

Vedanta

381 JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2015

Sri Ramakrishna - Jesus Christ Come Again
Swami Mukhyananda

An Introduction to Hindu Theology
Swami Sunirmalananda





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

Divine Wisdom

Do not see the defects of others; see the good, the merits only. As Sri Ramakrishna said, be like the winnowing basket that retains the good grain, while rejecting the chaff : not like a sieve that lets the good material drop through and holds back what is worthless. We should move about freely, seeing the world as the manifestation of Rama. To hate and injure anyone is to hate and injure Rama, who pervades the whole world.

Do not agitate yourself, dreaming up all sorts of projects. The Lord does his own work. You be the instrument. If the idea that "I am the doer" gets hold of a person, it will be the cause of bondage; and no permanent good ever comes out of such deeds. Take refuge in Sri Ramakrishna with your words, deeds, and thoughts, and all will be well.

If a pitcher has a hole in the bottom, water poured into it will flow out. No water can be kept in it.

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Editorial

Gayatri Mantra (Contd)

Editorial
Gayatri Mantra

- 1) OM
- 2) BHUR-BHUVAH-SVAH
- 3) TAT-SAVITUR-VARENYAM
BHARGO-DEVASYA-DHIMAHI
DHIYO-YO-NAH-PRACHODAYAT

Gayatri mantra is the most sacred hymn of the Vedas repeated thrice daily, at dawn, dusk and midday. Repetition of the Gayatri mantra with devotion can confer all material benefits on a devotee (in the form of granting a sharp intelligence, *Buddhi*). But the main purpose of this ritual is spiritual progress, the union of the individual soul with the Universal soul by knowing Him and becoming one with Him. The Gayatri mantra is very profound in its meaning. The repetition of it is considered equal to the study of all the Vedas. The chanting of any mantra helps one become focussed and gain insight into one's mind.

The Gayatri mantra is chanted in three parts. First, one starts with the word Om. Next one connects the Om with the *Vyahritis* (*Bhuh* etc) and meditates. Lastly one meditates on *Tat Savituh* etc.

The meaning of the Gayatri mantra

The Gayatri mantra can have two meanings, a literal meaning and an implied meaning. The literal meaning of the Gayatri mantra is: "*Let us meditate on the most excellent glory of that Divine Being who is manifesting in the form of the three worlds. May He guide or stimulate or inspire our understanding.*"

The first part in reciting the Gayatri mantra is *Pranava* or Om and the three '*vyahritis*' : *Bhuh, Bhuvah and Suvah*. The repetition of these two prepare one for the subsequent portions of this sublime prayer. The second part stimulates the mind of the spiritual aspirant, for the effective contact between the mind and the Divine Consciousness behind *Savita*, the Sun. The last part is an effort to surrender and be receptive to the grace of God brought to bear through the repetition.

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The term *Dhimahi* is a prayer, "We meditate on the most auspicious or excellent glory of the divine, manifested through the Sun God (*Savita*)." Without the sun there is no world to live in; the Sun is life, light, and knowledge (consciousness). Hence it is the most direct manifestation of the divine. The visible form of the Sun is only the sheath which covers the *Inner Ruler* within it. It is this Inner ruler whom a devotee longs to see, hence contemplates, and offers worship and adoration. The last part of the mantra enjoins a total surrender on the part of the seeker in the attitude of taking shelter in the Truth.

The term *Prachodayat* means to unfold or to awaken. "May He unfold, or awaken our intellect or understanding." The seeker now assumes, in that spirit of submission and supplication for divine grace, the attitude of unity he wants to experience by piercing through the Sun to get at the hidden Reality behind.

The implied meaning of the Gayatri mantra is complete union with the divine. In this also there is the way of the *bhakta* or devotee, and the way of the *jnani*. The devotee says 'I surrender myself totally to God'. But for a *jnani*, the Vedanta teaches '*Tat Tvam Asi*', 'That Thou Art'. Through the practice of contemplation on Brahman the student realises, '*Aham Brahmasmi*', 'I am Brahman'. Thus the implied meaning of the Gayatri mantra is '*Thou Art That*'

The literal meaning

The first part of the Gayatri mantra is 'Om'. Sage Patanjali says that the syllable Om is the best sound symbol of God. Meditation upon Him can be effected by repeating Om and meditating upon its meaning.

To the Hindus, the manifested universe is the form behind which stands the eternal inexpressible, the *Sphota*, the manifester as Logos, or Word. This Eternal *Sphota*, the essential material of all ideas or names, is the power through which God creates the universe. *Brahman* conditioned by *Maya*, first manifests Himself as the *Sphota*, the inexpressible Word, out of which He evolves as the concrete, sensible world. This *sphota* is present in all beings, and anyone can realize God through the power of *sphota*. In this theory of the *sphota* the syllable *Om* is given the highest place.

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Why this is so Swami Vivekananda explains:

"This Sphota" says Swami Vivekananda, "has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is Om. And as by no possible means of analysis can we separate the word from the idea, this Om and the eternal Sphota are inseparable; and therefore it is out of this holiest of all holy words, the mother of all names and forms, the eternal Om, that the whole universe may be supposed to have been created.

If properly pronounced, this Om will represent the whole phenomenon of sound production, and no other word can do this; and this, therefore, is the fittest symbol of the Sphota, which is the real meaning of the Om. And as the symbol can never be separated from the thing signified, the Om and the Sphota are one. And as the Sphota, being the finer side of the manifested universe, is nearer to God, and is indeed the first manifestation of Divine Wisdom, this Om is truly symbolic of God."

The second part of the Gayatri mantra is *Bhuh, Bhuvah, and Svah*. These three words are known as *Vyahritis*, the most auspicious words. The mere utterance of these three words is believed to confer on an aspirant all blessings both secular and spiritual.

The words *Bhuh, Bhuvah* and *Svah* represent the gross, subtle and causal worlds. All beings experience the three states of waking (gross world), dream (subtle world) and deep sleep (causal world) respectively. In the context of the Gayatri mantra the essence of the these three words *Bhuh, Bhuvah* and *Svah* is Om. Put simply Brahman in the form of Om manifests itself as the three worlds — the gross, the subtle and the causal. (The *Maandukya Upanishad* is an elaboration of this idea) Om is Brahman, God. Therefore the world we experience through these three states is nothing but God with name and form. Even though what we experience every moment is God only, due to ignorance we are unable to know Him. The Gayatri mantra , repeated with devotion confers that God—vision upon us.

The third part of the Gayatri mantra consists of the three sentences beginning with *Tat Savituh varenyam* etc., whose meaning we saw earlier.

Gayatri Mantra

Gayatri mantra from the Vedantic point of view

As mentioned earlier the implied meaning of Gayatri mantra is 'Thou Art That'. How does one derive this meaning?

The Om represents Brahman, the impersonal aspect of God.

The three *Vyahritis*, *Bhuh* etc., represent the three states of experience i.e., the personal aspect of God.

Thus the word Om is the cause and the three worlds are the effect. Since there is no difference between the cause and effect the word *Dhimahi* (we meditate) implies the oneness of the individual with the universal.

Gayatri mantra is also a meditation on *Brahman* as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. The word *Tat* beginning with the words *Tat savituh* etc represents the aspect of pure existence 'Sat'. The word *Bhargah* means effulgence, the power of illumination i.e., intelligence or the 'Chit'. And the word '*Varenyam*' means that which is most desired. All beings desire only '*ananda*', bliss, joy. Hence the Gayatri mantra is a meditation on *sat-chit-ananda* (Absolute Existence-Absolute Knowledge and Absolute Bliss)

Thus from the Vedantic point of view the Gayatri mantra is the highest type of meditation on God. Either way it is the most useful form of prayer, meditation. Repeated with deep faith the Gayatri mantra confers both intelligence as well as spiritual realization.

There are three ways of chanting the Gayatri (any) mantra : loudly and audible to people around; chanting with lip movement, audible only to the person who is chanting only and not to others; purely mental with no movement involved.

Revered Swami Yatiswaranandaji used to advise his devotees to chant the Gayatri mantra a few times before one does *japa* of the mantra received from one's Guru. He believed that the Gayatri mantra removes the obstacles and advances an aspirant in his spiritual path.

Swami Dayatmananda

Sri Ramakrishna – Jesus Christ Come Again

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Christians all over the world have been looking forward to the 'second coming of Jesus Christ' when, as projected in the Bible, the 'kingdom of God on earth' will be established. That will be a golden period in the history of humankind when all humans will exist peacefully, submitting to the will of the eternal Spirit, writes a devout Christian.

When we go through the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of religious harmony, and of his immaculate spiritual consort Sri Sarada Devi, and his great disciples, Swami Vivekananda and others, impressions begin to gain ground that Jesus Christ has perhaps already come again in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. There are such striking similarities between the two which several thinkers and savants all over the world have begun to recognize and give expression to. He seems to be an amplified Jesus to suit the modern scientific age and globalization of humankind.

Let us consider the factors that lead one to such a conclusion.

1. Within ten years of Sri Ramakrishna's Mahasamadhi in 1886, his great life and universal message had spread all over the world, as it were, by Divine Will. It is said that with his advent 'the age of truth' has dawned. Says Swami Vivekananda:

From the very date that he was born, has sprung the Golden Age. Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions, and everyone down to the Chandala will be a sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, Brahmins and Chandalas—he lived to root out all. And he was the harbinger of Peace—the separation between Hindus and Muhammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of

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*the past. That fight about distinctions that there was, belonged to another era. In this Satya Yuga the tidal wave of Sri Ramakrishna's Love has unified all.*¹

2. Sri Ramakrishna too was born, as detailed in his biographies, through immaculate conception by the infusion of Divine Power by Shiva into Chandramani, his guileless and pure mother. When his father was in Gaya on a pilgrimage, Lord Vishnu told him in a dream that he would be born as a son to him.²

3. From his biographies and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*,³ we learn that Jesus Christ entered and merged into Sri Ramakrishna at the end of his Christian *sadhana*. Similarly, during his varied spiritual sadhanas, other incarnations, prophets and various divine beings also merged into him. Hence Sri Ramakrishna is considered the embodiment of all the gods and goddesses. Several people affirmed seeing Jesus Christ in him during his lifetime.

4. There were also several incidents in his life resembling those in Christ's life, like that of Martha and Mary⁴ and his debate as a young boy on religious matters with pundits. Like Jesus Christ, Sri Ramakrishna too was divinely wise without formal education; frequently used parables in his teachings; and had to give up his body as a result of taking upon himself all the sins of humankind.

5. Sri Ramakrishna became a bounty of spiritual grace (*kalpataru*) and conferred spiritual vision freely on many devotees on 1 January 1886, the Christian New Year's Day. Two of his eminent disciples, Swami Saradananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda (then known as Sharat and Shashi, respectively), were recognized by Sri Ramakrishna as the disciples of Jesus Christ. It is also noteworthy that, on his visit to the Basilica of St Peter's in Rome, Swami Saradananda went into a trance. It is also significant that Sri Ramakrishna's great

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disciples took the vow of sannyasa at Antpur on Christmas Eve of 1886, when Narendranath dwelt on the life and renunciation of Jesus Christ, and described him as a great Sannyasin.

6. Even during Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime many declared him an incarnation of God. A few days before he passed away in Mahasamadhi, he declared his avatahood unambiguously to Narendra, clearing the last vestiges of doubt from his mind. Swami Vivekananda says:

*... in the Ramakrishna Incarnation there is knowledge, devotion and love—infinite knowledge, infinite love, infinite work, infinite compassion for all beings. You have not yet been able to understand him. ... What the whole Hindu race has thought in ages, he lived in one life. His life is the living commentary to the Vedas of all nations. People will come to know him by degrees.*⁵

His life is a searchlight of infinite power thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought. He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India (7.483).

This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations (5.53).

7. Frank Dvorak, a Czech artist of Prague, painted a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna based on a vision, and sent it to Swami Abhedanandaji, whom he came to know in about 1911. The painting is now very famous. Several others have seen Sri Ramakrishna in their vision, both during his lifetime and afterwards.

8. The great French author, Nobel laureate Romain Rolland, wrote biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in 1928 entitled 'Ramakrishna the Man-Gods and the Universal Gospel of Swami Vivekananda', in which he has described Sri

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Ramakrishna as the younger brother of Jesus Christ. Similarly, several other eminent biographers of Sri Ramakrishna such as Max Muller, Christopher Isherwood and Hans Torwesten have paid homage to him.

9. Hans Torwesten has written a book in German whose English version is '*Ramakrishna and Christ*'—*Or the Paradox of the Incarnation*. This is a comparative study and analysis of the Incarnation as embodied in Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna. A Christian by faith, and with practical experience of religious life in India and Europe, the author has been able to compare both these phenomena in an excellent way from different aspects of their life and teachings. A few of his observations are given below:

*What makes him [Sri Ramakrishna] so Christ-like that we can speak of an 'unknown Christ in Hinduism', with a slight and yet momentous shift in meaning which the Indian theologian Panikkar gave to the title of his book, not a Christ hidden in Hindu philosophy, but a Christ who lived a hundred years ago and is still unknown to most Christians.*⁶

Sarada Devi, just like Mary, was the embodiment of purity and virginity. Once as a young girl she looked up at the moon and cried, 'Oh, even the moon has stains.' Grant, O God, that I shall always be without stain!' She was 'chosen' by the Lord, because they wanted to marry off the young Ramakrishna. (Pg. 211)

Married to fulfil a divine purpose, Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi lived a pure spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna seated her on a pedestal and worshipped her as the Divine Mother of the Universe. Hence she got the epithet 'Holy Mother'. Anyone who understands the significance of this event will, in the words of Hans Torwesten, see in it more than just the union of two individuals at a high spiritual level. He will see in it the 'heavenly wedding' of the Son and His Shakti, who no longer stands completely in the background as the handmaiden of the Lord,

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but sits on the highest throne as the 'spouse', as the embodiment of the World Mother, before whom even the Son Himself humbly bows down. It is the bodily ascension of the Virgin to heaven taken literally, not proclaimed as a dogma, but celebrated in Hindu fashion (p. 120).

In this incarnation, Sri Ramakrishna held his mother, wife, and all women in great reverence and love, as embodiments of the Divine Mother, whereas in the earlier incarnation as Jesus Christ many will find support for their anti-feminine feelings in the example of Jesus. Did he not again and again turn away from his earthly mother, often with harsh words, and turn towards his Heavenly Father? (p. 110).

10. Another significant factor of great importance in the Ramakrishna incarnation (the Christ come a second time) is that, while all other incarnations and prophets were male and came singly by themselves, Sri Ramakrishna came with Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Narendranath (later Swami Vivekananda) together as a complete divine manifestation to elevate the whole of humankind in all its aspects—man, woman, and the young; householders and monks; *bhaktas*, *jnanis* and *karma yogis*; the active ones and the meditative ones.

While Jesus Christ established the Fatherhood of God, Sri Ramakrishna, in addition to it and other aspects of God, established specially the Motherhood of God, which is more intimate and loving. It also does justice to womankind by showing that God is not exclusively male, but can equally be female.

11. Sri Ramakrishna practised as spiritual *sadhana* not only the different aspects of the Vedic religion such as the various forms of *bhakti*, *yoga*, *tantra* and *Vedanta*, but also the *sadhanas* of the major world religions such as Christianity and Islam, and established that each religion is a path and will lead to the aspect of the Divinity envisaged by it, under whatever name and form God is worshipped with sincerity, purity and devotion. He also

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realized the absolute non-dual nature (*Advaita*) of the supreme infinite Reality beyond all names and forms, and established in his life and teachings the harmony of all religions as different manifestations of that supreme Reality. In his Advaita sadhana, he also showed that one has to go beyond all attachment to name and form, including the highly beloved dualistic personal names and forms of God helpful in the early stages of spiritual life, to reach oneness with the absolute Reality. This he did by severing with the 'sword of knowledge' the blissful form of his beloved Divine Mother Kali, whom he had worshipped devoutly earlier as the Divine Mother of the Universe, the supreme Power of the infinite spiritual Reality.

Of course, this harmony of religions has been in the Vedic tradition from very ancient times⁷ and has been emphasized in the whole gamut of Vedic literature all along for over 5000 years. Hence there is harmony among the numerous denominations of Hinduism. What Sri Ramakrishna did was to practise the ideas and demonstrate them in his life in this scientific age. Hence he is recognized as the prophet of religious harmony, and the temples dedicated to him are now called 'universal temples'.

12. Swami Vivekananda effectively propagated Ramakrishna's universal message to humankind in America, Europe and India. His great utterances initiated a gradual and silent change in the world of religious thought. We quote here a few passages from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* containing his thoughts—his lectures, conversations, letters, papers, interviews and compositions.

... Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these

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*horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.*⁸

Thus the life and message of the divine trio, Sri Ramakrishna—the Christ come again, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, show that, if there is to be a 'Kingdom of God on earth', the followers of all the religions of the world have to recognize the oneness of Religion and, giving up exclusivism and feelings of superiority, need to fraternize and show mutual appreciation and respect for other ways of worship, if not actually participate in them. Thus can be cultivated the ideal of the whole world as one family. All hatred and ill will have to stop. Thus alone will all prosper together and attain the highest good. This is practical Advaita, the recognition of the oneness of existence.

The Vedic tradition has tried to put this into practice. Hence there were hardly any religious conflicts in India until the exclusivist Semitic religions came in and gave rise to violent confrontations. There used to be only debates to establish the nature of the supreme Reality, of the cosmic universe, and of living beings and their mutual relationship. A proper application of the spirit of oneness (Advaita) can harmonize all the religions of the world, just as it did in the past in India. It is ego-culture which gives rise to the notions of superiority of one's religion and attempts to impose it on others.

The speciality of the Vedic tradition is that it does not claim any uniqueness, holding as it does that religion is inherent in every individual as potential divinity. One has only to express it in life and action. Because of the God within, there are 'gods' as

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His agents outside, as in a mirror. It is only human beings that can achieve sainthood or prophethood because they can manifest their latent divine potential. Animals, however much they may be taught, cannot do that.

One cannot achieve spiritual infinitude or freedom from bondage to external beings and entities by merely upholding and praising the divinity and glory of God. That is possible only by realizing the inner divinity. True freedom and bliss are only in the Infinite and not in the finite. So everyone is exhorted to 'Arise, Awake, and strive to realize the infinite Truth within, taking guidance from the great ones who have already realized It. For the path is difficult— as difficult as walking on the edge of a razor.'⁹

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, March 2002)

Footnotes :

Notes and References Ramakrishna Jesus come again

1. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda , 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 6, p. 335. [Hereafter CW, followed by volume and page numbers.]
2. Siva, Vishnu and so on are the names of the supreme Being in His different aspects. Literally, Siva means the good, the auspicious; and Vishnu means the Divinity that pervades everything immanently (in. ", to enter').
- 3 M., The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 34.
4. *ibid.*, p. 838.
5. CW, 6.320.
6. Hans Torwesten, Ramakrishna and Christ—Or the Paradox of the Incarnation (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1999), p. 82.
7. In the Vedic tradition, which sees the oneness of religion, there is no antagonism to other religions, nor attempts at proselytization. The good and beneficial aspects of all religions are welcomed and adopted. The Rig Veda says: 'A no bhadrah kratavo yantu visvatah, let noble thoughts come to us from every side.'
8. CW, 1.4.
9. Katha upanishad, 3.14.

An Introduction to Hindu Theology

Swami Sunirmalananda

PART 1

THE HISTORY OF THEOLOGY

What is Theology?

Theology is the intellectual knowledge of God. It is also defined as the 'science of things Divine.'¹ A dictionary defines this term as 'the field of study and analysis that treats of God and of God's attributes and relations to the universe; study of divine things or religious truth; divinity.'² *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines Theology as the '*study of religious faith, practice and experience: the study of God and His relation to the world.*' '*Theology Proper is the study of the knowledge of God and His relation to mankind,*' says the renowned theologian, Stanford Murrell.³ Charles Hodge defines Theology as the 'science of religion.'⁴ Vincent Cheung defines Theology as follows: '*The word Theology refers to the study of God. When used in a broader sense, the word may include all the other doctrines revealed in Scripture.*'⁵ According to the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry website, "... *Theology is very important because in it we can discover who and what God is and what He desires for us.*"⁶ It is also defined as a learned course in seminaries.

We may describe Theology as the human mind's attempt at knowing the nature of God, the universe and the living beings, through the study of scriptures, meditation and contemplation, and through dialogue and discussion. If the scriptures are compared to the ocean, the Theologist is the marine biologist who studies and classifies the plants in it. The scriptures are like the ocean, containing innumerable things. The theologian studies and classifies them. To study the scriptures, however, he uses certain methods and we shall soon see what they are.

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Two words combine to form the word Theology—*Theos* and *Logia*. ‘Theos’ means God, and ‘Logia’, which is near to ‘Logos’ in derivation means “word”. ‘Logos’ is a Greek word which meant, according to *Wikipedia*, “ground”, “opinion”, “word”, and so on initially. Logos is an important word. Its meaning and significance altered or broadened with time. Going down the history lane, Heraclitus is supposed to have broadened its scope by giving the term the position of the unifying power behind all creation.⁷ In a sense, *Logos* was for Heraclitus the mind of God. Thus, since Heraclitus’ time, Logos came to mean knowledge or discourse in philosophy.⁸ Stoic philosophers, materialistic in their ways of thinking, gave a materialistic interpretation to the word Logos and called it the “active” part behind the “passive” universe. The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Philo, considered Logos to mean both the power and the Divine—the creative force as well as the Divine in One. (Just to compare in a crude way, it sounds like *prakriti* and *Purusha*). For Philo, Logos has a “nourishing” effect on the human soul, as Logos provides the spiritual power and knowledge to it.

The term Logos has travelled much. Philo contributed the word ‘logos’ to the Jewish tradition. From there, St John brought it into the Christian tradition.⁹ The Biblical meaning of *logos* is ‘Word’.¹⁰ Stanford Murrell defines *logos* as discourse.¹¹ ‘The Word was with God, and the Word was God’. So, Theology is “God-knowledge”. Logos has come to mean knowledge or the science of knowing. This term has two or three connotations, of which “the Collection of Christ’s words” or “the sayings of Jesus” are important.

In this way, Theos, that is God, and Logos, that is Knowledge, came to mean the knowledge of God, principally Christian knowledge of God. However, Theology, as the knowledge of God, includes the knowledge of the scriptures, saints, practices, rituals, and so on too. The question is, does Theology mean merely Christian Theology, or does it include other faiths too? This leads us to the scope of Theology.

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The Scope of Theology

Theology, as it is generally known, is a predominantly Christian discipline. Some limit the meaning of the term to Christian religious writings and to their study alone. Some others, however, have accepted theologies in Islam and Judaism too. There is Hindu Theology also. Here is an interesting and gracious comment about Theology from Rev. James Petrigu Boyce, who quotes Charles Hodge, another well-known theologian: "The term "Theology" is applied, not only to the science itself, but to any treatise on that science. This is true not only of a discourse upon the one true God, but even of one upon the many false gods of the heathen. It is also true, though the treatise be not a scientific discussion, but simply an imaginative narrative or poem. Thus "Orpheus and Homer were called theologians among the Greek, because their poems treated of the nature of the gods." (Charles Hodge, *Sys. Theol.* Vol. 1, p. 19.)¹² Rev Boyce further adds: *'The term "Theology" is, however, especially applicable to learned and scientific works upon God, or the gods. Of these, many are to be found connected with Heathenism. Such are the Vedas, the most ancient of the sacred books of the Hindus. Such is the Zendavesta of the ancient Persians.'*¹³ So, though predominantly Christian, Theology need not be confined to that faith alone.

Religion, Philosophy and Theology

Why should you study Theology? Theology is an important discipline. It teaches the student, who approaches it with faith, the essentials of religion, increases his faith in God, awakens in him the spirit of enquiry, and makes him an aspirant of Truth.

There is philosophy, there is religion, and then there is Theology. How to distinguish between them? Bernard Lonergan writes in *Method of Theology*: *"To identify Theology with religion, with liturgy, with prayer, with preaching, no doubt is to revert to the earliest period of Christianity. But it is also to overlook the fact that the conditions of the earliest period have long since ceased to exist."*¹⁴

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We must at the outset make it clear that in the field of religion, it is difficult to make clear-cut distinctions and separate one subject from another as all deal with God, the soul, and the universe. Yet, some characteristics are notable. Are the three—religion, philosophy and Theology—the same? No, they are not. If religion is compared to a university, philosophy is its science section, and Theology is its physics department. Religion is the whole, philosophy is its major portion, and Theology is a part of that chunk. This is just one way of seeing it. Yet, there is no rule that the part and the whole should be different. The part can be a whole, as in the case of a hologram. A hologram can show the whole scene even if it is cut in half unlike a photograph, which shows only half the scene when cut in half. So, while Theology deals with some topics, philosophy deals with some others. Yet there are meeting-points. From the Indian point of view, to classify Theology as a separate branch of study, different from philosophy, is a little easier because Theology is an exercise of the path of knowledge. That is, enquiry into God is the way of the person walking along the path of knowledge. Yet, the devotee too wants to know the nature of God and so do the others.

Theology is founded on faith. Religion is the term used collectively for beliefs, faiths, practices, founders, books, and so on—all together. Philosophy is the term used collectively to the study of the system of thought, methods of attaining knowledge, ethics, epistemology, aesthetics, logic and so on. Theology, however, is the study of the nature of God, strictly speaking. Therefore Theology is not the same as either religion or philosophy, but a separate and an independent branch of knowledge, under religion and philosophy.

Theology and Philosophy of Religion differ widely in their character. Theology deals exclusively with a specific religion; in expounding one doctrinal system, it starts from a positive belief in a divine revelation and in the continued working of the divine spirit, affecting also the interpretation and further development of the sacred books. Philosophy of Religion, on the other hand, while dealing with the same subject matter as Theology, treats religion from a general point of view as a matter of experience, and, as every philosophy must,

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without any foregone conclusion.¹⁵ Though this should be the case, Theology in recent times appears to deal with numerous other topics. We shall see how. But before that, we shall have a bird's-eye view of the history of Theology.

We have traced the history of the word 'Theology'. Now we shall just have a little peep into the history of Theology. Looking through the Occidental window, Theology begins with Greece. Since scholars give such a lot of importance to Greek theologians and since the word Theology has its origins in Greece, let's concentrate for some moments on Greek Theology. But before that, a few words of clarification.

We have said that the word 'Theology' has two Greek terms: *theos* and *logos*. *Theos* is both a masculine and feminine noun in Greek, which means God or Goddess. *Logos* means, in a general sense, 'knowledge'.

A Brief Note on the History of Theology

1. Theology in Greece

This note is extremely brief and just indicates the path taken by Theology. The word Theology (*theologia*) was first used by the Greek philosophers centuries before Christ. They used this term to signify their study of God and nature. We quote from the most popular encyclopaedia today, *Wikipedia*: "Theology translates into English from the Greek *theologia*, which derived from *theos*, meaning God, and *logia*, meaning utterances, sayings, or oracles (a word related to *logos*, meaning word, discourse, account, or reasoning) which had passed into Latin as *theologia* and into French as *théologie*." *Wikipedia* also says that the term was used in English as 'Theology' by 1362. A famous poem of this period about heaven, hell, and the earth in-between, and the dreams of a ploughman, is attributed to William Langland, in which he uses the word Theology. So, in a sense, he is the first known person to use this term in English. The term, says *Wikipedia*, meant the same as its Greek and Latin equivalents, and "had acquired in Patristic and medieval Christian usage, though the English term has now spread beyond Christian contexts."¹⁶

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We have said that Theology is the intellectual knowledge of God. What do Greek theologians say about God? Not much is known about pre-Socratic gods as their works have not survived. None of the pre-Socratic literature survives, but it's known that there were several philosophers like Thales, Xenophanes, and others, who have had different opinions about God and His creation. The most interesting aspect of Greek philosophy at that time was the naturalistic explanation of creation. God was not considered as the Creator but natural elements like air, water and so on were called the fundamental elements of creation. Thales, for instance, said water was the fundamental material. In one of the few pieces of poetry of Xenophanes that are extant, we read the first ideas about God. Xenophanes says:

Ethiopians say that their gods are flat-nosed and dark,

Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired. (frag. 16)¹⁷

The Greek gods and goddesses were pre-eminently mythological rather than 'theological'. That is, mythology delivered to the Greeks their Olympian gods and goddesses. As far as is known, Homer and Hesiod are the earliest known authors, poets and mythologists of the Greeks. Their works, especially Homer's works, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, are the bases of Greek mythology, which subsequently led to theological studies. Hesiod's *The Theogony* speaks of God and creation for the first time in Greek extant literature. There certainly might have been earlier philosophers, but their works aren't known. According to the Greeks, the first qualification of the gods is that they are immortal. In *Theogony*, Hesiod says that the Gods are immortal.¹⁸ Zeus is the father of the gods and goddesses, is immortal, and is the creator of the earth and the heavens.¹⁹ All the stars and planets and rivers came from Zeus, as did the gods.²⁰ But who came first? The firstborn was Chaos (not God!).²¹ There is, however, one interesting point: the ancient Greeks believed that the universe was orderly and not chaotic. The next known philosopher was Heraclitus. Of all the thinkers of the Homerun period, Heraclitus was perhaps the best. His idea of the Divine as the Logos and that all things are one, based on the Logos, is interesting: 'Listening not

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to me but to the logos; it is wise to agree that all things are one. (frag. 50)²²

Homer too speaks of numerous gods and goddesses, though Zeus is the patriarch. Zeus, however, is not the supreme God, and the concept of the supreme God is not so evident in Greek Theology. Zeus, as scholars see him, is like Indra of the Vedas. Subsequent theologians like Plato do not give such a lot of importance to the numerous mythological Greek gods. They, on the contrary, gave importance to a universal intelligence which is behind the design in nature and which is ruling everything, and called it the teleological proof. The teleological proof is simple: it is like seeing the effect and assuming the cause. Seeing the order in the universe, Greek philosophers assumed an Intelligence. Further, seeing the way all matter is in continuous motion, they assumed a cosmological power behind. So, thus far we have seen that from the Occidental viewpoint, Greeks were the pioneers in Theology, and according to them, God was not the fundamental Creator.

In his *Laws*, Plato writes a beautiful note about the state of mind of the youth of those days, which is true even today: 'At Athens there are tales current both in prose and verse of a kind which are not tolerated in a well-regulated state like yours. The oldest of them relate the origin of the world, and the birth and life of the Gods. These narratives have a bad influence on family relations; but as they are old we will let them pass, and consider another kind of tales, invented by the wisdom of a younger generation, who, if any one argues for the existence of the Gods and claims that the stars have a divine being, insist that these are mere earth and stones, which can have no care of human things, and that all Theology is a cooking up of words. Now what course ought we to take?'²³ However, according to historians, Plato, unlike his mentor, was not superstitious, though he had faith in God. His Theology was an open search for God but not belief in the 'heathen' gods.

In his *Republic*, (Book II), we see Socrates discussing with Adeimantus about what sort of education should be given to the people. They speak of music, poetry, etc. They discuss the need to remove poetry

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which affects future generations adversely, since children cannot separate allegory from truth. Then Socrates says that virtuous thoughts should be taught and God should be presented correctly. Adeimantus asks Socrates how that could be done. Here is their conversation: 'Very true, he said; but what are these forms of Theology which you mean?' Socrates replied: 'Something of this kind. God is always to be represented as he truly is.'²⁴ Here, Plato makes Aristotle speak of Theology as a pure science of expressing God truly. In this way, Theology was a popular word amongst the Greeks since the 5th century BC and was used by Plato and others. But it became the name of a system of study of the (largely) Christian tradition only by the 14th century AD.

2. Theology in Christianity

Origen (184-253 AD) was the first "theologian" of Christianity. He used the term Theology to mean the study of the knowledge of God, just as the Greeks did. However, some of his beliefs, especially his idea of afterlife, were considered anti-Christian, and he was excommunicated. The best theologian of the Church must perhaps be John the Evangelist, whose *Gospel* equates the Word (Logos) with God.²⁵ In just a few words, St John elevated the idea of God and opened new gates for thought. The subsequent Christian scholars, like Clement of Rome, Ptolemy, Dionysius of Alexandria ("the Great"), did pioneering work in the field of Theology. St Augustine, who is said to have established the "ancient faith", took up the thread and initiated a new trend in theological studies—especially with regard to the idea of the original sin. There were many other important thinkers. In time, Varro, Boethius and others made extensive use of the term 'Theology' and studied theories of the Christian religion using this word in depth. Thus, Theology came to stand as a science in itself. Theology, called the greatest of sciences and the dearest of subjects to monastics, has gained in popularity with the passing of time, and has occupied a place of distinction since the last few centuries.

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Christianity generally divides the growth and development in its Theology into three stages: the patristic, the medieval, and the modern. The first eight hundred years of Christian thinking and contributions by early fathers is called the patristic period. The next seven hundred years is the scholastic period in which extraordinary works like the *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas came into existence. The next period is the modern period, when the Age of Reason, the Reformation and such other 'revolutions' took place, and Theology got a secure position in universities. Today, Theology is not just a monastic subject of study but also an academic enterprise.

A continuous flow of ideas and literary contributions by scholars down the centuries has enriched the Christian theological literature. However, not all opinions are the same. There have been diverse currents of thought, diverse interpretations, and different schools of thought. According to scholars, not all could be called theologians, either. As Rev. James Nugent remarked in his article on 'Theologians and the Church', '*Theologian* in the strict sense is applied only to those relatively few men who are regarded as truly experts in Theology. The role of theologians in the Church is somewhat like that of research scientists in an industrial firm. ... a theologian who denies official Church teaching is not fulfilling his role.' And this began to happen during the first few centuries. There were independent opinions. Something had to be done in order to restore order and to unify the Church. Thus, seven Councils were held, of which two were very important. The first council of Nicaea in 325 AD was to decide the relation between God and Christ. Emperor Constantine convened this council, and created a creed called the Nicene creed, which gave to the world the idea of the holy Trinity. Thus the ideal of the holy Trinity was born. This set aside theological disputes created by Arianism and others. Arianism, whose founder was Arius, said that of the Trinity—God, Son and the Holy Spirit—the son was inferior, and was created by God. This idea of Christ's being "created" led to a huge theological controversy, and the Council called him a heretic. The subsequent councils too concentrated on the apparent confusion of the divinity and humanity

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of Jesus Christ. In recent times, there is a proliferation of literature on various aspects of Theology in Christianity. Numerous scholars are presenting newer ideas on the subject. So, Theology has been playing not a small part in the Christian faith.

The fundamental topics discussed in Christian Theology are God, the Holy Spirit, Salvation, the Bible, the human being and his salvation, Eschatology, etc. Of them, some of these are dealt with in depth: 1. The ideal of the holy Trinity—God, Son and the Holy Spirit—and their unity. 2. The idea of the fall and salvation of the individual through Christ. 3. The idea of sin. 4. The idea of the love of God for man, as exemplified in Christ's sacrifice. 5. The singular nature of Jesus' birth and resurrection, and so on.

(To be continued)

Footnotes :

1. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 3.8.11
2. Ref. *Dictionary.com*
3. Stanford Murell, *A Foundation for Faith* (1999), p.20
4. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, USA (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005), vol. 1, p. 39
5. Vincent Cheung, *Systematic Theology*, (USA : Reformation Ministries International, 2005), p. 5
6. Matt Slick, *Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry* website, "What is Theology?"
7. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
8. *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.
9. St John 1 : 1
10. *St. John*, 1.1
11. Stanford E. Murrell, *An Introductory Study of Systematic Theology*, introduction.
12. Rev. James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract Systematic Theology* (1887), p. 4
13. Rev James Petigru Boyce, *Systematic Theology*, p. 5
14. Lonergan, Bernard, *The Method of Theology*, p. 140

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15. Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, Macmillan Company, 1918, p. 13-14
16. See *Wikipedia* on Theology.
17. Cf. Richard McKirahan, *Theology before Socrates*, p. 9
18. Hesoid, *The Theogony*, see ll. 29-35
19. Hesoid, *The Theogony*, see ll. 36-52
20. Hesoid, *The Theogony*, see ll. 104-115
21. See Hesoid, ll. 116-138
22. fragment 50., cf. Richard McKirahan, *Theology Before Socrates*, p.12
23. Plato, *Laws*, translated by Benjemin Jovett, Book 2.
24. Plato, *Republic*, tr. Benjamin Jowett, Book II
25. St. John, 1.1
26. Further reading : 'History of Dogmatic Theology' in *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*
27. Rev. James Nugent, 'Theologians and the Church', in *Steubenville Register* (Ohio) Sept. 26th, 1968.

Be pure and sincere. Pray from your heart: "Lord, have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me." The supremely merciful Lord will give you strength, faith, and confidence. Call from the very bottom of your heart, and he will certainly hear and respond.

Be not vain. We are born to learn and there is no limit, no end, to the things to be learned. Let us pray that the Lord may give us good minds and right understanding. My earnest prayer is: May all learn to take the name of God and be awakened. May all be born anew. May all their delusions cease, and may they gain bliss.

"Service, worship, and obedience will easily make a person attain to Sri Rama." Is service something ordinary? Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "He who attains devotion to me is honoured and served by many. None can equal him. He conquers the three worlds."

Swami Premananda

The Sixth Patriarch

Aldous Huxley

In Dwight Goddard's extremely valuable compilation, 'A Buddhist Bible,' there is one document of which I am especially fond: The Sutra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch.' That blending of Mahayana Buddhism with Taoism, which the Chinese called Ch'an and the Japanese of a later period called Zen, achieves its earliest formulation in this account of Hui-neng and his teaching. Whereas most of the other Mahayana Sutras are written in a somewhat forbidding philosophical style, these recorded reminiscences and sayings of the Sixth Patriarch exhibit a freshness and liveliness which make them quite delightful.

Hui-neng's first 'conversion' took place while he was still a youth. "One day, while I was selling firewood in the market, I heard a man reading a Sutra. No sooner had I heard the text of the Sutra than my mind became all of a sudden enlightened." Travelling to the Tung-tsen monastery, he was received by the Fifth Patriarch who asked 'whence I came and what I expected to get from him.' I replied that I was a commoner from Sun-chow, and then said, "I ask for nothing but Buddhahood."

The boy was then sent to the granary of the monastery, where for many months he worked as a labourer, hulling rice.

One day the Patriarch assembled his monks and, after reminding them of the uselessness of merit in comparison with liberation, told them to go and 'seek the transcendental wisdom within your minds and write me a stanza about it. He who gets the clearest idea of what Mind-Essence is, will receive the insignia and become the Sixth Patriarch.

Shin-shau, the most learned of the monks and the man who was by all expected to become the Sixth Patriarch, was the only one to do as the Abbot had commanded.

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*"Our body may be compared to a Bodhi tree,
While our mind is a mirror bright.
Carefully we cleanse and watch them hour by hour,
And suffer no dust to collect upon them."*

So he wrote; but the Fifth Patriarch told him to go back to his cell and try again. Two days later Hui-neng heard someone recite the stanza, knew immediately that its author had not achieved enlightenment and himself dictated, to someone who knew how to write, the following lines:

*"By no means is Bodhi a kind of tree,
Nor is the bright reflecting mind a case of mirrors.
Since mind is Emptiness,
Where can the dust collect?"*

That night the Fifth Patriarch summoned the youth to his cell and secretly invested him with the insignia.

Not unnaturally Hui-neng's fellow monks were jealous, and many years elapsed before he was generally recognized as the Sixth Patriarch. Here are a few examples of his utterances, as recorded by his disciples.

"Since the object of your coming is for the Dharma, please refrain from having opinions about anything, but try to keep your mind perfectly pure and receptive. I will then teach you." When he had done this for a considerable time I said, "At the particular moment when you are thinking of neither good nor evil, what is your real self-nature?" As soon as he heard this, he became enlightened.

People living under illusion expect to expiate their sins by the accumulation of merit. They do not understand that the felicities to be gained thereby in future lives have nothing to do with the expiation of sin. If we get rid of the principle of sin

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within our own minds, then and only then is it a case of true repentance.'

"People under delusion are stubborn in holding to their own way of interpreting samadhi, which they define as 'sitting quietly and continuously without letting any idea arise in the mind.' Such an interpretation would class us with inanimate beings. It is not thinking which blocks the Path; it is attachment to any particular thought or opinion. If we free our minds from attachment on the one hand and from the practice of repressing ideas on the other, the Path will be clear and open before us. Otherwise we shall be in bondage."

`It has been the tradition of our school to take 'non-objectivity' as our basis, 'idea-lessness' as our object and 'non-attachment' as our fundamental principle. Non-objectivity' means not to be absorbed in objects when in contact with objects. 'Idea-lessness' means not to be carried away by any idea which may arise in the process of exercising our mental faculties. 'Non-attachment' means not to cherish craving or aversion in relation to any particular thing or word or idea. Non-attachment is the characteristic of Mind-essence or Suchness.

'Where thinking is concerned, let the past be dead. If we allow our thoughts, past, present and future, to become linked up into a series, we put ourselves under bondage.'

`Our true Nature is intrinsically pure, and if we get rid of discriminative thinking, nothing but this intrinsic purity will remain. Nevertheless in our system of Dhyana, or spiritual exercises, we do not dwell upon purity. For if we concentrate our mind upon purity, we are merely creating another obstacle in the way of the realization of Suchness, namely the delusive imagination of purity.

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"The Sutra says, Our Essence of Mind is intrinsically pure. Let us each realize this for himself from one momentary sensation to another."

The account of the Patriarch's last days is unfortunately too long to quote in full. About a month before his death Hui-neng informed his disciples of his impending departure and gave them some final words of advice, among which the following are notable. 'You are especially warned not to let the exercise for concentration of mind fall into mere quietism or into an effort to keep the mind in a blank state.' And again, 'Do your best, each of you. Go wherever circumstances lead you'. Listen to this stanza: -

*"With those who are sympathetic
You may have discussion, about Buddhism.
As to those whose point of view differs from ours,
Treat them courteously and try to make them happy.
Do not dispute with them, for disputes are alien to our school,
They are incompatible with its spirit.
To be bigoted, to argue with others in disregard of this rule
Is to subject one's Mind-essence to the bitterness
of this mundane existence."*

On his last day the Patriarch assembled his disciples and told them that they were not to weep or mourn for him after his death. , "He who does so is not my disciple. What you should do is to know your own mind and realize your own Buddha-nature, which neither rests nor moves, neither becomes nor ceases to be, neither comes nor goes, neither affirms nor denies, neither remains nor departs. If you carry out my instructions after my death, then my going away will make no difference to you. On the other hand, if you go against my teachings, even were I to remain with you, no benefit would be yours."

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After this he sat reverently until the third watch of the night, then he said abruptly, 'I am going now,' and in a moment passed away. At that time a peculiar fragrance pervaded the room and a lunar rainbow appeared to link the earth and heaven; the trees in the grove turned pale and the birds and animals cried mournfully."

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When love arises in the heart, joy fills it. Do not see the faults in others; see good in all and learn to love and honour all. Thus did we brother-disciples live together at the Baranagore monastery. If we did not see Naren [Swami Vivekananda] for one day, we would run to Calcutta to see him. And what attraction, what unbounded love Naren had for us—until the last moment of his life. Now all that appears as a dream. And brother Rakhhal [Swami Brahmananda]. Whenever I hear that he wants to go somewhere away from the Math, I feel empty in my heart.

The mind will always attach itself to something or other; so it is best to have it fastened to God and his devotees. You have left home; the devotees are now your next of kin. To live like this is to live a Life of self-surrender and concentration of mind. Lose yourself in love; be drunk with love. Forget "I" and "mine" by being absorbed in love. When the narrow little "I" goes, the Real will manifest itself and you will know bliss.

I scold you for your own good, considering you my own. I do not want to keep anyone at arm's length. I wish to make the whole world my own, through love. You, too, must make the whole world your own.

Swami Premananda

Fear of Death and the Problem of Evil

Swami Nityabodhananda

[The Late Swami Nityabodhananda, a former Editor of the Vedanta Kesari, was the head of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Geneva, Switzerland. In this article the Swami induces us to think over the problem of evil and how to face it.]

The thirteenth chapter of the Gita enumerates the virtues that help the awakening of true knowledge, virtues like humility, modesty, patience. If we can cultivate one virtue, then all others follow in its train. Now I am particularly drawn to the ideal of patience, its psychological and spiritual content.

We are so much pressed for time, we are so much in a hurry, that when somebody asks us to be patient, we feel that that person is not sufficiently civilized or cultivated. Patience, we feel, is a waste of time. Modern man is an 'anxious man'. He suffers from 'anxiety neurosis'. Where does this this anxiety neurosis come from? It manifests in his anxiety to do many things, to huddle up a hundred things in the day; but the source of this neurosis is to be found elsewhere.

For one thing, he is afraid of annihilation. Fear of death stalks him every moment. No doubt, the fear of death was always there since the beginning of man; but at no time was it so acute as today. Science has invented most fantastic instruments of destruction. These instruments can be used any time to annihilate the entire world. This threat hangs in the air.

We in the West are influenced by the idea of one single life. As we do not see beyond this life, we are anxious to realize all our ambitions in this life itself. That is a powerful factor that increases anguish. The fear of death, fear of annihilation, arises when we think that death pushes us into a state of complete negation of all that we cherished during this lifetime.

Fear of death dwells in the sub-conscious of man everywhere whether in the West or in the East. But in the East, especially

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in India, there are many attenuating factors. Firstly, the Hindus believe in many lives, and so they are not in a hurry to achieve all in this life. When I told a friend the other day that the Westerner believes in one single life, whereas we Hindus believe in many lives and hence we are not in a hurry, he turned round and said, 'O, you are idle people and that is why you believe in many lives'. The observation is very interesting.

'But then, I replied, 'it is not an ordinary idleness, it is a glorious and supreme idleness which does not believe in time, but in timelessness. Eastern civilizations are said to be deathless civilizations as they believe in timelessness'. In the sense I am speaking 'idleness' is an inner condition of the soul when it is quiet and when time-notion does not touch it. Meditation is a state of idleness. Art is born of idleness. All great prophets, Buddha and Christ, were idle. But from their idleness was born a supreme responsibility, a responsibility to save the world. A world must be created before it can be saved. This supreme responsibility is not the responsibility born of the cause and effect relationship, namely our responsibility towards father, mother, son etc., this responsibility is born in time. Christ's responsibility to save the world was not born in time, it is a cosmic responsibility and so intemporal. Nobody fixed it for him. When Christ wanted to save the world (and the world was always there to be saved) we may say that he destroyed the time and space world. He created a new world, that is to say he integrated the world into His own Self. So we say a world must be created before it can be saved. Before saving the world, one must will the world and real will is equal to idleness. In their idleness, which is the same as meditation, the world was born. Only in the timeless can a world moving in time be born.

We do not give time for the responsibility to be born; we are in a hurry. We must learn the art of idleness so that the nucleus of responsibility takes shape in us and then we will be different beings making use of time but not dominated and obsessed by

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time. We are now dominated by the time-idea and are slaves to it. So long as we are slaves to it, the responsibility cannot be born. For real responsibility – we are not speaking of family responsibility or social responsibility – but responsibility to discover oneself and to live up to that realization, is born in a state of relaxation, when we are completely relaxed of all time-notions. So then the fear of death is much attenuated in Eastern civilizations because all time is at our disposal and there is no hurry.

Only when we are relaxed from time can we practise patience, patience which is the law of evolution. Patience is the faith that the timeless reality will take us to our real destination. In this context I am tempted to narrate a short story which shows the notion of timelessness in an old woman. An old Indian woman was living in a farm near the mountains. The wild animals used to come during the night and spoil her crops. So she sent for a gun-man who came and waited for several nights to shoot the animals. After two nights, the old woman said : ‘My boy, you have been waiting two nights. You better fire your gun and when the animals come, they will receive it.’ It looks rather a strange story, but it is typical of the Indian view-point that is not at all obsessed by the idea of time, but which is relaxed in its outlook and attitude towards things.

‘Absence of attachment for objects of the senses, and also absence of egotism; perception of evil in birth, death and old age, in sickness and pain.’ (Gita, 13. 8)

This verse lists qualities like absence of attachment for sense objects and absence of egoism, then, reflection on the evil in birth, death, old age, in sickness and in pain. Commenting on this verse, Sankara says :

‘Pain itself is evil – birth is a misery, death is a misery, old age is a misery. Birth in itself is not a misery, but it produces misery.’

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It is very significant that both birth and death are here considered evil. Usually we consider death as evil, but not birth. This is our partial way of looking at things. We like birth and not death, forgetting that they go together. There is a saying in India 'When you were born, you were crying and others were laughing. Live in such a way that when you die, you will laugh and others will cry'.

If we are inclined to weep at death then we must rather weep at birth, for then we touch the cause of death or in other words, we take the thing as a whole. The evil is not in death, but in our manner of taking things partially. We are not courageous to accept things as a whole. We want the sweet part only and reject the bitter. We often think when we eat fish, why did God create bones, or in eating a good fruit, why did God create the seed which leaves only a small portion eatable? In wanting to reject a part of reality, we are rejecting a part of ourselves.

How can we approach the problem of evil with this partial consciousness? When this partial consciousness vanishes and we accept life and death as part of one whole thing, then death ceases to strike us as evil – or death does not exist, it is only existence that exists.

It is so true that it is a partial consciousness that awakens the idea of evil in us. Death exists every moment. We are told that a relation of ours is dead, then we are struck by death as evil and weep. On the contrary if we discover that every moment so many are dying, then we extend it to the limits of existence and we can never weep for existence. Existence can never affect us or strike us, for we are existence.

So then this seems to be a vicious circle. When we cut ourselves from the totality, we are conscious of evil. That is evil, this cutting away from the all, or the desire only to accept one part of the whole and not the all. Modern medicine has proved that

Fear of Death and the Problem of Evil

microbes of all sorts exist in a man of health, only they do not dominate and produce a condition of illness. When the body loses its equilibrium or state of fullness then only the microbes assert themselves and produce a condition of sickness. So also it is not the presence of evil, that makes us conscious of it, but a partial consciousness that accepts only a part of reality.

So then evil exists for us only when we are open to it, when we pay attention to it. Evil is a felt condition. It is evil when we live it. This does not mean that my felt condition is the only criterion for the existence of evil. This will be taking up a solipsistic position. A reality that exists without my being conscious of it must become *the* Reality and it becomes so by our openness to it. Our insistence is that it is our openness to evil that is evil and therein lies our salvation. This means that we can change the face of evil, if we can change our attitude to it, if we can be creative before it and not passive. Look for instance at the attitude of Christ towards the woman of bad repute. He did not condemn her like the mob. He only told her : 'Go and sin no more'. The Good in Christ was so strong, so dominant that he could not see the bad in that woman. This is of great importance. If we do not want to be obsessed by evil, if we do not want to see evil, then the way is not to attack evil, for then we are open to it, not even to have righteous indignation against evil, but to cultivate the amount of good, so that the presence of evil would never touch us or shock us. This is not to become thick-skinned or be like a wall, impervious to things. The presence of good in us is dynamic and conquers the evil and transforms it as in the case of Christ and the woman of bad repute.

Now what did Christ do to her? He told her of a state without sin, 'Go and sin no more'. And by saying so he created a contradiction in her. She became creative, caught as she was between two opposing states. Mistake or error is not a static state. It is the most dynamic state. In error we are

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caught up between two opposing states, right and wrong. It is a most creative epoch. Christ gave the woman this creativity.

We often take the state of error as a passive state and in the same way the quantity of evil as a fixed thing in this world. This is wrong. When we are in error and not realize it we are in a passive state; when we are in error and realize it, it is a dynamic state. How can we be in error and at the same time realize it as an error? I cannot commit a sin knowing full well it is a sin. If I do that, it only shows that my conviction that it is a sin, has not come from my being. Until my whole being participates in a conviction it is not a realization. And when my whole being is convinced about it, I cannot do it anymore. The position 'the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak' is no more there. That is a half-realization stage where the whole being has not participated in a conviction.

So then realization of an error takes us through this evolutionary process wherein the flesh which was once weak becomes converted into the spirit which is will and which is firm.

Until we come to that firm stage what shall we do ? I am in error and when I say I am in error, I create in me that rich creativity of which I spoke in Christ. The statement 'I am in error' comes from a state of knowledge and has my whole being behind it. It is not an empty statement. It is a creative state, because the moment I say 'I am in error' I transcend both error and knowledge, I englobe the opposition by consciousness, for the function of consciousness is to cover up, or englobe our oppositions. The consciousness imparted by Christ to that woman englobed the opposition in that woman. All that we can say about this state is that it is a contradiction. But when we live it, it is no more a

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contradiction, it is a creative state. We are most creative when we are between two opposing states.

We miss the dynamic aspect of evil when we look at it as a dead condition, as a permanent quantity. It is only when we see it as a dead condition, that we have horror of it. Evil is not a dead condition. It enters into us in a moment of partial consciousness and pushes us to a total consciousness by creating in us a state of opposition. And this state of creativity which evil is capable of awakening in us, is the fruit of evil and that should dictate our attitude towards it.

Our attitude towards it should not be pessimistic. We should not say that it is useless to do something, that it is always there in spite of ourselves, and remain passive before evil and allow ourselves to be subject to it. Neither should we be optimists, and say — and some philosophers of the 19th century said that this world is improving — that it is going towards an epoch when all evil will be banished from this world.

We should neither be pessimists nor optimists, but realists in this world where evil is a reality, but where the possibility of conquering evil by good is also a reality, if not a greater reality. That is what Buddha and Christ believed and did. They did not sit quiet saying it is impossible to change the world nor were they optimistic. Buddha said: ‘...never is hatred conquered by hatred but by love’. Here he was affirming the capacity of good to conquer evil. Here he was speaking of the creative state that evil can provoke in us.

Our part should be to go on working against evil, by being good and doing good, and thereby developing in us the good. This world is a gymnasium, where we have got

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dumb-bells and other instruments to take up and develop our muscles. Evil is a dumb-bell we can make use of.

The two paths taught by the Vedanta to transcend evil are: (1) Meditation, (2) Service. By meditation we increase the good, the divine in us and by service we participate with suffering and not only get familiarized to it, but reduce it and construct in us the shock- absorbers against suffering.

When this creative and constructive attitude towards evil develops in us an evenness of mind and equanimity of spirit, we would grow spiritually. Above all what is important is that we should gain in equanimity and evenness of mind. The world is like a dog's tail. It is always curved. If we put it in a straight barrel, it will be straight inside. The moment we take it out it will be curved again. So the condition of this world as made up of opposites should not disturb us, should not discourage us. We are here to dominate the world and to be masters in the spiritual sense. The presence of evil should serve us as a starting point for our spiritual journey. Then we should have learnt how to transcend many other obstacles in our daily lives, which threaten to destroy our faith in God and the Good.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, June 1967-68)

[To a disciple of Holy Mother] If mentally you hold on to the blessed feet of Holy Mother, in your heart, and happen to enter the abode of Yama (the king of death), know that poor Yama will run away in terror of you.

The children of Sri Ramakrishna have their homes everywhere in this world. Our Lord does not remain bound within any limited space. And know wherever he may place his devotees, that becomes his abode.

Swami Premananda

Self-Surrender

Swami Vireswarananda

Sometimes we hear people saying, "I have surrendered myself to the Lord and I have nothing to do." But self-surrender is not that easy. It is very difficult to attain. It also requires a very long, life-long practice to actually come to a point of self-surrender. We cannot come to self-surrender unless we go through intense struggle. It is only when we have gone through a life of struggle, when we have exercised all our strength and power to realise God, and find that we are nowhere, it is only then that we are able to surrender ourselves and it is then that God's grace comes.

But without our personal efforts we cannot expect God's grace. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "We are always to be at His door and then His grace may come." It is our duty to be at His door i.e., we must always be thinking of Him and be very near Him, then the chances of getting His grace are great indeed, though that will not in any way give us the right to demand His grace. Grace depends upon His own free will, but if we are always near His door, the chances are that we may get it. So though we might practise *Sadhana* or do lots of *Japa*, we cannot say that so much of *Sadhana*, so much of *Japa*, such and such austerity will bring us God-realisation. After all our efforts are put forth to the extreme, it is finally God's grace that helps us to realise Him. So without personal effort we cannot get Him, but then there is no guarantee that by personal effort we will realise Him, for that depends upon His grace. It is God's grace that helps us to know Him in His real nature. You may remember the story Sri Ramakrishna used to tell : The Divine Mother is born as the daughter of Himalaya and she was in his house moving about

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like a daughter. One day Himalaya told her, "I know you only as my daughter, but I would like to know your real nature." Then Mother told him, "Well father, to know my real nature, you will have to perform Sadhana (spiritual practice) like the sages who performed Sadhana for lives together before they understood my real nature. You cannot have it simply because I am your daughter." This is the truth in our spiritual life. We must put all our effort, then only divine grace comes, otherwise it does not come.

You may also remember another parable of Sri Ramakrishna: "Once Narada was going to the abode of the Lord and on his way he met two spiritual aspirants and each of them requested him, 'Please ask the Lord how many lives I have to go through before I attain freedom.' When Narada returned, he came by the same path and one of the two aspirants asked him, 'Did you ask the Lord?' He said, 'Yes, I asked the Lord.' 'What did He say?' That you have four more lives to go through before you get freedom.' He became sorely dejected when he heard that he had to go through four more lives. Then Narada came to the other aspirant (Sadhaka) and he too asked him, 'Did you ask the Lord about me?'

'Yes', said Narada.

'Then how many lives have I to go through?'

'Do you see the tamarind tree nearby and the leaves of that tree? You have to go through as many lives as there are leaves on that tamarind tree, before you attain freedom.'

'This Sadhaka was so glad that he would get freedom after so many lives and he began to dance in joy. A voice immediately said, 'My son, you are free this moment.' So that determination in him pleased the Lord and He made him free at once, while the other person became very dejected because he had to go through four more lives.

Self-Surrender

There is the other story of two birds, showing how grace comes. The two birds laid their eggs on the seaside and when they went out for food and returned they found that in the meanwhile the eggs had been washed away by the waves and carried into the sea. They were very much upset and they resolved to empty the sea by removing the water. They took a little water in their beaks and threw it on the sands. In this way they were going on throughout day and night. Then Varuna, the Lord of the Sea, wanted to know what the matter was. He came and asked the birds, "What are you doing?" They replied, "The sea has washed away our eggs, so we are trying to empty the sea so that we may get them back." Varuna was very much pleased at their determination and he gave back the eggs to the birds.

So without effort, without struggle, no grace will come, that is certain. It is only when we put our maximum effort that we are capable of having that grace. Otherwise we can never expect His grace to come, simply because we think we are surrendering ourselves to Him. We simply cannot surrender ourselves so easily. Self-surrender is very, very hard. You have to go through great Sadhana. Afterwards when you say that you have surrendered yourself, then there will be nothing for you to do thereafter. Your will no longer will be yours.

There is the example of King Janaka. He went to Ashtavakra for spiritual instruction and Ashtavakra gave him instructions, and the king was about to get on his horse-back and return, one leg was already on the stirrup, when Ashtavakra said, "Where is my *Gurudakshina* (offering to the Guru), you have not given me that." Janaka said, "I give everything to you. My whole kingdom, myself and everything I possess I give to you as an offering." Ashtavakra accepted it. The king remained in that position with one leg on the stirrup. He could not get up on the horse. After some time, Ashtavakra asked him, "What is the matter? Why are

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you not getting on the horse and going back to Mithila?" Janaka replied, "How can I? I have given everything to you and there is nothing I can call mine. There is no will left in me. I have not the power to get up on this horse and go back to Mithila." Then Ashtavakra gave back everything and said, "On my behalf you rule the kingdom." This is real self-surrender. It is no joke to surrender yourself.

You also know the life of Girish Babu who gave the power of attorney to Sri Ramakrishna. He used to say, "It would have been easier for me to practise Sadhana than to have given this power of attorney. Because I have given the power of attorney, every moment I find I have nothing to do. If I go to do anything, at once I am reminded that I cannot do that. It is for Sri Ramakrishna to settle. And it has been a great source of trouble to me to go through this ordeal."

So self-surrender is not a very easy thing to attain. We should not deceive ourselves by saying, "We have given up everything to the Lord and we have nothing more to do." We must put our maximum effort and try to realise God and then only will His grace come.

Finally, it is the Lord's grace that leads us to God-realisation and not our self-effort; but it is also true that without self-effort the grace does not come.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, January 1978)

Look, my children, there is the path still open to you. You are young, your minds are not hardened by worldliness. Weep for the vision of the Lord and pray with all your heart to him ; he will show you the path and guide you. Give up the sense of "me" and "mine". I pray that you all may be united in mind and heart through the Lord's grace; I pray that he may grant you right understanding.

Swami Premananda

God is also Mother

(continued from last issue)

Hans Torwesten

Thus the Ground, particularly its characteristic as the all-levelling female, has something “revolutionary” about it, because revolution seeks to reduce to ground level the differences between high and low, master and servant, which have grown too great. While the female is identical to the being of the Ground, while being and meaning are almost the same in it, the male must often give a meaning first, he lacks self-knowledge, so that he is always concerned to secure positions for himself – and then keep them. This is how in particular in capitalism, which presupposes a male society, which understands itself by what it has made out of itself. Marxism – not its sad expressions as State communism, but in its idyllic anarchic form, in which man is finally at home and goes fishing when he wants to – has something female about it. Indeed whenever man forms a final general picture of completion and satisfaction, he cannot avoid going back to the female. Completion is in the woman, who appears in the Apocalypse.

Is the female so firmly fixed in being, as we have just said? Here we encounter a fundamental contradiction, which passes through the whole contradiction concerning the male and the female – a contradiction moreover which is almost exclusively contested by men. On the one hand man is glad to claim that he embodies the Absolute Being, the eternal Subject which basically requires no object, the One without a second. If however a second being pops up next to him, this is in any case tolerated: as the insignificant, the non-self, the unconscious, the relative, which is fully dependent on the Absolute. If this insignificant being, which is actually a non-being, wants to live meaningfully, it can only

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obtain this if it acquires this significance if it gives up its boundless nothingness and is there entirely for the essential Being – God of his “representative” man. It cannot exist in itself, but only if it is there for the true being; only in this way does it acquire a modest share in being. Its paradoxical situation consists in the fact that it can obtain only an aura of being, if it recognises and admits its complete non-existence and admits, and is transformed into service of the Being.

It is however not so wonderful with man’s self assurance, because otherwise he would never have produced the counter figure: woman, rooted in nature, embedded in being, identical to herself, emanating peace and satisfaction, virginal beginning and at the same time eternally dependant. Man on the other hand is always restless, seeking, tragically strife-torn, who hopes for healing and fulfilment from woman. While mother and child form a natural unity, he is the rootless being that chance attaches to, who must first give himself a meaning. He has to seek a role for himself, he only “exists” if he keeps himself above water from day to day. His restless activity is only to be explained by a lack of being, and in spite of all the technical and cultural achievements he remains very sensitive, especially when confronted with a secret laughing and giggling, which he sometimes believes he hears in the background. Does this not come from the female background – that fine irony, which often plays about the woman’s lips and which man so fears? Of course she pretends to be hypocritically stupid and deliberately plays the part of the insignificant being, who looks up to him. He continues on, flattered, but was there not once again this smile, which calls him into question like nothing else in the world. Many people try to explain this contradiction; man’s resting in himself is pure transcendence, and if man here and there makes a somewhat unsure impression, this is only because he has not

God is also Mother

yet attained the fundamental transcendence. His apparent uncertainty and the impression of “chance” are evidence indicating that man is not content with “natural” life, that he deliberately foregoes this false quietude of a mere temporary being, because he is called to higher things. The alleged and so often praised self satisfaction is however pure immanence, a resting in the created world. Man must not envy woman for this quietude. She embodies the quietude of the beginning, the quiet before the storm, the peace of paradise. At the moment when she is also no longer content with the mere natural being, when she becomes a “person” who wishes to transcend her natural being, she makes just the same insecure impression as man – indeed it is even more difficult for her to feel right in this new role, as she is by nature intended only for immanence, while man finds his true being only in exceeding himself. There is of course not much point in pursuing this game endlessly, even if Great Maya produces a lot of fun. What we often regard as an aid in intellectual guidance, suddenly reveals itself as confusion, in which the opposite is always true. We can regard man’s activity as a “transcending”, which positively separates from the immanent female, which remains stuck in the material – or also as a fatal extroversion, which leaves man hopelessly in the outer world, while woman is always anchored in Being through her “inwardness”. In many Indian systems man on the other hand embodies this rest and inwardness, while the female represents the restless waves of the sea and the dance of creation. For a western existentialist a person can only transcend himself by “doing” something – he is what he does, what he makes of himself.

Thus, as we have already indicated, the “male” ideal of Indian philosophy for the active and the “person” of the glorifying West almost has something feminine about it, because it sees fulfilment in resting in itself. One can rightly point out that resting is not

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always the same. The absolute resting in oneself of the ascetic god Shiva is worlds apart from the peaceful purring of a cat lying snuggled up in the sun. One cannot therefore go very far with a simple division into rest and movement, passivity and activity. One can admire the body of a beautiful girl stretched out in the sun, and murmur something about the female quality of resting in itself – but no one will assert that this beautiful body, which simply is, emits the same qualities as a statue of Buddha, which in its own way embodies the naked being. Buddha can emit this transcendental repose only because he has conquered himself beforehand, because he became a hero who conquered all things, including himself. His relaxation was preceded by great effort and determination, which finally succeeded in conquering both inertia and activity – and the ignorance that is connected with all these pairs of opposites.

(To be continued)

Translated by John Phillips

God is the God of all; His grace is upon all mankind. But the so-called devotees of God fail to transcend the narrow bounds of hatred, jealousy, injury to others, and sectarian quarrels. God incarnates to break such barriers. But, again, his followers create boundaries, claiming to preach new and marvellous ideas, proclaiming that such a liberal spirit has not existed before; condemning all other forms and sects of religion as narrow, superstitious, and wrong—theirs alone being eternal, true and right.

Swami Premananda

Leaves from an Ashrama 48:
Social Utility of the Mystic

Swami Vidyatmananda

I heard it voiced again just the other day—the old complaint that the mystic is selfish. 'So much concern for my own improvement, my own growth, is bad,' the critic was exclaiming. 'How can anybody, considering the shape the world is in, be so self-centred as to sit about meditating? If a man wants to devote himself to higher ends, why can't he do something for others, such as patch up wounds or drain swamps or tear down slums—or even run for political office?'

This estimate of the individual who tries to devote himself to God is a familiar one. Superficially it is even logical. But the real fact is very different. The sage is the most valuable member that any society can have. Contemplation is a more humanitarian pursuit in the long run than the so-called unselfish work.

Or so it seems to me, and here is why. The natural movement of the world is downward. Cynicism comes more readily than faith, decay quicker than growth. How easy to be destructive, how difficult to be positive and loving! Left to its own devices, mankind must proceed toward chaos.

In opposition to this trend stands the mystic. His mind is wholly cheerful, his outlook steadily constructive. He sees how things are but is not affected by them. People can look at him and take heart. He infuses positiveness into the atmosphere. His example furnishes proof that real goodness is actually attainable in this world. He gives everyone who comes in contact with him a boost.

Electricity is everywhere, no doubt. But it required a Franklin to collect it and bring it down to man's reach. *Ananda*, too, infuses creation; but is available more easily when chan-

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neled through a tangible human conductor, the mystic.

In old Indian and Chinese civilizations the man of wisdom was regarded as the ultimate social benefactor. Not so in ours, because we still believe that action is everything. But pain will make us learn. We shall see one day that the most public-spirited thing anyone can do for his community is to present it with one improved unit. Here is a lifework we should encourage young people to consider.

If contemplation is my career, or even my part-time avocation, I should be proud and should proceed with serious application. For I am doing much more, potentially, than merely 'saving' myself. The detractors don't know what they are talking about. The well-being of the world depends more than we realize upon the dedication of its meditators.

Spiritual practice means to try to know our own defects and to learn how to remedy them. You will certainly become perfect if you make a habit of seeing the good qualities of others and taking on such qualities as far as possible. If you do not manage to become perfect in the present life, it is doubtful whether you will be able to become perfect even in a thousand lives. Take the stand that in this very life you will achieve perfection. Delusion will then be broken and darkness will be removed. All of you must be united in heart and mind through the grace of the Lord. Unity and harmony there must be. There is no other way. Know all to be the Lord's own. Everyone is good; only the little ego is bad. Shun this and you will be freed from all bondages.

Fill your inside and outside with love. I have been made a bond servant by the love of Sri Ramakrishna; by his love he made all of us bond servants. He was love inside and outside. Even his rebukes stemmed from his love.

Programme for January - February 2015
Sunday discourses begin
at the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm
Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

Jan	4	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 61	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	11	Swami Vivekananda's Puja	
Jan	18	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 62	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	25	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 63	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	1	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 64	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	8	Day Retreat	
Feb	15	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 65	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	22	Sri Ramakrishna's Puja	

Swami Vivekananda's Puja

Sunday 11th January
at Bourne End at **4:30 pm**

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 8th 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 22nd February
at Bourne End at **4:30 pm**

The holes in a spiritual aspirant are worldly cravings. The materials by which such holes can be repaired and kept closed are : hearing the truth of God, meditating on him, chanting his name, reading sacred books, ritual worship, prayer, and so on. At every step you will be tested. Be careful, very careful.

Believe that any good that is done by you is by God's power and that you are mere instruments in his hands. Don't think of the work you do as a task at all; try to do it in an unselfish way, not seeking for the results. That will break bondage. The selfsame medicine will give different results, according to the type of ingredients taken with it. Thus work is in one sense a bondage; yet if it can be done in a detached way, in a spirit of dedication to God, that same work will give you devotion and liberation. Confusion will arise and bondage result if you keep your eye on name, fame, or some other worldly objective.

Swami Premananda

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If God, the dispenser of the universe, is not generous, people's wants can never be satisfied by man's charity alone. Try to see the Lord's lila even in these miseries and sufferings. He is the supreme benefactor, but man is deluded by playing with earthly dolls! He forgets everything by being satiated with lust and greed, and thirsting for name, fame, and honour. That is why the Merciful God has brought famine, plague, and this great war [World War I], eventually for the good of many. See and learn.

Swami Premananda



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