept. Similar is the case with sin. Though scholars have explained this concept repeatedly, it has become more and more complicated with the passing of time. What could be the idea of 'sin'? The Hebrew words for sin are *chatah* (error, missing the mark), *pasha* (transgression) and *avone* (transgression or ignorance). Error is going against the set

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pattern or law, and against God's will. Now, to err is human. Even if it is considered infernal, sin should not demand eternal damnation, because God came to save, and everyone needs a chance to change. So, the idea is different.

Maybe we can look at Sin from the Vedantic angle. Is Sin a misinterpretation of the theory of *karma*, because Hamartiologists say that the very possession of the physical body shows that we are sinful? Perhaps. Perhaps the idea of 'sin' could be somewhat akin to the idea of karma but largely misinterpreted by theologians. 'As you sow, so you reap,' is the well-known law of karma. *Karma* means action, *karma-phala* means the result, and the effects of this result could be either good or bad, depending on the deed done. If your eating chilli is karma, the burning tongue is the *karma-phala*. You can perform both good and bad karma. And you can perform karma both for worldly as well as spiritual ends. Nobody can evade work or *karma*. The very system makes us work, and everything we do is conscious or unconscious work. *Karma*, however, is not fatalism as it is generally understood but is something positive. Karma is not talking about the past, but living the present moment correctly. Yes, our sufferings are the results of our past *karma*, but our happiness too is the result of past karma alone. Most importantly, *karma* and its result are both inert and don't produce results of themselves. God is the bestower of the results of karma. This point is important.

Vedanta, which has a perfectly positive approach to life and spirituality, declares that karma means opportunity. Whatever you might have done in the past, whatever may be your state of life now, it can change. Begin now! Just do good. Serve others without looking for accolades or rewards. Soon, the past bad karmas are wiped out and you begin to glow, grow and rise up. Karma gives this positive outlook of life.

## Sin, Jesus Christ and Vedanta

In Christianity, sin is a negative concept, considered only as something bad – which leads to bad effects. It blocks the evolution of the soul. Further, Lutherans oppose the idea that good works and merits will cancel past sins. So there is no hope. This only means that the meaning of sin is limited and narrow. In Christ, however, the idea of sin is different. His was the Genesis way, which says: 'If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.'<sup>32</sup> Do what is right and you can keep away sin. Good karmas prevent evil tendencies.

The Vedantin, Christ, said exactly this when he ordained that we must love our enemies, love them that curse us, and so on. He wanted us to forget the very idea of sin and have faith, be positive, look positive, think positive and do positive deeds. Remember his parable of the man who sowed good seeds and how wicked ones planted seeds of Tares unknown to him.<sup>33</sup> Remember the story of the planting of the mustard seed. Good deeds not only remove weeds but also give enormous benefits. Vedanta teaches exactly that. Vedantic teachers are, in a way, really carrying the real message of Christ door to door. Vedanta does not believe in judgement etc, but it teaches yoga, meditation, selfless action, prayer, and such other practices to burn away the accumulated karmas and be liberated in this very life. We are divine and infinite, but are bound due to ignorance, and through selfless actions, prayer, meditation or discrimination, we can be free.

Speaking of ignorance, we come to the 'original sin'. Adam's story, the idea that his eating the forbidden fruit cursed the entire humanity with sinfulness, could be allegorical. That story is perhaps related to primordial ignorance or *avidya*, and it is well known that the *avatar* or incarnation comes to remove our ignorance and show us the way. Thus, Christ's death and

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resurrection reveal the immortality of the soul. However the gist of the whole thing is to do good, for, 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'<sup>34</sup> And where is this Kingdom of Heaven? 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.'<sup>35</sup>

### References:

~~1 St Matthew, 25: 33, 34, 46~~

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2 Dr Robert D. Luginbill, *Hamartiology : The Study of Sin*, p. 7

3 Same, p. 6, 7      4 St Matthew, 26:15

5 1st Corinthians, 13: 20-22    6 1st Corinthians, 15 :22

7 St Matthew, +3 :40-43    8 Romans 3:24-25.

9 St. John 1:29      10 St Mark 13 :31

11 Same, p.126    12 Dr Robert D. Luginbill, *Hamartiology*, p. 17

13 Same, p. 18      14 Same, p. 2

15 St Matthew, 18 :12-14    16 St Matthew, 18 :11

17 St Matthew, 3 :7 and 23 :13-35      18 St Matthew, 18 :7-9

19 St Matthew, 25 : 31-46      20 St Matthew, 25:40

21 St Matthew, 18 :21-22      22 St Matthew, 5 :43-44

23 St Matthew, 5 :45      24 St Matthew, 7:3-5

25 St Mark, 5 :34      26 St Matthew, 7 :10

27 St Matthew, 7 :13    28 St Matthew, 17 :20

29 Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works, Vol.3*, p. 193

30 St Matthew, 5 :3    31 St John, 8 :7    32 Genesis, 4 :7

33 St Matthew, 13 : 24-30

34 St Matthew, 7 :21

35 St Luke 17:21

# Faith, Reason And Realization

Swami Adiswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

**T**he arguments in support of faith and those in support of reason do not establish the superiority of one over the other, and therefore do not resolve the controversy.

What, then, should be the way? Can spiritual quest and scientific outlook go together? Must one discard reason altogether in order to have faith? Would the faith that suppresses honest doubt be considered sincere? Or should one cultivate skepticism in order to be spiritual?

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF VEDANTA

Vedanta harmonises faith and reason in the background of realisation. The contention of Vedanta has several points of emphasis, the first of which is that the validity of Truth depends neither on faith nor on reason but on Its realisation in life.

The reality of God is not contingent upon the negation or affirmation of scripture or reason. Religion is realisation. Realisation of Truth is neither scholasticism, which delights in logical postulation, nor blind faith in any creed or dogma or miraculous event, nor ethics tinged with emotion.

Realisation is more than believing or reasoning. Believers in faith run the risk of being deluded by their emotions, and believers in reason by their intellectual preferences.

There is a difference between the realisation of Truth and Its conception, between what we believe emotionally, comprehend intellectually, and really feel spontaneously.

Blind faith depends on theological evidence, while unbridled reasoning relies on unrestrained skepticism. The extreme form of

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the first is dogmatism, which often claims to know everything about God, and the extreme form of the second is the philosophy of atheism, which believes more in the denial than in the acceptance of Truth.

Such faith or reason can never give us the certainty of inner conviction. An aspirant may master all the arts of reasoning, or study all the sacred texts, and yet remain an atheist or an agnostic.

The core of the realisation of Truth is not 'seeking' but 'seeing', and 'seeing' begins where 'seeking' ends. The *Upanisadic* exhortation is 'Do not seek God, but see Him.' It is seeing through the eye of integral vision, in which our entire self participates. Merely believing in the existence of God is neither seeking Him nor seeing Him. Such a belief or faith is neither conviction nor realisation but mere opinion. It is neither stable nor valid because it is not supported by reason and personal experience. Mere reasoning, on the other hand, because it is intent on seeking, is unable to see that which is self-evident. Realisation is seeing the Self-revealed. It is revelation and becomes possible when the instruments of perception are cleansed.

God, according to Vedanta, has two aspects—macrocosmic and microcosmic.

Seeing God in everything (the macrocosm) begins with seeing Him as one's indwelling Self (the microcosm). Our perception of the Real depends on what we believe to be the nature of Reality. What we perceive outside is the reflection of what we see within ourselves. The macrocosm and the microcosm are built on the same plan. The goal of spiritual quest, according to Vedanta, is liberation. Liberation does not mean going somewhere we have not been before or acquiring something that we did not have before. It is a state of 'being', as distinguished from the feverishness of compulsive 'becomings'. It is unitive vision, by which one sees one's own Self in all and all in one's Self. The state

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of liberation is that of perfect freedom, which transcends all varieties of perception—moral, intellectual, and spiritual. A liberated soul is not just a knower of Truth, but is the very embodiment of Truth. He is neither a theologian who believes in creed and behaves as if he knew everything about God, nor a philosopher who indulges in speculation. He is neither a traditionalist who clings to orthodoxy, nor a futurist who lives in the days yet to come. The free soul communes with the Truth and is not content with either describing It or gathering facts about It.

Realisation of Truth proceeds from an inner maturity or evolution, which begins with the dawning of faith. Faith matures into conviction through reasoning and discrimination ; intellectual conviction about Truth inspires the mind toward uninterrupted concentration, and this concentration culminates in the final revelation of Truth.

Vedanta accepts both reason and faith as instruments for the realisation of the ultimate spiritual goal. There cannot be genuine faith without reasoning and discrimination.

On the other hand, one cannot discriminate Truth from untruth unless one has implicit faith in the Truth. Neither faith nor reason singly can give any finality to the real nature of Truth. The realisation of Truth is possible only through the co-operation of both. The testimony of faith without the foundation of inner conviction is mere conjecture, while the conclusions of reason unsupported by personal experience only indicate that which is not Truth, since the ultimate Reality, infinite and incorporeal, defies all attempts of the finite human mind to define and know It.

The *Upanisads* indicate the ultimate Reality as the imperishable Absolute, the eye of our eye, the ear of our ear, the very ground of our being, which cannot be grasped by the discursive intellect or described by words. All our attempts to describe the Ultimate

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end in profound silence. 'He who knows he knows, knows nothing, because nobody knows the Knower.' The vision of the Ultimate varies from individual to individual, depending on the spiritual seeker's disposition of mind. Our realisations of the Ultimate indicate how It appears to us and not what It really is in Itself. These realisations have been described by the various religious systems as communion with God, union with Him, *samadhi*, *nirvana*, and so forth, and Vedanta considers them to be like different photographs of a cathedral or temple taken from different angles of vision. Each is true and unique but never complete.

The second point of emphasis is that realisation of Truth must be direct and immediate. Our ordinary perceptions are indirect because they are experienced through the instruments of the senses— eyes, ears, nose, skin and tongue. Such experiences are neither direct nor immediate, and they are often vitiated by the imperfections of the instruments of perception. For example, imperfection in a person's eyes may lead him to see an object doubled or disfigured, or the perversions of his mind may make him see and feel something in a distorted way. Direct perception of the ultimate Reality is neither unconscious nor conscious. It is superconscious and is reflected in the mirror of the pure mind free from all attachments and aversions. Superconscious realisation of Truth is known as intuitive realisation.

According to Vedanta, there are three instruments of knowledge: instinct, reason, and intuition. Instinctive experiences are automatic and unconscious, such as breathing, the beating of the heart, and the circulation of the blood. In such activities the I-consciousness remains dormant.

Reason is the mature form of instinct. The vision of reason is wider than that of instinct.

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One's I-consciousness becomes active when one uses reason as an instrument of knowledge. The experiencer in this state is able to separate himself from the act of experiencing as well as from the object experienced. Experience through reason is, however, not direct because it is conditioned by reason. It is an experience which is conscious but not spontaneous. It is not a decisive realisation because it is not supported by the entire self. We reason about a thing until we are convinced about it and are able to see it directly. An experience conditioned by and dependent upon reason is, therefore, not founded on the absolute certainty of realisation. Intuitive realisation is the mature form of reason and is always amenable to reason. The vision of intuition is the widest. It is superconscious, direct, and immediate. Intuitive realisation never conflicts with the experiences of relative facts, just as the adulthood of a person does not negate his childhood. Realisation is intuitive because it is neither inferential nor impulsive.

Intuitive experiences are marked by three characteristics. They are universal; they do not disturb or contradict reason; and they are conducive to the welfare of all beings. Intuitive realisation of Truth is inspirational. It is the direct vision of the tranquil heart negatively corroborated by reason. That which is absolute Truth cannot be realized except through the heart, but its realisation is established only when all possible alternatives to it are negated by reasoning. The ideal knower of Truth is a free soul who has transcended all pairs of opposites, such as pleasure and pain, good and evil, virtue and vice, which are the various polarities and rigidities of the mind.

The proof of genuineness of intuitive realisation is not anything private or mystical; its surest indication is the transformation of character. As a tree is known by the fruits it bears, so is a knower of Truth to be recognized by the total transformation of his

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character. Such a knower of Truth becomes the very embodiment of Truth, living and moving under Its spell.

For him the experience of Truth is not only spontaneous but also continuous.

This Realisation, according to Vedanta, has two aspects, *jnana* or subjective experience, which is inner, and *vijnana*, which is the objective realisation of the same through living. Realisation becomes complete when what is intuitively experienced within the heart manifests in the form of spiritually creative, spontaneous actions in everyday life. The depth of an aspirant's spiritual realisation is always proportional to the degree of spiritual creativity he has achieved. Intuitive realisation is possible only when an aspirant has been able to overcome the mind, which by nature is restless, turbulent, obstinate, and not easily subdued by reason. Such overcoming of the mind is never possible without the practice of intense spiritual disciplines.

There are skeptics who often look upon any such practice of spiritual disciplines to overcome the mind as a form of conditioning and obedience to the injunctions of the scriptures as self-indoctrination. The traditions of Vedanta, however, contend that superconscious realisation is never possible unless the mind is pure and free from all attachments and aversions, that is, free from all conditioning. The mind and the senses, already conditioned by various habits and preconceived ideas, are to be deconditioned by the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Nevertheless, the direct perception of Reality is not something that is produced by the practice of spiritual disciplines. It is a revelation. Truth is revealed in the mirror of the heart when it has been thoroughly cleansed. Prayer and meditation, sacraments and ceremonies, vows and austerities, cannot give us the vision of Truth, they can only help us to remove the coverings of the mind. They are only means to enable the aspirant to pursue his

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path of reasoning until the Truth is realized, for when the Real is experienced directly all reasoning comes to a stop and all doubts are stilled forever. We no longer reason about that which we directly perceive.

Vedanta emphasizes that reasoning must be supported by the practice of four disciplines. The first of these disciplines is the practice of discrimination between the Real and the unreal. That which is Real is characterized by Its unchanging character, Its continuity and Its universality. Vedanta describes this Reality as *Brahman*, or the Absolute, all-pervading pure Consciousness.

It is non-dual, infinite, incorporeal, and immutable, and is the Reality of both the macrocosm and the microcosm. The world of diversity is an appearance and Vedanta designates this appearance as *Maya*. *Brahman* and *Maya* are not two realities but one inseparable reality.

Neither are the two aspects ever in conflict; they complement each other. The shadow of an object has no meaning without the object to which it belongs; similarly, the world of *Maya* is inexplicable without the knowledge of *Brahman*. Liberation, according to Vedanta, is this very knowledge of *Brahman*, and we are all moving towards this liberation, consciously or unconsciously.

The three basic aspirations of all living beings are: to exist eternally, to know the unknown, and to be happy. The fulfilment of these three aspirations is attained only through the knowledge of *Brahman*, since *Brahman* is of the nature of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. While the ignorant think that it is difficult to attain the knowledge of *Brahman*, the knowers of *Brahman* declare that it is not possible to remain eternally ignorant. So long as one has not realized *Brahman*, one confronts It everywhere as the inexorable law of cause and effect.

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The second discipline is the practice of the renunciation of that which is intellectually perceived to be unreal. It is the habit of the average mind to cling to something emotionally even though convinced about its unreality intellectually. Through the practice of renunciation the aspirant must overcome the habit of emotional clinging.

The third discipline is mastery over the mind, which involves its control and regulation. No control is ever possible without regulation. To achieve control and regulation of the mind and the senses one must have one-pointed devotion to the quest of Truth and be endowed with fortitude, which is even-mindedness under all conditions; implicit faith in one's spiritual worthiness and in the spiritual hypothesis; contentment ; self-settledness ; self-control; and concentration. The fourth discipline is intense longing for Truth. All spiritual practices and all reasoning become futile unless one feels a deep inner longing for the realisation of Truth. The third point of emphasis of Vedanta is that the validity of spiritual realisation depends upon three tests: *sruti*, or testimony of the scriptures; *yukti*, or reasoning ; and *anubhuti*, or personal experience. Any one of these singly may enable a seeker to attain the probability of Truth, but not its final certainty. Such certainty can be attained only when all three tests are applied to verify the validity of such Truth.

Scriptures, Vedanta emphasizes, cannot be taken to be exhaustive accounts of Truth. They are merely suggestive. Scriptures have no value for the ignorant since they have no interest in them. They are equally of no use to the knowers of Truth because they have realized the Truth directly in their lives, and are therefore no longer dependent upon the scriptures. Scriptures are what Sri Ramakrishna indicates as almanacs which, although they forecast rain, do not contain the rain. They are useful insofar as they are considered to be testimonies of the

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experiences of the past knowers of Truth. But to believe in such testimonies without verification through reason and personal experience is like believing in the beliefs of others, which cannot serve as an inspiration for life. Therefore, an aspirant is advised to dwell on the essence of the scriptures and align his life accordingly. In the words of Sri Sankaracarya, what has been described by numberless scriptures can be put forth in half a verse: 'Brahman alone is Real, the world is illusory, and the individual and Brahman are identical in essence.' Sole dependence on reasoning for the certainty of Truth, however, often leads one to intellectual rationalisation. Reasoning works well only when it is directed towards a goal and supported by the practice of the four disciplines. Unless the mind of an aspirant is free from all attachments and aversions, his reasoning is bound to be conditioned by these and thus prove futile and inconclusive. The efficacy of reasoning as an instrument of knowledge depends not merely on its perfection but also on its right use. According to Vedanta, the right use of reasoning is its rational use as opposed to irrational use. Rational use calls for sincerity of purpose and honesty of doubt. The goal of reasoning is to dispel doubts and help one to discover the Truth for oneself, but no reasoning, however perfect, can dispel doubts which have no rational basis.

Rational doubts are always sincere, plausible, and relevant. Irrational doubts, on the other hand, are irrelevant, unreasonable and obsessive. Such doubts, which are rationalized expressions of the doubter's emotional and intellectual fixations, frustrate and defeat the very purpose of reasoning.

Rational use of reasoning initiates a process of positive and creative thinking and such thinking is free from the pressures of any tradition, authority, convention or emotion. In contrast, irrational use of reasoning is negative and, therefore, uncreative,

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and cynical. It is a form of compulsive skepticism that is often prone to raise a doubt merely for the sake of doubting. The watchword for the rational use of reasoning is 'exploration', while that for its irrational use is 'manipulation'.

The traditions of Vedanta mention three types of reasoning: *vada*, *jalpa*, and *vitanda*.

*Vada* is academic reasoning, the goal of which is to discover Truth without having a bias for or against the hypothesis. This type of reasoning seeks to establish the fact by highlighting the merits of such a hypothesis. *Jalpa* is that type of reasoning in which the main purpose is to defeat the arguments of the opponent by any means, rational or irrational. It is reasoning in a dogmatic and negative way. The third type of reasoning, *vitanda*, seeks only to lay bare the defects of the opponent's contentions without trying to suggest an alternative hypothesis. The *vitanda* type of reasoning may also take the form of *chala*, which is a rejoinder that seeks to wilfully misinterpret the arguments of the opponent, or *nigraha*, the purpose of which is to give arguments in such a way that they will not be understood by the opponent even though repeated several times.

Reasoning in Vedanta is not arguing. Neither is it reasoning with any bias for or against the hypothesis. It is a process of rational discrimination between the Real and the unreal. Absolute Reality is affirmed by negating all that is relative.

The contention of Vedanta is that an average mind is subject to habitual doubts, preconceived ideas, and personal sentiments. Unless guarded by reason it can easily lapse into inertia and delusion. There is no way of dispelling these prejudices of the mind except through reasoning. Vedanta exhorts an aspirant to scrutinise the meaning of Truth and to make a critical estimate of what he has realised to be true.

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While reasoning by itself is inconclusive, scriptures by themselves cannot dispel doubt nor evoke conviction. The methods of valid knowledge according to Vedanta are: perception, inference, verbal testimony, comparison, postulation, and non-apprehension.

But no one of these singly, nor several together, nor all of them in combination can decisively establish the finality of Truth, which is transcendental.

The last resort for an aspirant, therefore, is his personal experience. But even personal experience by itself is not to be considered enough, for one's personal experience can be deceptive, temporary, reflected, or false. In view of the insufficiency of the various instruments of knowledge, Vedanta contends that the validity of any direct experience of Truth can be assured only when it is corroborated by scriptural testimony and affirmed by reason.

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You cannot live a continent life unless you devote yourself to God, and without continence realization of God is impossible. Unless you realize God you will not find happiness, and without happiness life is vain. Therefore I beg you, my dear children, struggle, make an effort, and soon you will find faith and devotion awakening within you. You will be blessed by the vision of God, and you will become the heirs of immortal bliss.

Swami Brahmananda

# God is Also Mother : Female And Male Religions

Hans Torwesten

(Continued from last issue)

**W**e must here come to speak once again of the inner relationship between mother worship and mysticism. It is not a coincidence that Orthodox (male) theology has always strictly refused to recognise a supra-personal Ground behind the three divine persons of the Holy Trinity, which would at the same time round off the Trinity as a fourth entity. Psychologists like Jung have often drawn attention to these connections. Odd numbers such as one and three are traditionally always male, while even numbers such as two and four are female. The fact is that in Hinduism on the one hand there are very many pairs which express an original polarity (*Shiva-Shakti*, *Purusha-Prakriti*, etc.) and on the other hand *Turiya* is strongly emphasised, the "fourth" (absolute) condition, in which all trinities are dissolved (waking state, dream state, dreamless state; the three *gunas Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattva*; the *Trimurti Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, as well as the three components of OM: A-U-M), points to a female-motherly basis, in which it is above all a question of fullness, completion and totality, while the male trinity, as it is so strongly emphasised in Christianity, has something pointed about it, something that has to assert itself through activity and has already separated itself from the Ground.

So many connections arise out of this. The male-female key does not in fact fit everywhere and one should not overdo it, but it nevertheless makes an essential contribution to understanding religious attitudes. It becomes clear that there must be great differences, sometimes indeed stark contradictions – in which it

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is naturally easier for female dominated religiosity to tolerate the "other", even sometimes to incorporate itself, than the prophetic male structured attitudes, which seem unable to exist without a certain aggressiveness and conversion rage.

The religious currents, in which the female dominates and is at least prevalent, are not ashamed of sensual expression and markedly include the visual element in their worship – like Roman Catholicism, the Eastern Church, Mahayana Buddhism and especially Hinduism. It is however these same religious currents which also lean towards mysticism, and the word mystic comes from "*myein*" which means: closing the eyes. The revelling in sensual colours and forms is thus balanced by the "negative way", which goes beyond all images to the non-image, to the "emptiness", to the formless *Brahman*, to the desert of divinity. This tendency to transcend all forms is not to be confused with the attack on images by the male Protestant line, because for the latter the naked One of mysticism is just as repulsive as the most sensual representation of holiness.

That which the eye represents for the "Catholics" is the ear for the "Protestants" – in which connection one must of course be aware that there are very many mixed forms of these "types". The Protestant listens to the *word*: the revealed word of Holy Scripture, the word of the preacher. For this reason absolute priority is given to the words of the divine service and the withdrawal or even avoidance of rituals, sacraments, physical substances – not to speak of "sensual" decorations of churches.

It is of course not a question here of classifying one approach as "right" and the other as "wrong". The barrenness of the Protestant attitude, which seems to appeal especially to the people of the northern countries, has its advantages. One can even go so far as to say that listening is superior to seeing, it is "nobler", as Meister Eckhart said. It seems not to distract one so much from

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the essential as "images" often do, it seems not to be so endowed with *Maya*, but makes us more ethical and adult. The revelling in images, the contemplation of Baroque ceilings has something "childish" about it, and in deliberate exaggeration one could say that pictures are only something for the illiterate.

And yet the deliberate turning away from all images and the exclusive turning to the word contains great dangers. It very soon involves the over-evaluation of the rational, which in the end dries religion out from within. The Protestant religion has developed above all into a religion of the head, and it is no wonder that at its fringes it again and again turns into a blind rage of sectarian emotionalism, while the Catholic religion makes a much more balanced impression in this regard.

One often cannot avoid the impression that the anti-sensual attitude is often an open or even secret hatred of the female. If Protestantism likes to call Rome the "whore of Babylon", there is in this on the one hand an expression of a justified criticism of the excesses of the papal court, but also a hatred of all the rest of the religion of "joy in creation", which in ancient times was connected with the dominance of the Great Mother and of which one can still find traces here and there in Catholicism. The radical Protestant attitude, which finds expression for instance in a thinker such as Kierkegaard, is hostile towards Eros and as – precisely because the father image is too much of a burden for it – has never found a relaxed relationship towards the female.

This begins with the Old Testament, to which Protestantism refers – not by chance – much more often than does Catholicism. The "pure" religion of the triumphant *Jahwe* must always be raised above the neighbouring fertility religions, which often have enough "female" characteristics. The struggle of the prophets against the cult of images is at one and the same time a struggle against the female. We do not wish in any way to assert that these

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"pagan" rites and cults were superior to the religion of the Chosen People. The historical necessity was undoubtedly, at least among us in the West, on the side of the biblical religion, the monotheistic simplicity and effectiveness of which forced the female-motherly cults completely into the background and the underground. Yet that which at a certain stage in development of human consciousness is driven back, must be won back at the later stage in a higher form, so that it can come to a synthesis. In this regard it is a great advantage that in Asia the "female" soul of our planet earth could unfold at a high spiritual level, so that we do not now have to start again from the old fruitfulness rituals of the Canaanites or the Babylonians, if we set out on the search for our female amplification. Not a few East-West contrasts are covered with the problem of sexual polarity (just like many North-South conflicts). One does not need to be particularly bright to see a connection between Western imperialism and male claims to superiority. Just as the astonishing progress of Eastern mysticism is a clear proof that the male Western megalomania is itself slowly going astray, and that female-motherly values are again being expressed, (such as in connecting oneself to "earth" in meditation,) and given more attention. Not only has outward economic growth now come to its limits, but also the internal male craziness, which thinks it can endlessly exploit "female" nature and carry on in this way for ever. It is indeed still true today that man is more than just a species, which can find satisfaction in the repetition of its natural form. He is a venture, which continually transcends itself, and it is exceptionally not just a sample of male megalomania, if I say that in history to date it has been the man who has achieved this transcendence. Woman is – about which for instance Simone de Beauvoir so much complains- merely by her physical constitution more confined to nature and species, and she has so far concerned herself above all

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with the continuation of the human species, while the man, all the more freely on this female-motherly basis, which “bore” everything, could arrange his attempts at transcendence, in order to free himself from natural necessities. He did this in the East above all as an ascetic and yogi, in the West as a scientist and technician – in which connection there were and are also numerous overlaps. It is common to both attitudes that they are not content with the existing situation. The “*homo faber*” in the West was concerned to structure the world freely and consciously according to his own ideas, and in doing so he first investigated the laws of nature, then exploited them in order finally to go beyond them. For the ascetics and yogis it was also above all a question of the male *control* of nature. He did not want to wait for ages until evolution perhaps in a “natural” way at some time in the future deposited him on gentle waves on the shore of transcendence – and it was questionable whether it would ever do this. It even seemed to him more likely that it would hold him fast in the cycle of birth and death. So he wanted to force the process, to shorten it so radically as to escape the net of *Maya* as quickly as possible.

There is thus a male element also in the Eastern mystical tradition, especially in the Indian spiritual zone, but it does not express itself in external overwhelming exploitation of nature, but rather in a flight from nature – in regard to which we leave aside the control of nature by magical occult yogic powers. For the Western observer Eastern mysticism, in spite of the male heroic asceticism, has female features: its meditative reposing in oneself, its ability to wait (in spite of its impatience to attain final liberation), its self-withdrawal, its silence. Indeed, the final goal of the traditional yogi to dissolve into infinity, seems for the Westerner to point rather in the female-motherly direction. It is not by chance that for Western progress optimism, which is often

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regarded as the secular inheritance of Judaic-Christian religion, *Time* is of great importance and therefore also history and the future dimension. One can conceive of time, which stretches out in front of one, as "male", but *Space* on the other hand as female. Time has something aggressive and overcoming about it, it is not content with what exists, is looking for something new that has never been there before, it wants to be "different" tomorrow from what it is today. Space, on the other hand, has something load-bearing, something endlessly fruitful about it. It becomes pregnant with numberless "possibilities", but it does not seek them, they are simply brought forth. Linear time has a goal, specie does not. It is true that both of them, space and time, are aspects of the female *Maya*, and *Kali* is often regarded as the all-consuming Time, in whose jaws all appearances are again ground down to naught (similar to the jaws of the cosmic Krishna, who in Chapter 11 of the *Bhagavad Gita* also appears as "Time" in its frightful aspect). But in this case it is more a question of cyclic Time, which similarly to Space in the prophetic religions and their secular offspring, escapes this cycle of nature, and like an arrow seeks to develop more and more forwards and upwards.

Typically these "male" orientated religions regard creation almost always as a short one-off adventure, as a single-minded run from point A to point B. Also the historical progenitor or founder and the prophet looking into the future play a big part in these religions, while the "female" religion of infinite space understands itself as an "Eternal Religion". This must in no way be rigid, it can be very lively and full of new surprises, as the Ground, from which all these "possibilities" burst forth, is inexhaustible. Yet this female religion knows nothing completely new; everything that is at any time manifested was already contained beforehand in the "womb". *Shakti*, the Divine Mother,

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may make even the most daring cosmic dance steps, and yet remains always the same.

It will be one of the main tasks of the near future to transcend the seemingly unbridgeable opposites of these two different types of religion. Such a transcendence is also and particularly in the interest of the female, because both types of religion basically do not do justice to it. In the male dominated Western religion with its stress on time and progress the female-motherly aspect is often regarded as only a primitive initial step, which has to be overcome by manly consciousness. The latter regards itself already as transcendence, as the high point and fulfilment of development. It can indeed still further perfect itself, but encounters nothing more that calls it into question – unless it is a father-god's super-ego. If the woman does not in such an atmosphere waste away, she has to try to keep up with man, make his values and goals her own. It is true that in such a society man gladly asserts that woman must remain a woman, indeed he treasures her above all when she stays in her "reservation", in the confined area of the kitchen and the family, but woman rightly suspects that in this high regard for the "natural female" there is also mixed a little contempt. She wants to prove that the mere round of nature is not enough for her, that she basically seeks the same goals as the man and that she has so far not attained them, because man has not given her the chance. Today much of this is changing, and woman takes the place of man in many places. This trend is positive in that it indicates that human beings as such again and again exceed themselves, women not less than men. If one denied women this endeavour, one would deny her humanity. She would be forever condemned to being a mere piece of "nature", still indeed very necessary, especially for the "progressive" man, who now and then has to recover from his progress on her bosom, but basically is only carried along as a simple necessity of nature,

## God is Also Mother : Female And Male Religions

which allows him more and more to long for complete transcendence. She would always remain something completely different, the alien, who could never *with* man completely master the future. With all the negative things, which we have so far said about the Western civilisation dominated by Western values – and there will be more to say about this – we should not forget that this society has at least made it possible for woman largely to free herself from being a mere generic term and become a “person” – an important positive move, which must certainly be carried into the new age. Now the question arises as to whether the female contribution only consists of what man in any case already contributes – or to express it in other words, is woman nothing more than man’s late-coming follower? And to where does the so hotly fought for freedom of personal development stretch for the modern person, whether man or woman – only further and further into an empty transcendence? The existentialist pathos of the forties and fifties can no longer satisfy us today, people again look for their actual roots and their metaphysical background and it is at this point that the openness of the female space reveals itself, so as to incorporate this newly awakened urge for human freedom and make it become *fruitful*.

In the context of an “eternal religion”, as embodied in Hinduism, woman has it easier and more difficult at one and the same time. The great, all-encompassing timeless bounds of unity and perfection certainly has something female about it, but it also very quickly becomes a cage – also and in particular for the woman. While Western society has developed a dynamic, which in the end has also benefited women, the roles in an “eternal religion” seem established for ever.

Translated by John Phillips  
(To be Continued)

## The Direct Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Bhuteshananda

(I am often asked to speak on the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna whom I had the privilege to meet. To speak about them is difficult, because in their presence I used to be too overwhelmed to remember clearly everything that happened. Only in the case of a few with whom I had the good fortune of coming in close contact do I remember many things clearly.)

### SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

I met Swami Brahmanandaji much before I joined the Order formally in 1923. I used to meet him now and then as a young devotee. I was staying in an ashrama which was not formally affiliated to the Order, but swamis of the Order, including many direct disciples, used to come to that *ashrama* very often. There I got opportunities to meet Swamis Abhedanandaji, Turiyanandaji, Subodhanandaji, Premanandaji, and Adbhutanandaji. My memory of the last two swamis is too faint because my contact with them was very short. Even in the case of others the contact was of short duration, and I do not clearly remember much of what happened when I met them.

When I met Swami Brahmanandaji (fondly called just 'Maharaj') I was a school student. I first visited Belur Math in the year 1917. That means I could meet Maharaj off and on for five years until his passing away in 1922. At that time, because of my immaturity, I did not have sufficient courage to ask him questions. He appeared to me to be too big a personality to be approached on intimate terms. He was, of course, kind to all of us and particularly to the youngsters. We seldom saw him engaged in abstract religious discussions. He used to mix with us

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youngsters like one of us. He would joke and make everyone laugh. We were always aware that this simple, fun-loving swami who was making himself so easily accessible to us, was no ordinary person. We knew it was a rare privilege to be able to sit at his feet and listen to whatever he said. He was very fond of talking in a light vein most of the time and this appeared somewhat strange to newcomers. I shall give one example.

One day Atulbabu (Girish Chandra Ghosh's brother) brought a friend with him to meet Swami Brahmanandaji. The friend had heard a lot about the spiritual greatness of Maharaj. Unfortunately, throughout the period Atulbabu and his friend were near Maharaj, he was speaking on light, humorous subjects. Atulbabu felt a bit embarrassed and also anxious, wondering what impression his friend would carry home. Anyway, when they were leaving, Maharaj casually mentioned to Atulbabu's friend, 'You see, occasionally we speak about religion also.' His friend later told Atulbabu, 'Today for the first time in my life I met a person who is filled with pure joy.' Maharaj carried that atmosphere with him wherever he was. This was his way. One could never know what his approach would be toward a newcomer.

Swami Brahmanandaji had great attraction for Bhubaneswar, a place he considered highly conducive to spiritual practice. So he started a monastery there. In those early days, Maharaj spent most of his time in deep meditation. I will tell you an incident I heard from Maharaj's attendant.

There was a hotel nearby where pilgrims from different parts of the country stayed when they visited Bhubaneswar. Not everyone came for pilgrimage, of course. Many came for just sightseeing or to experience the quiet of a little town, away from the din and bustle of city-life. It seems three young men from Calcutta were staying at the hotel and they asked the manager

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about the places worth visiting. He mentioned the names of the prominent temples there and told the young men that they could also visit in the town a branch of the Ramakrishna Order. Then he shared with them the local gossip. He said, 'The head of the monastery (meaning Maharaj) lives in a princely style. His hookah is made of gold. The monastery has a big campus.' The young men said, 'It's outrageous that a monk should live in such a luxurious way. Why don't you people teach him a lesson?' The hotel manager said, 'Oh my God! That's unthinkable. A lot of big guns visit the place and I don't have the courage to say anything against the swami.' 'All right, then,' the young men said. "We are not afraid of anybody. We shall go and teach him a lesson.' At the monastery Swami Brahmanandaji was sitting in the parlour with his attendants. It looked like he was expecting somebody. He told his attendants not to disturb him when the visitors came. Indeed, after a few minutes the three young men arrived. They were taken to Maharaj's room, offered seats, and the attendants came away closing the door behind them.

What exactly happened inside the room the attendants didn't know. They only heard peals of laughter. After sometime the young men took leave of Maharaj and returned to the hotel. The manager asked them how they had found the princely swami. The young men replied, 'For the first time in our lives we have seen a really great man. He exudes love, sympathy, understanding. It was an experience of a lifetime.' This was typical of Swami Brahmanandaji. He sometimes impressed people by his mere silence, sometimes through amusing talks and, when he chose to do so, through his spiritual teachings. Whatever might be the contents of Maharaj's talk, all who met him carried a deep impression of his spiritual personality. So when we went to him as boys, we did not have the courage to ask him questions. Just seeing him was enough. That gave us enough

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fulfilment and joy. It was enough to fill our minds with love and respect for him – and these have remained with us undiminished all through life.

Swami Brahmanandaji was also very mischievous. When he and his brother disciples were once staying at Balaram Babu's house, Maharaj refused to go for bath in the nearby Ganga. He told his brother disciples, 'Today I am not feeling well. My stomach is upset. So I won't go to the Ganga for bath.' So the others went for bath. After they returned they waited, as usual, for breakfast which the ladies of the house were preparing. When it seemed to be getting late, one of the members of the family went to the kitchen to enquire the reason for the delay. The ladies were aghast. They said, 'We sent the breakfast long ago.' A young girl came to Maharaj and asked him, 'Didn't you see, Maharaj, that we brought the breakfast in this big plate here?' (They used to bring it on a large plate, with portions separated on the plate itself.) Maharaj said, "Yes, you did bring the breakfast. But I was so hungry that I managed to finish the whole thing.' Hearing this everyone had a good laugh and the ladies rushed inside to get ready a second round of breakfast! The swamis with whom I had close contact for several years were Swami Saradanandaji, who initiated me into spiritual life, and Swami Shivanandaji, with whom I could stay at Belur Math in my early monastic days.

*(To be continued)*

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, November 1977)

Meditate and dive deep. As you dive deep, you will know that God alone is real and that everything else is unreal. When, through spiritual practices, a little awakening comes, do not mistake that for the goal. Do not stop ! Move onward ! Light ! More light ! Go deeper and deeper. You must see Him face to face, and talk to him. Enough of study and argument! Now gather the forces of your mind and direct them toward God and God only. Plunge into the ocean of Bliss. Do not sacrifice eternal joy for the sake of ephemeral pleasure. (Swami Brahmananda)

# Sankaracharya: Life And Teachings

Swami Dayatmananda

(Continued from May-June Issue)

Sankaracharya had innumerable great disciples who also became his co-workers. When the greater part of the Indian plains had been converted to his views, he felt a call to visit Kashmir, in those days a land of great culture and learning. In Kashmir there was a temple dedicated to the goddess *Saraswati* known as the '*Sarada Peetha*'. It was also renowned as the *Sarvajna Peetha*, the seat of the highest learning. The custom there was to place the most learned man on this seat and crown him as the *sarvajna*, i.e., he who is well versed in all branches of knowledge, both sacred and secular.

Ascending the *Sarvajna Peetha* at Kashmir

Sankaracharya had felt an intuitive call to visit Kashmir. His disciples like Padmapada and also many pundits requested the Great Master to accept the challenge. There were four gates, in the four directions which led to the interior of the temple where the goddess '*Saraswati*' resided. Each gate was guarded by a learned Pundit of a particular school of philosophy. Unless one was able to defeat these Pundits in debate, one was not allowed to pass through the gates. Sankara defeated all the scholars belonging to various schools of philosophy easily; for he was none other than the incarnation of Siva. The great Master stood in the very presence of the goddess. The Pundits of Kashmir accepted Sankara as the foremost of the learned.

One may doubt whether Sankara's disciples are exaggerating the greatness of their Master. There is no need to entertain such doubts, for in our own days we have the shining example of Swami Vivekananda. When Swami Vivekananda needed a letter

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of introduction to the Parliament of Religions, Prof. John Wright wrote thus: "To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun about its right to shine." In fact the Swami felt in his heart of hearts that the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1897 was arranged for *him* only.

Sankaracharya stayed at the temple for a few days and worshipped Goddess Sarada with great devotion. Then he went to Sreenagar along with his disciples. Here he held discourses on the various branches of philosophy and preached the truths of *Advaita Vedanta* to the local people.

Then he moved to Kashmir where the king of Kashmir made necessary arrangements for the stay of the Acharya and his disciples. At Sreenagar there was a temple dedicated to *Bhavani*, the consort of Lord Siva. Sankara is said to have worshipped the goddess here and composed the beautiful hymn *Soundarya Lahari*.

### Liberating his mother

During this period one day the Acharya suddenly came to know of his mother's illness in Kalady, and her impending death. He remembered his promise to his mother that he would be at her bedside at the time of her death. He then travelled through air by his Yogic powers and reached his mother's side quickly.

His mother was beside herself to see her beloved Sankara. She was extremely happy to see her son again after a lapse of about twelve years. With the idea of liberating her, he sang a hymn in praise of Siva. It is said the attendants of Siva appeared on the scene and Sankara requested them to escort his mother to the world of Shiva. But his mother was terrified at the sight of their ferocious appearance. Sankara then sang a hymn in praise of Lord Vishnu. Immediately, the attendants of Vishnu appeared on the spot and took away the mother's soul to the abode of Lord Vishnu.

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These two hymns came to be known as *Siva Bhujangam* and *Vishnu Bhujongam*.

*(We need not cherish doubts as to how one can give liberation to others. We may recall how Sri Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi granted liberation to their mothers at the time of their passing away. Ordinary people cannot do this. But great souls like Sankaracharya can certainly bestow liberation on others at their will.)* Sankara then did the last rites himself and started another pilgrimage to the North of India along with his disciples. This was his last trip.

### Towards the End

Sankara's work was now almost finished. He had written his commentaries and original works. He toured many parts of India several times and had broadcast the sublime teachings of Advaita Vedanta. He had vindicated the truth of the *Vedas*, "Brahman alone is real. All is Brahman. The human soul is that Brahman, not separate from It." It was now left for his disciples to protect and propagate the work.

In course of time Sankaracharya with his disciples reached *Badarikasrama*. He was pleased to see that regular worship is done at the temple. He stayed there for a few days and worshipped the Lord there. From *Badarikasrama* the Acharya with a few of his disciples went to *Kedarnath*. Here he felt that the time for his departure from the world was drawing near: he was only thirty-two by then. He decided to give up his body at this sacred *Kedarnath*.

Sankaracharya then called four of his distinguished disciples and entrusted them with the work of establishing four Vedanta Centres in the four corners of the country. *(just like Sri Ramakrishna who charged Swami Vivekananda with the establishment of the Ramakrishna Order)* The Acharya commanded Padmapada, Suresvara, Hastamalaka and Totaka to establish four *Maths*

## Sankaracharya: Life And Teachings

(Vedanta Centres) at the four corners of India. Jagannath Puri, Sringeri, Dwaraka and Jyotirdham became these four Math centres.

The disciples then requested the Master to leave his last message for all humanity. Sankaracharya then recollected the ten verses which he had earlier chanted when he met his *Guru Govindacharya* at their first meeting. He then chanted the ten verses in his nectar-like voice.

*I am not earth, I am not water.  
I am not light, I am not air,  
I am not ether, I am not sense organs,  
Nor am I a combination of these,  
Because they do not always exist.  
I am simply Shiva the Self.*

Sankara said that in these verses one would find the essence of all Vedantic teaching. Hearing these verses all who were present near the Great Master felt highly elevated. Their minds ascended to a higher plane and were filled with indescribable Bliss. They could not feel the grief of the impending separation from their beloved Master.

Sankara ordered his disciples to spread the sublime Truths of Vedanta to all the people (*For the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many*).

Then came the last pilgrimage. Sankara went into the Himalayas. At the foot of a snow-capped peak he blessed his disciples, and disappeared. This was the last ever seen or heard of the great sage. At thirty-two years of age, he entered into the Blissful state of Brahman.

Sankaracharya is not dead, the Soul is divine, deathless. He is living and his work is still thriving. The monastic Order established by Sankaracharya is thriving and thousands of sincere aspirants are taking to monastic life, becoming monks and are

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striving for God realization. The commentaries and the innumerable works of the Great Master, like the great 'Vivekachudamani' and other sublime writings, are being studied by spiritual aspirants and scholars alike both in the East and in the West. The Advaita doctrine preached by the Great Master is unsurpassed even today and represents the highest pinnacle of thought ever reached by the human intellect.

(To be continued)

What is the use of wandering about from place to place? Have you not seen hundreds of such wandering monks? And what have they achieved? Are you to become like them? Swamiji did not want you boys to be like these wandering monks. He founded this monastery toward one Great end: and that is to realize God. Consider that, and try to live your life and mould your character accordingly. The spiritual practices of one single man are enough to make a monastery vibrate with holiness. Oh, what a wonderful spiritual atmosphere there was at the Dakshineswar temple when Sri Ramakrishna was living there! The moment our boat touched the steps of the landing stage we felt as if we had reached heaven itself!

Swami Brahmananda

## **Programme for September - October 2013**

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)

Sep	1	Katha Upanishad 1	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep	8	Katha Upanishad 2	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep	15	Katha Upanishad 3	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep	22	Katha Upanishad 4	Swami Shivarupananda
Sep	29	Day Retreat	
Oct	6	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 30	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct	13	Durga Puja	
Oct	20	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 31	Swami Dayatmananda
Oct	27	Katha Upanishad 5	Swami Shivarupananda

### **Day Retreat**

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda  
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 29<sup>th</sup> September  
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.  
Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

### **Durga Puja**

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October  
at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

No matter what riches you may possess, no matter what prospects you may have for living a happy and prosperous life, you still will not find lasting happiness. Pain follows pleasure, and every action brings its own reaction. Nothing lasts, but the one true happiness which is to be found in God.

You are boys – young boys. Your minds have not yet received any worldly impressions. If you can struggle now, you will be able to escape life's sorrows and miseries. Never forget the ideal of human life. We have not inherited this human birth to waste it in eating, drinking, and sleeping like animals. Since you have been born as a human being, spurn all worldly enjoyments and resolve to realize God. Never waver in your purpose, even if it means to die in the attempt. Enjoy the ecstasy of devotion and spiritual practice now, and then enter the doors of infinite bliss forever. The most important aim in spiritual life is the attainment of God's grace. The breeze of grace is always blowing; unfurl your sails.

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You are young; this is the time to practise spiritual disciplines. What can you do when you are old? Develop love in your heart and you will achieve everything. Where is your early enthusiasm? You seem to be quite satisfied with your present condition, but I tell you, do not remain satisfied with yourself as you are now. Contentment with the external conditions, yes, but never be contented with your state of spiritual growth. Become dissatisfied. Try to move ever onward in your search. Do not stop until you have found the diamond mine !

**Swami Brahmananda**



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