

Vedanta

383 MAY - JUNE 2015

The Message of Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Bhuteshananda

With Swami Turiyananda at Kurukshetra

Swami Atulananda



Divine Wisdom

Swami Shivananda

'The Master used to say: "The breeze of divine grace is ever blowing. Simply hoist the sail." The grace of God is ever present but one must make an effort to deserve that grace. Of course we are blessing you. You also sincerely call upon the Lord. You will see how great His mercy is. He is ever ready to shower His grace. Take His name, worship Him, remember Him constantly and call upon Him very earnestly. You will see how gracious He is. So much grace will descend upon you that you will be overwhelmed; your life will be blessed. Nothing can be accomplished without His grace. It is He who has kept this world enchanted by His Maya. That is why one should also pray: "O Lord! Do not keep me ignorant with your world-bewitching Maya. Give me pure devotion to your lotus feet. May my life be glorified!"

'Unless the Lord casts His compassionate glance upon a soul, how can he cross this illusion? In the Chandi there is a line, "The Mother, the Giver of all boons, being pleased, bestows emancipation upon souls." That is to say, being pleased with the prayers and devotions of men, the Mother gives spiritual emancipation as a boon. Being freed from Maya, they realize their divine nature. It is very difficult to snap the bonds of Maya without the grace of God; but it is also true that if a person sincerely prays to Him He listens to that prayer and lifts the veil. He will listen to your prayer all-the more because you are in the world. He is especially gracious to you householders because He knows that you carry a heavy load on your shoulders. You are being scorched by the sorrows and bereavements of this world. That is why, if you pray a little, He will be pleased and come to your rescue, quickly removing the load from your shoulders. But that prayer should be sincere and earnest.

But in the midst of all your duties you will have to make a little time to call upon the Lord in seclusion; otherwise you will come to grief. There is not so much danger if one can hold on to God. It is very necessary to remember Him.

Vedanta

383 MAY - JUNE 2015

Contents

98	Editorial
101	The Message of Sri Ramakrishna <i>Swami Bhuteshananda</i>
113	With Swami Turiyananda at Kurukshetra <i>Swami Atulananda</i>
119	An Introduction to Hindu Theology-3 <i>Swami Sunirmalananda</i>
135	The musings of a Chinese mystic
138	Leaves from an Ashrama : 50 Sacrifice in Social Service <i>Swami Vidyatmananda</i>
140	The Value of Faith <i>Jnanada</i>
144	Programme

ISSN 1355 - 6436

Editorial
Will power
(Continued from last issue)

Do we need willpower?

The difference between men and men is the difference in will power. Those who have more willpower are seen to lead a happier, better and a more meaningful life. The more the willpower the better one's life can be. Those who have a weak will are likely to be failures, and remain unhappy and unfulfilled. The stronger our will power the better chance we have of leading a life of fulfilment.

(There is, however, one important point to be noted here. There are two uses of willpower—the good and the evil. Revered Yatiswaranandaji used to warn that without a strong moral foundation and a noble character, mere power of will can lead to disaster and tragedy. Evil geniuses in history, such as Hitler who inflicted on humanity unspeakable suffering, had very strong willpower. But it was misdirected.)

Evidence indicates that willpower and self-control are essential for a happy and successful life. The effects of weak or strong will power were clearly demonstrated through the marshmallow experiment. It was a series of studies on delayed gratification in the late 1960s and early 1970s, conducted by psychologist Walter Mischel, then a professor at Stanford University. In these studies, a child was offered a choice between one marshmallow given immediately or two marshmallows if they waited for a short period of, say 15, minutes, during which time the tester left the room and then returned. In follow-up studies, the researchers found that children who were able to wait longer for the preferred rewards tended to have better life outcomes, as measured by SAT scores (a test taken by school students as part of the

national curriculum), job attainment, and other life measures. Those who, in Mischel's experiment, held out for two marshmallows later – grew into healthier, happier and wealthier adults. Those with low willpower, the study discovered, fared less well academically.

Nowadays we all realize that willpower—the ability to control our emotions, behaviour and desires—influences our physical and mental health, our finances, relationships, and success in life. Yet, for lack of definite goals in life, training and direction, many of us feel like failures—in control one moment but overwhelmed the next. Many of us also feel guilty about letting down ourselves and others. Many people are slaves to their thoughts, emotions, and cravings, their lives dictated by strong impulses. Without willpower nothing can be achieved.

What is willpower?

Willpower is a special faculty of our mind which helps us overcome conflicts. It is a reaction to an internal conflict. When we want to do one thing, but know that we shouldn't, we know we should do something, but we do nothing, it is here our willpower comes in.

We have many common names for willpower: determination, drive, resolve, self-discipline, self-control etc. Willpower can be defined also as:

The ability to delay gratification, resisting short-term temptations in order to meet long-term goals. The capacity to override an unwanted thought, feeling or impulse. Conscious regulation of the self by the self. 'Willpower' is the ability to make a conscious choice. Willpower means the capacity to act at any time of one's choosing without hindrance. The power of will is more manifest when the situations are complex. Greater willpower is needed when there are conflicts and hindrances.

Willpower is closely linked with self-improvement. There is not a person who does not desire to improve in his or her life yet many people fail due to lack of sufficient willpower.

Many of us hope and believe that we could improve our lives if only we had more willpower. With more self-control we would all eat right, exercise regularly, stop procrastinating, and improve our lives in every way.

Do I have willpower?

Yes, all of us have willpower. Like knowledge and happiness it is inherent in every soul. Not only do all of us have willpower, we are, in fact, exercising it all the time albeit unconsciously. We feel weak not because we have no willpower but because we are scattering it in countless useless ways. What we need is to set definite goals in our life and strive to attain them slowly but surely. We have to realise that success cannot be achieved overnight. The Buddha used to say that he was born hundreds of times before he attained illumination. We too can develop a strong will following definite steps.

Development of willpower

Many want to improve their lives but report that lack of willpower is the most significant barrier to change. Most people believe that willpower is something that can be learned. Recent research also suggests some ways in which willpower can be strengthened with practice.

The development of willpower requires that we understand its nature. Willpower has four components – a strong desire, a definite goal, concentration, and self-discipline. When we develop all these four limbs we have strong willpower.

(To be continued)

The Message of Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Bhuteshananda

(Talk delivered by Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, then Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on Sunday, 16 February 1986, at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore.)

The message of Sri Ramakrishna is so vast and deep that it is impossible to expound it in detail. I can only touch upon a few salient points of it here. Whatever fell from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna or whatever he did was for the good of the world. Therefore I believe that whatever of his teachings that I share with you will be helpful to you in your life.

From the early days of his life Sri Ramakrishna was mad after God. God realization was his only concern in life, other things were absolutely secondary for him. He said, 'Verily, I tell you, I know nothing but God'. He lived for God realization ; however, he wished to have this realization not for his own enjoyment but for the joy of sharing it with others. Let me give you an illustration. One day he was in a mood of deep *samadhi*. The mood was persisting but he was trying to keep it under control. When a man enters *samadhi* and gets completely absorbed in God, it is impossible for him to communicate with others. So Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother of the universe, 'O Mother do not make me forgetful of the external world. I want to talk to the devotees.' Ordinary people cannot understand the deep significance of this utterance. *Samadhi* is a state for which all followers of spiritual life aspire; it is the culmination of the pursuit of spiritual life. For Sri Ramakrishna *samadhi* had become natural and habitual. But when he was in the company of devotees, he tried to avoid getting absorbed in *samadhi* lest he should forget the world and therefore the people assembled before him would

be deprived of the great truths which he was eager to share with them. He was an unending fountain of the eternal wisdom derived from his various experiences of the ultimate Reality. At the same time, he was also a keen observer of the external world when he was not absorbed in samadhi.

There are some points that Sri Ramakrishna particularly emphasized. First, according to him, God realization is the only aim of human life. Without God realization everything else is incomplete and, with God realization, nothing more remains to be attained here or hereafter.

Now, what did Sri Ramakrishna mean by God-realization? To put it briefly, it means an intuitive experience of the ultimate Ground of all existence in which the seer and the seen become one. God realization does not merely mean the vision of various divine Forms or having some higher feelings which may be described by different people in different ways. Complete absorption of the individual self in the Absolute: that is what Sri Ramakrishna meant by God realization. As it has been beautifully described in the *Upanishads*: 'Just as pure water falling into a vast sheet of pure water becomes one with it, so also becomes the self of a contemplative man who has realized God'.¹ That is to say, in that state the individual ceases to be an individual any more. He is not lost ; rather, he becomes the Absolute himself. This experience of unity is the real meaning of God realization. However, there are various other forms of spiritual realization, and Sri Ramakrishna accepted all of them. That was the catholicity and breadth of vision that Sri Ramakrishna had about God realization.

The second salient message of Sri Ramakrishna is that not only we should have that realization in our soul, but also it should be shared with others. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there were some people who, when they got any good thing to eat, would eat it themselves, wipe their lips and remain mum. They have no wish to share it with others. Sri Ramakrishna condemned

such an attitude. The great realization that one achieves in the spiritual path has to be shared with others. Only then will life attain full maturity. By sharing that realization with others, by helping others reach the same experience, our experience becomes fulfilled in the real sense of the term. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked his dearest disciple Narendra (who later on became Swami Vivekananda) about his goal in life. Narendra replied: 'It is my desire to remain absorbed in Samadhi continually for three or four days, only once in a while coming down to the sense plane to eat a little food.' Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'You are a small-minded person. There is a state higher even than that. "All that exists art Thou": it is you who sing that song.'² The Master further said that he wanted him to be like a banyan tree with its branches spread all around giving shelter to thousands of weary travellers. This incident shows the general trend of the thought of Sri Ramakrishna. He himself took great pains to disseminate spiritual ideas among the people and to help them in pursuing the highest goal. If the first half of his life was spent in gathering the treasures of spiritual experience, its second half was spent in sharing that wealth with other people.

We now come to the third message of Sri Ramakrishna. As he put it, *yato mat, tato path*, 'As many faiths, so many paths.' All paths lead to the ultimate goal of God realization. This was not a mere intellectual conviction but a fact that he himself had experienced through the pursuit of different religious paths. He was a great experimenter in this respect. After he had had God realization in one way he wanted to know how other people followed their paths, how they reached the goal, and what that goal might be. So he followed each path, paying scrupulous attention to all the injunctions and traditions concerning it, and he invariably found that every path led to the same goal, namely, God realization. The realization itself is something incommunicable, because it is one's own innermost experience which is beyond the reach of words. But as far as words would

go, he tried to describe his experiences in his own unique way, being endowed with all the knowledge of the different paths. He can thus be of immense help to the followers of different paths. That is the unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna.

In the history of world religions we never find any teacher doing spiritual experiments in the manner Sri Ramakrishna did. We find expressions of great catholicity in the scriptures of Hinduism, and, perhaps of other religions as well. The ancient Vedas declare : 'Truth is one: sages call It by various names'. Divine Incarnations and prophets have made similar statements. But history has no record that any of these great teachers actually practised the different paths and ultimately realized the same goal through each of them. As far as we know, Sri Ramakrishna alone did it, and this is what makes his life unique. The catholicity that he taught was not just an expression of a broad mind or philosophical outlook but had a deep experiential content. It was one of the most valuable experiences that he gained through his experiments. When he spoke of other paths, it was about his own experiences of those paths that he spoke. He respected every path and never criticized any path.

Tremendous faith is necessary for strict adherence to a particular path to the end. We must have unflinching faith in the goal. But if we can have equal respect for the paths that others are following, it is so much better. Sri Ramakrishna did not ask us to accept the truth of the harmony of all paths even on the basis of his own experiments. Rather he asked us to go on experimenting on our path as well as on other paths. He has taught us not to talk of the superiority or inferiority of any path before we are in a position to evaluate properly the worth of these paths. If we can follow the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, we can look upon the followers of different paths as fellow-travellers to the same goal as ours. This message of Sri Ramakrishna is of utmost importance particularly in these days of communal hatred and conflict. It is usually the lack of proper understanding of your

own religion that makes you pass judgement on other religions. Have respect for other faiths if you can, otherwise do not pass any judgement. What is really important is sincerity. Regarding this Sri Ramakrishna said:

Whatever path you follow—whether you are a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, a Shakta, a Vaishnava or a Brahmo—the vital point is aspiration. God is our Inner Guide. It doesn't matter if you take a wrong path—only you must have longing for Him. He Himself will put you on the right path.³

The grace of God falls alike on all His children, learned and illiterate—whenever longs for Him. The father has the same love for all his children. Suppose a father has five children. One calls him 'Baba', some 'Bap', and some 'Pa'. These last cannot pronounce the whole word. Does the father love those who address him as 'Baba' more than those who call him 'Pa'? The father knows that these last are simply too young to say 'Baba' correctly.⁴

May be, a person is not able to follow the right path; even then, if he is sincere to the backbone, God will see and guide him along that path until he reaches the 'goal'. This is Sri Ramakrishna's view on different faiths. The differences between different religions can be eliminated, and all communal conflicts can be resolved if we take this teaching of Sri Ramakrishna seriously. Only then can we really be humble and tolerant and be able to accept the different paths as equally valid. This kind of humility born of introspection is of utmost importance in our lives today.

For God realization we must identify ourselves with spiritual life only, and everything else should be regarded as secondary. We should concentrate all our energies in a systematic manner towards that goal which is God. This earnestness, this one-pointedness born of living faith in one's goal, is absolutely necessary for progress in spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna never

said that spiritual life must be pursued in one uniform way. He said that there is infinite variation in human temperament, and so there must be variety in the paths which can enable all people to reach the goal. If you rigidly insist on one path only, most of the people will have to go without spiritual life. That is absurd, and should never be done. God has created the universe in multiple ways with an infinite variety of forms. Similarly God has created various paths for the realization of the highest Truth so that everybody may find a path suitable to him. This is the simple understanding that Sri Ramakrishna insisted upon. He wanted to make spiritual life natural to everybody and he taught his disciples never to try to impose their own ideas on anybody.

Once Swami Vivekananda, who had already accumulated sufficient spiritual power, wanted to test it by transmitting it to one of his brother-disciples. He did it and the result was that the brother-disciple to whom his power was transmitted underwent a complete change. The brother-disciple had originally been following the path of duality, that is, maintaining the relationship of the worshipper and the worshipped with God. But when Swamiji transmitted his power to him, he became immersed in the idea of the unity of the universe and the soul's identity with God. Sri Ramakrishna called Swami Vivekananda and said: 'What is this? Don't you see what harm you have done to him by injecting your attitude of mind to him? He has been progressing well till now with a particular mental attitude, the whole of which has now been destroyed. What is done is done. Don't act so thoughtlessly from now on. The boy, however, is lucky that greater harm has not befallen him.'⁵ Swamiji remembered this teaching throughout his life, and emphasized it in several of his lectures.

Sri Ramakrishna was a man of complete renunciation which he regarded as a spiritual aspirant's most valuable asset. 'Through renunciation alone have people attained immortality',⁷ says the

Upanishads.' Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Nothing can be attained without whole-hearted renunciation.' But at the same time, Sri Ramakrishna said that renunciation did not mean the same thing to everybody. A monk who has renounced worldly life can renounce inwardly as well as outwardly. However, a householder cannot do that, and for him it will be enough if he practises renunciation only inwardly. He can meet the requirements of normal social life and discharge his duties towards his family and society. But at the same time he must have complete detachment in his mind. Detachment is what renunciation really means. It should be noted that this sort of division of renunciation into 'outer' and 'inner' does not reduce the importance of either. Inner renunciation alone is not sufficient for a *sannyasin*. He is supposed to uphold the example of total renunciation to the world, and so he has to be a man of renunciation inwardly as well as outwardly. A householder need not renounce externally but he must practise internal renunciation. This is another important message of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna knew that all people are not equally anxious for God realization. He divided mankind into four groups: those who live in bondage, those who are trying to get rid of that bondage, those who have achieved freedom from bondage, and those who never got involved in bondage but remained ever free. Explaining this classification, he said : 'Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net.

Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look! there goes a big one.' But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into

the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear anymore; we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.⁷

Most of the people are in bondage and remain ignorant of that fact. A disciple asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, is there no way out for such people?' The Master at once replied with great emphasis, 'Certainly there is.' He then pointed out the different ways open to bound souls.⁸ What are these ways? Taking God's name, keeping the company of holy men, constantly thinking of God, and now and then retiring to solitude. It is good to get away, once in a while, from your usual environment, where people remain entangled in worldliness, and think about God in solitude. That way you will learn to cultivate dispassion towards the world as well as an intense desire for God realization. Thus Sri Ramakrishna has given hope to the people who are supposed to be always in bondage.

Sri Ramakrishna was the greatest optimist anyone can think of. He never thought that a person could be doomed for ever. There is always hope for everybody; he spoke only about that hope and never had a word of condemnation for anyone. Sri Ramakrishna saw even in the worst sinner the living presence of God. He recognized potential divinity and the latent power to manifest it in all people, only the sinner and the ignorant are not aware of it. Inner struggle is necessary to become aware that you have the possibility, the innate capacity, to realize your ultimate goal. This consciousness of the goal will make you constantly discontented wherever you may be, so much so that you can never be at peace until you have reached the goal.

Sri Ramakrishna holds the hope of salvation for everybody. For him there is no such thing as eternal damnation, because God resides in every being. There cannot be a being in whom God is not, in whom Divinity is not hiding itself, as it were, and waiting

for its expression. Sri Ramakrishna asked people never to think of their sins but to think of the glories of God and of the way they might realize Him, and to have abiding faith in the ultimate victory of spiritual struggle. There is not a single soul for whom there is no ray of hope, for whom there is no prospect of God realization. This boundless faith in man is a most striking feature of Sri Ramakrishna's message. He was always a prophet of hope, a prophet of the ultimate victory of good over evil. Indeed, this is to be considered the main message of Sri Ramakrishna. This message of the Master is not meant only for any particular sect or particular religion. It is meant for everybody who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

Sri Ramakrishna spread broadcast the idea that, wherever you may be, the Divine Spirit is throbbing in you and waiting for an opportunity to manifest through you. You are all the children of God. Not only that, you are simply the essence of God. Only the veil of ignorance that covers the soul has to be removed, and the inner light will shine at once. Suppose, says Sri Ramakrishna, there is a room which has been dark for a thousand years. It now needs only the striking of a match for the darkness to go. It goes at once; it does not go bit by bit, although the darkness had been there for a thousand years. Similarly, a man may have been apparently sinful for many years. But that does not matter. It is only a dream: he has been dreaming that he is doomed. He has to be awakened from that bad dream. Just shake him, help him to break the dream. Then he will awaken and realize that the experience of the state of downfall was merely a bad dream, and that he is eternally free.

Sri Ramakrishna's message gives you hope, encouragement and an immense amount of inspiration so that you never feel satisfied with the condition in which you are. It makes you feel 'divine discontent' and yearning for going ahead. Never remain satisfied with where you are; go ahead, and stop not till the goal is reached, says Sri Ramakrishna. To illustrate this point he gave a fine parable: A wood cutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A *Brahmachari* said to him, 'Go forward.' He obeyed the injunction and discovered some sandal-wood trees (by selling which he got a lot of money). After a few days he went still farther and discovered a gold-mine and, next, mines of diamonds and precious stones. With these he became immensely rich.⁹

The idea is that we should not feel satisfied if we get some experience of joy in our pursuit of spiritual life. Spiritual life has endless possibilities. The more we advance, the higher will be our experience. The higher our experience, the greater will be our ability to solve our problems and the more we will find peace and joy in life. This spiritual quest must go on until our death. Only when we completely merge ourselves in the Absolute and cease to be individuals, and become free from all limitations, can we claim to have achieved the goal of life. We have to reach that one ultimate Reality which is the Absolute, without which nothing exists and beyond which there is nothing more to be attained, as the *Gita* says.¹⁰

It is the ultimate goal which we have to seek, follow without wavering, without slackening our pace of enquiry, undeterred by any circumstances. Whatever that state may be, the ultimate experience is beyond words. It is so deep

and transcendent that it cannot be communicated through words. In fact, the question of communicating it does not even arise because, in that state, other people cease to be separate entities. You become the whole world, and the sole expression of that one ultimate Reality. That is the goal we have to seek. This goal may be experienced by people in different ways; do not be confused by that. Take it for granted that there are different kinds of experience because of the differences of the experiencing mind. But ultimately all these experiences are meant to lead you towards the ultimate goal—the realization of infinite, absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, *sat-cit-ananda*. Beyond this no attempt has been made in the scriptures to describe the ultimate goal. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that everything in the world had been defiled by the mouth but *Brahman* alone had not been defiled in that way. All the knowledge that people boast of is in fact different kinds of ignorance, because they fall short of the ultimate Truth. True knowledge is that which removes all distinctions between you and the ultimate Reality. It is attained through complete purification of the mind.

I pray to Sri Ramakrishna that through his blessings we may all proceed towards the same goal, show respect towards others who are following different paths, and also be considerate towards those who remain forgetful of God and feel it our duty to help them get rid of their worldly dream.

Foot-notes

1. *Katha-Upanishad* 4.14
2. Cf *Life of Swami Vivekananda, revised edition* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), Vol. 1, p. 162.
3. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942) P. 673
4. *ibid* p. 407
5. *Life of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1, p. 167*
6. *Mahanarayana Upanishad* 12.14
7. *The Gospel* p. 86-87
8. *ibid*, p. 87
9. *ibid*, p. 109
10. *Bhagavad-Gita* 6.22

The Master used to say: "Children's feet slip while walking along the high pathways across fields. The child who holds his father's hand may sometimes lose his balance and fall down. But the child whose hand is held by his father is not in danger of falling." Similarly, we too are treading the narrow and crooked path of this world and there is great danger of our falling down. But there is no danger of our falling if the Master holds us by the hand. The Master is certainly holding us by the hand; otherwise who knows where and when we would have fallen?

Swami Shivananda

With Swami Turiyananda at Kurukshetra

Swami Atulananda

Although the sun eclipse of 1907 was still a few days off, Kurukshetra was already crowded with fifty thousand pilgrims from all over India, when Swami Turiyananda alighted from a packed train that halted at the little railway station. It was evening of the first day of the great religious festival. The rest houses and temporary shelters and tents were filled with men, women, and children, all huddled together like sheep in their folds. We went from place to place but could find no shelter and there remained nothing to do but spread our blankets with other pilgrims under the protecting branches of a magnificent banyan tree. So using our little bundles as pillows we sat down and rested.

Presently a woman approached us and, with palms folded, asked whether we had had supper. When the Swami answered that we had not yet eaten she hastily retreated, and, from her own camp, brought us milk, wheat cakes and a vegetable curry. Simple as the meal was, we both enjoyed it heartily. Then we rolled ourselves in our blankets and lay down to sleep. I was watching the brilliant stars through the branches of the tree when, after a while, I saw the Swami sit up.

"What is the matter, Swami?" I asked.

"Gurudas," he answered, "now you are a true Sannyasin." "That is what I want to be, Swami," I responded, and I quoted from Swamiji's "The Song of the Sannyasin":

"Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend?

The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed; and food

What chance may bring; well-cooked or ill, judge not.

No food or drink can taint that noble Self

Which knows itself. The rolling river free

Thou ever be, Sannyasin bold. Say Aum tat sat, Aum"

"That is it! That is it!" the Swami exclaimed. "We are Mother's children; we have nothing to fear. She gives and She takes. Blessed

be Her name." Then followed one of his familiar eulogies of Swamiji. "He was the true Sannyasin. In luxury and poverty he was the same. He knew that he was the *Atman*, the witness, ever free. Weal or woe meant nothing to him. The world was his stage. And how well he played his part. He lived for the good of others. There was no selfishness in him. He had no axe to grind. He lived and preached the Master's message. Our Master used to say: 'He can do anything he pleases. Nothing can spoil him!'

Then, after a little pause, "But we have to be careful. *Maya* is so powerful. We are so easily caught and deluded."

"But," I interposed, "Mother can protect us."

"You are right, Gurudas; never forget that. Always trust in Her. What is life without Her? It is all sham and humbug. She alone is real."

Another pause, and then: "Now try to sleep a little. Tomorrow we may find a better place."

I tried to sleep but could not. The experience was so novel and thoughts came rushing into my mind. The Swami was lying down again but I don't think he slept any more than I did. It must have been long after midnight when I saw him get up.

"Gurudas, it is raining," he said. "We must get shelter somewhere!" I had not noticed the sudden change in the sky, but as I listened I heard rain drops falling on the leaves of the tree. We got up and with our blankets over our heads went in search of shelter. But, as before, we found every place filled. The Swami, however, was determined to get in somewhere. And so against the loud protests of the pilgrims, we pushed our way into one of the open sheds. There was a great hubbub, loud voices and sleepy voices, abuse and discussion of which I understood very little. I thought they would throw us out bodily. But suddenly the noise quieted down and a little room was made for us. We laid down wedged in between other pilgrims like sardines in a box. We were out of the rain anyhow, and presently I fell asleep. When I awoke

in the morning I found that a child was using my legs for a pillow. I was sore all over, for I had been lying on a hard earthen floor which was none too smooth.

As I said before, we were in an open shed, that is, it had only three walls. And now the sun was shining through the open space. Many of the pilgrims had already gone out to wash themselves at the well nearby. We followed their example, and when we returned we found the shed half empty, for many of the pilgrims had gone in search of better lodgings.

I asked the Swami how he had succeeded in getting inside the shed when the opposition was so strong. He laughed and said, "You don't know us yet. We make a big noise but there is nothing back of it. You, in the West, take everything so seriously. Here you will see two men talking and gesticulating as if they were going to murder one another. But five minutes later they sit and smoke together and talk as if they were old friends. That is our way. These people are not educated but they have good hearts. When they saw that we were really in trouble they made room for us even though it inconvenienced them. I told them that you were a stranger in a strange land, and a sannyasin. At once they became curious and wanted to know all about you. Then they said, 'Come, brothers, we will make room for you.' You will always find it so. Sannyasins are respected all over India, especially by the poor. They are simple and kind-hearted; not sophisticated like some of our educated people. Swamiji loved the poor. His heart bled for them. 'They are my gods!' he used to say. That is why our Mission works so much among the poor. All over India we have centres for them. We educate them and give them free medical treatment. We serve God in the poor."

After a while he said, "We are on the battlefield of Kurukshetra where Sri Krishna preached the *Gita*." Then he began to chant from memory the second chapter. A few pilgrims came

and listened. He chanted in a loud voice with much feeling. I was thrilled with the beauty and rhythm of the Sanskrit text.

Just as the Swami finished chanting, a man approached us. He scowled and said, "What are you doing in my shed?" Swami replied, "We are Sannyasins, we are taking shelter here." "Who is the Sahib?" he asked. (We learned later that he suspected me of being an English spy in disguise.) Swami told him who I was and that I had come to see the religious festival and bathe in the holy waters of Kurukshetra. At this he became quite amiable and said, "You may both stay here as my guests. I will supply you with food." He called a servant and told him to place some straw under our blankets. Then, saluting us very humbly, he went away.

When he had gone, Swami said to me, "See how Mother plays! Now we can be at peace. Do you think you can stand it?"

"Yes, Swami," I replied. "I am sure I can."

A little later a servant brought us food — unleavened wheat cakes and molasses. He brought this every morning. And every evening, for nine days, we had wheat cakes and lentil soup. Sometimes our host would come and ask how we were getting along. There were other pilgrims in the shed but we had sufficient room to spread our blankets. These pilgrims cooked their simple meals on little earthen stoves built against the inner wall. As there was no outlet for the smoke the air often became suffocating, and it made my eyes smart. But we did not complain since it could not be remedied. We got along very well except that I suffered from fever now and then. I was, however, able to move about. On the days when I had fever, I could not eat the coarse food, and Swami, full of tender solicitude for my health, would buy me a cup of milk.

In the evening many would come to converse with the Swami and to receive spiritual advice from him. He would talk for hours till late in the night, never tiring. He was always ready to speak on religion. After our morning bath and meal we would go about

among the pilgrims, visit other Sannyasins and holy places. We were shown the exact spot where Sri Krishna delivered the *Gita* to Arjuna; the place where Bhishma expired at his own will, his body resting on a bed of arrows, and many other places sanctified by tradition. There was an enormous banyan tree in whose branches Sadhus lived in little shelters made of leaves and twigs. Most interesting of all was the great concourse of different monks of different sects. There were naked monks and those who wore only clouts, the rest of their bodies besmeared with ashes from the sacred fire. Others wore salmon-coloured robes and turbans. Some had long shaggy hair bleached by the sun and hanging down their shoulders or coiled like a little tower on top of their heads. Then there were shaven monks, and *Brahmacharins* in white tunics. It was the most motley crowd I had ever seen.

Erudite *pundits* and *Sannyasins* held discussions or read and chanted from the Vedas, while sitting cross-legged under the trees or in front of their little tents or straw huts. One monk had taken the vow of perpetual silence; another took food only when it was offered to him. One monk in a red robe had taken the vow to remain standing in one place for nine days, his arms resting on a trapeze attached to the limb of a tree. There was something to interest us wherever we went.

Then came the day of the eclipse, when everyone must bathe during the auspicious hour when twilight enfolded us. The crowds were so vast and the rush so great that though the reservoirs were of enormous dimensions it was difficult to enter the water. But we succeeded in dipping three times when the eclipse was full. It was a grand spectacle, this bathing in the sacred waters by thousands of enthusiastic devotees.

Afterwards we discussed the merit of bathing and other religious performances. Swami said: "It all depends on our mental attitude, on our faith and belief. Where there is true devotion the result is good. It purifies the mind. We must try to see Mother in

everything. That will make us spiritual." Then he quoted from the Chandi, "To that Divine Mother who dwells in all living beings in the form of Consciousness, we bow down again and again."

"She is in everything and She is everything. She is the river, She is the mountain, She is all." "That is a grand vision. Our Master had that. He did not see the Ganges, he saw only Brahman."

When the festival was over we separated. The Swami remained at Kurukshetra for a few days as the guest of a man who took him to his home at Anup Sahar, and I left for Delhi and other places on my way to the Belur Math.

(Reprinted from Vedanta And The West, September-October 1961)

Let us surrender ourselves to him and pray (with folded hands): "Master, may we grow in renunciation and dispassion! Make us pure! May we grow in love and sympathy! May you hold us by the ' hand!"

'Calumny, gossip and things of that nature are very bad. They drag the mind down. As long as one can, one should practise meditation, worship and study; the rest of the time one should keep silent, thinking about God. It is a good practice. Organization has its necessity and usefulness. That is why Swamiji founded this Order and introduced works of service for self-purification.'

Swami Shivananda

An Introduction to Hindu Theology-3

Swami Sunirmalananda

(Continued from the last issue)

Branches of Theology

Christian Theology has developed into a great science down the centuries. Theology, in the earliest stages, meant the study and interpretation of the teachings of Jesus Christ, his life, and the Old Testament. The topics included (this has been mentioned already) God, the Holy Spirit and Jesus; Jesus and the earlier prophets and their prophecies, angels, heaven and hell, sin and salvation, and so on. During the Middle Ages and the subsequent modern period, several other subjects (like saints, miracles, etc.) came to be studied while earlier subjects became sciences in themselves. Thus, the study of sin became Hamartiology, the study of salvation became Soteriology, the study of all things dealing with spirits was called Pneumatology, the study of angels became Angelology, and so on. Websites give several ways in which Theology is classified. However, Stanford Murrell's excellent work, *Introductory Study of Systematic Theology*, says that there are five streams of theological studies: Natural Theology, Revealed (Biblical) Theology, Dogmatic Theology, Practical Theology, and Theology Proper.¹

1. Natural Theology: Natural Theology is the study of God's manifestation—His nature. Now, theologians say that His universe reveals the fact that He exists. Though Natural Theology covers a vast area of study, it has its limitations.

2. Revealed Theology: The Lord's word is the revealed word. Or, what is contained in the Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—is revealed. Revealed Theology is perhaps the

strongest of all the currents of theological thought, since it discusses revealed words.

3. Systematic Theology: Also called Dogmatic Theology, it discusses Virgin birth, resurrection, Christ's sinlessness, and so on. These are certain dogmas held by the Church. Dogmatic Theology stresses and studies them.

4. Practical Theology (Pastoral Theology): This is what is called *sâdhanâ* in other faiths. The practice of spiritual life in order to attain to Heaven is discussed here.

5. Theology Proper: This final part of Theology studies the nature of God.

There are other ways of classifying Theology. *Wikipedia* mentions the various disciplines of Theology in detail. It says, and we quote in its entirety:

Ø Apologetics/polemics – studying Christian Theology as it compares to non-Christian worldviews in order to defend the faith and challenge beliefs that lie in contrast with Christianity

Ø Biblical hermeneutics – interpretation of the Bible, often with particular emphasis on the nature and constraints of contemporary interpretation

Ø Biblical studies – interpretation of the Bible, often with particular emphasis on historical-critical investigation

Ø Biblical Theology – interpretation of the Bible, often with particular emphasis on links between biblical texts and the topics of systematic or dogmatic theology^[6]

Ø Constructive Theology – generally another name for systematic theology; also specifically a postmodernist approach to systematic theology, applying (among other things) feminist

theory, queer theory, deconstructionism, and hermeneutics to theological topics

Ø Dogmatic Theology – studying theology (or dogma) as it developed in different church denominations

Ø Ecumenical Theology – comparing the doctrines of the diverse churches (such as Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and the various Protestant denominations) with the goal of promoting unity among them

Ø Exegesis – interpretation of the Bible

Ø Historical Theology – studying Christian Theology via the thoughts of other Christians throughout the centuries

Ø Homiletics – in Theology the application of general principles of rhetoric to public preaching

Ø Moral Theology – explores the moral and ethical dimensions of the religious life

Ø Natural Theology – the discussion of those aspects of Theology that can be investigated without the help of revelation, scriptures or tradition (sometimes contrasted with "positive Theology")

Ø Patristics or patrology – studies the teaching of the Church Fathers, or the development of Christian ideas and practice in the period of the Church Fathers

Ø Philosophical Theology – the use of philosophical methods in developing or analysing theological concepts

Ø Pragmatic or practical Theology – studying Theology as it relates to everyday living and service to God, including serving as a religious minister

Ø Spiritual Theology – studying Theology as a means to orthopraxy – scripture and tradition are both used as guides for spiritual growth and discipline

Ø Systematic Theology (doctrinal Theology, dogmatic Theology or philosophical Theology)—focuses on the attempt to arrange and interpret the ideas current in religion. This is also associated with constructive Theology

Ø Theological aesthetics – interdisciplinary study of Theology and aesthetics / the arts

Ø Theological hermeneutics – the study of the manner of construction of theological formulations. Related to theological methodology. ²

Charles Hodge classifies Theology into the following categories: Theology Proper (discussion on the attributes of God; of the threefold personality of the Godhead, or that the Father, Son and Spirit); anthropology (the origin and nature of man; his original state and probation; his fall); Soteriology (the salvation of man); Eschatology (the state of the soul after death); and Ecclesiology (the idea, or nature of the Church; its attributes; its prerogatives; its organisation.)

A simpler classification is by Rev James Petigru Boyce in his *Systematic Theology*. He says: ‘Regarded as a science, Theology may be classified in various forms.

1. According to the method of revelation, into natural and supernatural Theology.
2. According to the purpose which it contemplates, into Systematic Theology, also called Didactic, or Dogmatic; Polemic or Controversial Theology; and Practical or Experimental Theology.
3. According to the main religious idea associated with it, as Atheistic Theology; Deistic Theology; Rationalistic Theology, etc.

4. According to the name of its founder, or the race in which it originated, or flourishes, as Christian Theology; Judaistic Theology; Mohammedan Theology, etc.
5. According to the sources from which it is derived, into Biblical Theology; Christian Dogmatic Theology; and Ecclesiastical Dogmatics.⁴

For our purposes, we shall use the popular division of Theology, into five disciplines: Natural Theology, Historical Theology, Systematic or Dogmatic Theology, Practical Theology and Theology Proper.

Our next part will deal with an introduction into Hindu Theology.

PART -2

HINDU THEOLOGY

Introduction

Theology, as we saw, is apparently a Christian subject—both monastics and lay people are studying this subject and are contributing towards its enrichment. However, ‘theology’, or the science of understanding God’s nature and other related topics, is a natural trend of all religions, and especially, of Hinduism or *Sanâtana Dharma*. Was there a Hindu Theology, studied since centuries before Christ? Of course there was, and we shall show how. While reading the text below, you will observe that we have alternated between the two names: Hinduism and Sanatana Dharma. Though Sanatana Dharma is the correct name for this ancient religion, it is popular as Hinduism and so we shall use that name too. The title, “Hindu Theology” is owing to the

popular term, Hindu, for Sanatana Dharma. Swami Vivekananda has decisively stated that the ancient religion should have got the name *Vedanta dharma* or Sanatana Dharma.

Name for Theology in Sanatana Dharma

The term 'theos' (θεός), which is Greek, means 'God', and sounds similar to Deva, Ju (piter), Zeus (Zeús in ancient Greek), Dieu (French), Deus (Portuguese), Dyu (Cornish), Dios (Spanish), Dio (Italian), Dius, and other words with similar, if not the same, meaning. The word Jesus, its Hebrew equivalent Jeshua (or Joshua), its Greek equivalent Iesous, all sound similar to Deva or *Theos*. Deva in Sanskrit (Iovis in Latin) means 'one who shines', 'one who enlightens', 'one who is the divine abode', etc.

There are numerous names for God in Sanskrit, of whom Deva, Dyaus, Divija, Dyupati, etc are nearer to Theos. Dyaus in Sanskrit means several things: heaven (the divine abode), the gods, and so on. However, the most popular word for God is Deva and Îsha or Îshvara. Theos meant *divine* to some ancient Greeks. So all words point to someone or something not mortal like us, something or someone unearthly, but 'He who is brilliant, who shines, who gives light.' In this, both Sanatana Dharma and the other paths are quite the same, though the concept of God, which is theology proper, may be different.

So much for "deva" or "theos". Now about "logos". As we have seen before, the original Greek word, "logos", meant, according to *Wikipedia*, "ground", "opinion", "word", and so on. Since Heraclitus' time, it came to mean knowledge or discourse in philosophy⁵. Logos does not only mean God but also means knowledge or the science of knowing. So the knowledge or study

of God is theology. There is one singularity about the Christian concept of the word. The word 'Logia' has two or three connotations in Christianity, of which "Collection of Christ's words" or "Sayings of Jesus" are two. So, if Logos is knowledge, Theology is god-knowledge.

The online encyclopaedia says: "Etymologically, the name Dyaus is derived from the Proto-Indo-European root word morpheme *dyeu-* (zero-grade forms *dyu-* and *diw-*) with the meaning 'to shine'."⁶ That which shines is God. It's to be noted here that Ahura also means light or 'shining'. 'Zarathushtra in his *Gathas* talks of *Mazda* as wisdom, and *Ahura* as Creation/Creator, Mazda Ahura - the Wisdom in Creation and Ahura Mazda the Creator of Wisdom-God.'⁷ He who shines is Deva or *Theos*, and to know his nature is Theology, *deva-jnâna*.

Can whatever shines be God? The Sun too shines; can he be Theos? The *shine* or brilliance that is considered here is not material or external. It is different; it is spiritual and internal. In a sense, though the Sun is a symbol of the Divine, for our argument here, the Sun is material. He shall not shine for all Eternity. Not so the one who has been truly indicated by the word Deva, the supreme Lord. His shine is spontaneous, ever-increasing and self-sufficient. His shine makes everything shine. This is Theos or Deva. We are, at the moment, not considering the "gods" of Hinduism, who are powers.

So what is the name that is used for theology in Sanatana Dharma? Sanskrit is a rich language and it has, not one, but many names for almost everything. So, *tattva vichara*, *devatâ-jnana*, *brahma-jijnasâ*, and several other names can be given. Here is how:

The Subject of Theology in Sanatana Dharma.

We shall first find out the words used for theology in Sanatana Dharma. In Sanatana Dharma, there are many words, other than Deva, which are similar to *theos* in significance. For instance, *tat*. *Tat* is used to indicate the Supreme Being or just 'That'. The study of *tat* is theology. *Tattva* can mean Reality and *tattva-jnâna* is God-knowledge or the knowledge of the Reality. *Vichâra* is another word used to mean study or enquiring into any subject. *Tattva-vichâra* is an enquiry into the Truth or the study of the knowledge of God. *Jijñâsa* is also enquiry. *Tattva-jijñâsa* is enquiry into the Truth. *Prashna* is another word which means questioning.

Shâstra means scripture, broadly. *Arthashâstra* is economics, *jivashâstra* is biology, and thus *daiva-shâstra* could perhaps be the science of the Divine, or theology. Next, by the word Logos *shabda* (the primordial Sound or word) is also meant. However, *Shabda-shâstra* is not theology but linguistics. There is no particular science called *daiva-shâstra* but there is *darshana-shâstra* (philosophy).

The beauty of the Sanskrit language is in its richness. The same object or subject may have many different names, and the same noun may mean several things too. So, though theology can be translated as *Tattva-jñâna*, there could be one or two more, if not several, words for it. It can be *devatâ-jnâna*, *tattva-vichâra*, *daiva-shâstra*, and so on.

There is one more word, but that is based on a different field of knowledge, mostly sense-based. That knowledge is of the material and subtle worlds. That knowledge is called *pramâ*. What is *pramâ*? *Pramâ* is valid knowledge. The means of attaining this knowledge are six according to the Indian systems of philosophy,

and they are called *pramânas*. The person who knows is called a *pramâta*. The object that is known or is to be known is *prameya*. However, this is not exactly theology. All these indicate the ancient Indian interest in knowing God, first intellectually, and then spiritually.

So, for theology, we shall use *tattva-vichâra* or *daiva-shastra* as the Hindu equivalents.

What are the subjects studied in theology? Theology covers a vast area of the field of religion. Yet, some of the important topics dealt with are the following. Please note that we are making a comparative study of Christian and Hindu theologies. So for this, we shall follow the system used in Christian Theology and compare it with Hinduism. Thus the topics dealt with in theology are classified into four: (a) God: the nature of God and proof of His existence, the question of whether or not God can be known, God's works as the human being sees them, and answers to atheistic doubts. (b) the Scripture: revealed or human. (c) study of the human being. (d) soteriology or the study of the concept of salvation or the goal of human beings. We shall not deal separately with the topic of "the Holy Spirit" as in Christianity as we shall include it in the study of God. Eschatology too comes under soteriology.

Thus, in our study of the Theology of Sanatana Dharma, we shall see what the Vedantist says about God, about the human being, about the universe, and about the goal of life.

When we come to this, we must mention the Visistadvaita (qualified non-duality) concept of theology: *tattva* or Reality, *hita* or the method, and *purushârtha* or the goal of life—these are the fundamentals of religion according to Visistadvaita. This system of theology was put forth by the great Visistadvaita saint, Vedanta

Deshika. Thus, within the broad structure of Sanatana Dharma, there have been not just one but several systems of philosophy, several systems of knowledge, and several systems of Theology.

Thus, we now know that Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma had a system of study of theology since ancient times. We know what is studied under theology. We also know the several names used by the Hindus. In Hinduism, such a study is not limited just to monastics but to everyone. Though in the past, owing to certain social constraints, only the upper classes of society had access to the study, with time and with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji, the study of theology and religion are open to all.

Before going to the study of theology proper, we shall begin with a small introduction into the history of Hindu Theology.

History of Hindu Theology

Hindu theology or the theology of Sanatana Dharma or Vedanta, had its beginnings and development in the soil of Âryavarta—the land of the Aryans. This land is not limited to the geographical land called India now. It encompassed several “countries” of today. However, the heart of the development of theological thought was the Himalayas as it was on the Himalayas that sages lived, studied nature and themselves, and discovered numerous truths. So, geographically speaking, Vedantic Theology had a vast motherland.

To say that Indian or Hindu Theology is as old as Indian history itself is to make a statement of fact. This is because, enquiry into the nature of Reality or Truth has been a practice of thousands of followers of Sanatana Dharma since the beginning of the use of human intelligence. Pre-Vedic literature is not

available, but recent excavations and studies prove that the ancient Hindus were an evolved race.

If our studies begin with the *Vedas*, the antiquity of the origin of theology will be quite evident. Enquiry into the nature of God and His creation was the natural and principal occupation of the Vedic peoples, whom we shall call the Âryas. Who were these Âryas? Âryas were those evolved races of extended India who lived initially on the banks of the River Saraswati and spread all over Âryavarta (the extended India), and who were well-known for their spiritual knowledge and intellectual acumen. The land of the Âryas, as it was called in the past, Âryavarta, studied theology with intensity and dedication, and there are ample proofs for this in archaeological excavations,⁸ in the *Vedas*, etc.⁹ “*ko veda jânam eshâm...who knows the origin of the gods,*”¹⁰ was the usual question of the seeker.

Since when did the sages begin to discover the truths? Since the beginning of human civilization, perhaps? The ancient laws of Manu, and the ancient literature, show that the very system in ancient Âryavarta or in all places where Sanâtana Dharma was practised was to seek knowledge as the one and the ultimate goal of life. The system of those races taught them to dedicate the first quarter of life for gaining knowledge, then living as householders for some time without giving up the ideal, and then during the third and fourth quarters of their lives, dedicating themselves completely for God knowledge. That is, the whole of an Aryan’s life was dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, to know God, to understand His nature. A number of accounts of such pursuits have been left behind. However, there is no count of the number

of works that were lost with the passage of time. So, Indian theology or *Tattva vichara* has a long history.

While speaking of the history of theology, we must not forget studies in Indian history. European scholars and Orientalists, dedicated as they were to the study of ancient Indian literature, entertained limited concepts of creation and time. For many of them, God created the world some 5000 years ago! For want of any substantial evidence either for or against their theories, the imagination of such scholars had decided that the Vedas were born some three thousand years ago. They fixed the dates too! And the world believed! As if the whole of the Vedas were “written” by some poets within some three-four hundred years’ time! This biased and limited view has done a great deal of damage in history.

However, later scholars have rectified the error with a vengeance, recent technological developments have given ample proof, and all have shown that the Vedas were beyond time, and at least ten thousand years old, to satisfy the date-loving historian. For, “The genetic link between early Europeans and even earlier Asians has surprised researchers... (The DNA of an early human who died about 400,000 years ago, and who was an) early European was more closely related to a much earlier species of human living in Siberia about 700,000 ¹¹ years ago” So human beings were, even considering these scientific researches to be final, at least 80000 years old. Now just imagine how old the Vedas could be, since the ancient peoples of Aryavarta were known to be living on these lands since times unknown. In the *Rig Veda* itself there are many verses which indicate the antiquity of the study of God. ‘In the days of old, our ancient Fathers, through the work of holy worship, sought pure light and

devotion, singing praises. They cleft the ground and made red Dawns (perhaps crude oil) apparent.’¹² The Institute of Scientific Research on the Vedas conducted a national seminar on the scientific dating of the ancient events before 3000 BC. It was said there: “The astronomical dates, calculated so far, indicate the development of indigenous civilization in India from the dates even prior to 6000 BC. Astronomical references in Rigveda represent the sky view of dates belonging to the period 8000 BC to 4000 BC and those mentioned in Valmiki’s Ramayana refer to sky views seen sequentially on dates around 5000 BC. Astronomical dates of some of the planetary references in Mahabharata on planetarium software work out to be around 3000 BC.”¹³ If the ancient Fathers or forefathers of Vedic sages knew all this, they were indeed ancient. Some researchers have proved that Sri Rama was born on 10 January 5114 BC. It is a scientific calculation based on planetary movements. That means Rama walked on earth some 7000 years back. The Vedas were far more ancient than this period. We may infer from all the available studies that Hindu theology is at least 10000 years old, if not earlier.

Vamadeva Shastri (David Frawley) remarks: “It is unfortunate that this approach has not been questioned more, particularly by Hindus. Even though Indian Vedic scholars like Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Arobindo rejected it, most Hindus today passively accept it. They allow Western, generally Christian, scholars to interpret their history for them and quite naturally Hinduism is kept in a reduced role. Many Hindus still accept, read or even honour the translations of the 'Vedas' done by such Christian missionary scholars as Max Muller, Griffith, Monier-Williams and H. H. Wilson. Would modern Christians

accept an interpretation of the Bible or Biblical history done by Hindus aimed at converting them to Hinduism? Universities in India also use the Western history books and Western Vedic translations that propound such views that denigrate their own culture and country.”¹⁴

The Harvard studies of the myth of the Aryan invasion is another example to prove the antiquity of theology in India: “A path-breaking study by Harvard and indigenous researchers on ancestral Indian populations says there is a genetic relationship between all Indians and more importantly, the hitherto believed “fact” that Aryans and Dravidians signify the ancestry of north and south Indians might after all, be a myth.”¹⁵ Gradually, scientific research is pushing back dates, as of the Buddha’s birth, for instance. So, the truth will come out some day. We can also compare the Jaina Tirthankaras and their history to see how ancient Indian theology was.

One important characteristic of the Hindu theological method is its practicability. Hindu Theology was not for theorizing or academic discussions alone. It was for practice. There is a big difference between the theology of the Âryas of old and those of the later-day religions. For the Ârya, whether Hindu, Bauddha, Jaina, or any other, theology was essentially a spiritual pursuit. The theological study or *tattva-vichâra* that was done in the past, and the intellectual search for God that was undertaken, was all with the spiritual ideal in mind. For that matter, any Indian science in the past, be it Vedic studies or grammar, was destined to lead to the supreme goal—the knowledge of God or Self. The system was such. The fundamental law of Sanatana Dharma is that the goal of everyone, whatever the way of life, is the

realization of the Self—or knowledge of God. The idea of the academic study of God was not there in ancient times. For the Aryans, therefore, there was no such thing called merely intellectual knowledge of God, for even an attempt at intellectual understanding of God would lead to spiritual enquiry and that to illumination.

Principally, there was no difference at all between practice and dialogue. Not just that. The Vedic and post-Vedic records are based on personal experience, on revelations and illumination. The goal, as we have said, of the sages who searched for theological knowhow was to know God through direct experience (aparoksha anubhuti) and theory was only a consequence. Vidales says in his *Methodological Issues in Liberation Theology*: ‘A theology with a sound historical dimension realizes that “theory” and “praxis” can be separated only for pedagogical and methodological purposes, that in reality they are two dialectical moments in one and the same dynamic, all-encompassing process. The practical application is a structural feature and phase of truth itself. In the modern view of truth it is not simply a matter of interpreting the world but of changing it as well.’¹⁶ Whatever his idea, practice and theory could not be separated is an eternal fact so far as Hindu theology is concerned. There have been some dry scholars all the time, but their study of philosophy and theology has been for secular survival alone.

The Vedas are the earliest sources of human knowledge. *Vid* means to know, and *Veda* means knowledge. Swami Vivekananda says: ‘The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or end. But

by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times.’¹⁷ Those discoverers were the *rishis* (sages). They were the seers of mantras (*mantra-drashtas*) and not composers of mantras. These mantras are the repositories of all the knowledge of God that they discovered from time to time. They were like scientists—dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge—mundane and spiritual. Not all of them were necessarily monks and nuns. Most of them were householders.

(To be continued)

Foot Notes

1. Stanford Murrell, Introductory Study of Systematic Theology, p. 22-24
2. See wikipedia
3. Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol.1, pp. 41-2
4. Rev James Petigru Boyce, Abstract of Systematic Theology, (USA: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1887), p.6
5. Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy.
6. From Wikipedia
7. Fariborz Rahnamoon, The Meaning of Mazda and Ahura in the Gatha, p. 3
8. E. J. H. Mackay, Further Excavations at MohenjoDaro
9. While the several undeciphered writings, and images from archeological sites are evidences of symbolism of God, there are numerous vedic hymns which show the eagerness of the sages to know the nature of God.
10. Rig Veda, 5.53.1
11. The Independent, December 4, 2013 issue: “Scientists sequence oldest human DNA from fossilised leg bone found in Spain”
12. Rig Veda, 4.2-16
13. Serveveda.org
14. David Frawley, “Solid Evidence Debunking Aryan Invasion Theory”
15. From a website
16. Vidales, Raul. Methodological Issues in Liberation Theology, in ed. Rosino Gibellini, Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, London: SCM, 1980.
17. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, vol.1, pp, 6.7

The musings of a Chinese mystic

The mystic is Chuang Tzu who lived, wrote, wrangled and fished about 200 years before Christ. He was a follower of Lao Tzu, but speculated amid abstractions and contradictions where Lao Tzu was content to be homely and practical. But he is one of China's great men – for all that, one of its anti-materialistic sages, and perhaps its greatest writer.

The centre and pivot of Chuang Tzu's teaching was 'Tao.' Now this Tao was a very wonderful thing. It originally meant road or way, and developed into right road or way, and then into the right way of Heaven, or of the all-pervading Life of the Universe. This may mean God, in our conventional use of the word, or it may mean the Stream of tendency which makes for stability, peace and righteousness. According to this mystic, everything has Tao in it, especially when it acts out the law of its being. The steadfast earth has it; so have the unerring revolving suns and stars. The tip of a blade of grass has it. If metal and stone were without Tao, they would not be capable of emitting sound.

What the Sage calls the 'Heavenly equilibrium' is Tao, and he who holds the scales is God, and God is passionless, a kind of celestial mathematician, who destroys and is not cruel, who benefits and does not count it charity, who was before all antiquity and is not old, who supports the universe and does not think of it as skill. He is the great, the supreme, the ever-abiding Inevitable.

From this, Chuang Tzu deduced what may be called a line or law of life. The Prince of Ch'u, wishing the Sage to take charge of his State, sent two high officials to see him about it. They found him fishing, and gave him the prince's message. Without turning his head, he quietly said, "I have heard that in Chu there is a sacred tortoise which has been dead some three thousand years, and that the prince keeps this tortoise carefully enclosed in a chest

on the altar of his ancestral temple. Now, asked he, "would this tortoise rather be dead and have its remains venerated, or be alive and wagging its tail in the mud?" "It would rather be alive and wagging its tail in the mud," replied the officials. "Begone," said the Sage I too will wag my tail in the mud."

'Follow the path of least resistance' seems to him to be a sufficient gospel....It is bad to have passions: they 'disturb the internal economy.'

'Live, then, the natural life', he says. 'Once upon a time people *were* natural....'

'See what you have got', he says: 'a crowd of commandments which seem like the beating of a drum after a fugitive. Get rid of small wisdom and great wisdom will shine upon you. Put away goodness, and you will be naturally good. A child does not learn to speak because taught by professors of the art, but because it lives among people who can themselves speak.'

May there not, after all, be some 'method', in this man's 'madness'? Our strenuous conventionalities and artificialities may have done more to lead us wrong than right. The main thing in deportment is to be manly and womanly with natural self-possession, and not to put on airs learnt from a dancing master. So with goodness; the main thing is to be good, and not to seem so: and it cannot be denied that what we call civilization has substituted a great deal of seeming for being. 'Look at your fine philosophers,' he says, 'what claim have they to praise? Their nice distinctions simply amount to knocking a hole in a wall in order to stop it up with brambles; to combing each individual hair; to counting the grains for a rice pudding. How, in the name of goodness, do they profit their generation?'

The real truth is that this mystic was as one who sat above the world, regarding it as a noisy, drum-beating, show at the fair, and reflecting upon the vanity of it. Nay, as one who wondered whether it was not all illusion. 'How do I know', he says, 'that

love of life is not a delusion after all? How do I know, but that he who dreads to die is as a child who has lost the way and cannot find his home?... 'Fools', he said, 'think they are awake now, and fancy they are princes or peasants. The little dream-play will soon be over. Once upon a time I, Chuang Tzu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. Suddenly I awaked, and there I lay, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man.'

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, December 1906)

Devotee: 'I made this pilgrimage once before, too, but it was at an inauspicious time. Many have expressed the opinion that pilgrimages at an inauspicious time do not bring good fruit.'

Mahapurushji: 'Well, my child, we do not believe in those things, To see the Lord (i.e. inside a temple) does not require an auspicious time. All times are good. The moment you see the Lord even an inauspicious time becomes auspicious. God is the Supreme Good always. How can harm ever come to one by seeing the Lord?'

Saying this he started singing:

Blessed is Thy name, and blessed Thy abode;
Blessed are Thy actions, blessed Thy dispensation.

Swami Shivananda

Leaves from an Ashrama 49

Sacrifice in Social Service

Swami Vidyatmananda

Swami Vivekananda once remarked that if the Western people did not tone down their passion for material satisfactions they would turn into a 'nation of idiots'. But the pursuit of personal gratification has not diminished, and Swamiji's prediction seems on the verge of coming true. Mental illness is a gigantic problem in Europe and the United States; and there is now the new madness of drug addiction. Why? It seems to me that there is a correlation between self-concern and mental health--between ego and psychological well-being. The more self-concern, the less mentally healthy I am; the more my ego asserts itself, the more abnormal I shall be. The wisdom of our language is revealed in the term 'insane with jealousy'. The psychotic, we know, is totally bound up in himself. For him no one else exists. 'I am Napoleon.' 'They are doing bad things to me.' 'I am right; all others are wrong.' At one time (when I was not living up to my ideals sufficiently) I conceived the idea that I was being intrigued against. Out of a few coincidences I 'discovered' a plot, aimed at me. Later, when I got hold of myself, I found that there had been nothing in it. But for the time being I had been on the borderline of paranoia. This scared me and showed me how easy it is to 'go off' if one gets bound up in oneself. Freud's harm was not in his stress on sex. His offense was that he introduced a new idea--or rather put forward an old idea with apparent scientific endorsement--that self-expression is my right and privilege. Indeed, I shall be sick if I do not express myself.

If it is a fact that the more I think of myself the worse my mental health, conversely it should be true that the less self-concern I have the better off I shall be mentally. This must be what Swamiji had in mind in his reference to materialistic

civilization, for sacrifice is the basis of the old Hindu morality. The duty of the householder is to give up his life (that is, selfish motives) for others—wife, children, community. The duty of the monk is the same, but broader. His duty is to give up his life for God and all mankind.

When we forget ourselves we are mentally healthy and inwardly happy. Is there anyone more ecstatic than the doer of some heroic action, whose attention at that moment is concentrated on the well-being of another? Each of us has experienced the delight that comes when we make some gesture that is utterly selfless.

I know all this; let me practise it. Let me cultivate the habit of sacrificing myself every day. Let me believe that I am doing it for others or for God. In the final analysis, though, I am doing it only for myself. The Western spirit is materialistic, as Swamiji said. But Westerners can also be utilitarian, and nothing is more useful for one's eventual benefit than self-forgetfulness.

If the mind has a natural leaning towards God, one can make time and opportunity for spiritual practice. What is essential is earnestness. If you cannot carry on your spiritual practice here, you won't be able to do so anywhere. The Master used to say, He who has it here, has it there too." That is a statement full of truth, my child. Call upon God and pray to Him with great sincerity. He will give you an abundance of devotion and faith. Why should you go? You are doing the Lord's work. Is it a small matter?'

Swami Shivananda

The Value of Faith

Jnanada

The importance of faith in spiritual life is often underestimated in this country. We, as a nation, are just emerging from an era of agnosticism. Coincidentally with the rise of importance and respect for science, we experienced a decline of confidence in religion. This movement reached a climax shortly after Charles Darwin's *ORIGIN OF SPECIES and DESCENT OF MAN* electrified the nation. For a short time it seemed that religion and science were doomed to be warring factors. Many religious groups of the time felt that this theory of evolution was a direct attack on their creeds and consequently condemned it and forbade their followers to sympathize with it. The scientists of the time were more inclined to accept the facts of a fellow scientist than the words of a priest or preacher. Large numbers of people became estranged from spiritual life over this very issue. Youth particularly subscribed to the new theories and it became fashionable to be agnostic. People grew almost ashamed to admit that they attended church or believed in God. At the same time, those who still clung to their religious beliefs grew lax in fulfilling them. Mediocrity was the theme of religion. This country was still called a Christian nation but few of its citizens followed the commandments of Christ.

Gradually, however, this movement died down. The advocates of religion discovered that science was not in itself a challenge to their creeds. The scientist in his laboratory found that there was one missing element and came to suspect that the element was God. The agnostic youth grew into a man searching for something permanent, unchanging in a world of

flux and change. The nation as a whole has begun to delve into spiritual matters.

Thus today many of us are beginning to feel that science does not offer a solution to the problem of life. In our search for the answer to this problem, we have started to look to God. It is, usually, a gradual change. As we study various philosophies, we become more and more interested in those books which deal with spiritual matters. Finally we are forced to admit, somewhat grudgingly, that religion "has something."

However, in spite of the fact that we are commencing to see the true value of religion, we still maintain our old prejudices against faith. We still connect it with ignorance and fanaticism. We are willing to study religion and cautiously to apply the teachings to ourselves but we are afraid, as it were, to let ourselves believe that we can reap the harvest of such activities. We tend to pride ourselves on the fact that religion with us is purely a matter of logic. We accept God because it seems logical that God exists. We try to realize Him also because our reason tells us that that is the basic goal of man. This attitude is characteristic of us to a degree that we are inclined to feel superior to the person who has faith and devotion. We say: "So and so is too emotional. He is a typical *Bhakta*. I could never be like that."

We do not realize how much we are denying ourselves in the non-acceptance of faith. Actually we cannot accomplish a thing in spiritual life unless we have a firm foundation of faith on which to build. Without faith in God, we cannot mobilize ourselves for action. Spiritual life is not child's play; it requires courage, persistent effort and the ability to concentrate. It would be impossible to apply any of these qualities to spiritual life unless we had faith in the goal.

It is, of course, easy to state the necessity of faith but it is more difficult to prescribe the ways of acquiring faith. The first step would be a complete intellectual conviction that God is and can be realized. This can be achieved by seriously reading the works of the seers and saints. The next step is a deep intellectual conviction that realizing God is more desirable than enjoying worldly pleasures. This can easily be arrived at by observing how fleeting and unsubstantial these pleasures are. A study of history will quickly persuade us that the world is indeed a "dog's curly tail"; it can never be permanently straightened out. A study of the various types of people in the world soon gives the lie to the fairy story of "And they lived happily ever after." Very few worldly people ever achieve happiness and those that do are constantly in danger of losing it by circumstances beyond their control such as the death of a husband, wife or child.

Then having been intellectually persuaded that realizing God is the only worthy goal in life, we must seek a teacher. It is the teacher who will inspire us with faith in God. It is the teacher who gives us confidence that God can be seen not only by the saints of old but by ourselves. From him we get the courage to make our first effort and to persevere. Thus through the teacher's grace and our own effort, we gradually obtain the faith to struggle with ever increasing vigour.

Just as the child, encouraged by its parents obtains the courage to take its first tottering step, and then another and another until it gains the strength and faith to walk and run and jump, so we, encouraged by our teacher, take our first step in realizing God. If we stumble and fall down, we are told that strength is not the ability to stand upright but the determination to get up again after having fallen.

So our confidence grows and, in addition to our intellectual beliefs, we attain an inner conviction that we are on the right path. Many times events will challenge this knowledge. Occasionally doubts and deep discouragement will arise, but as we struggle ahead we come to recognize them as passing moods, mirage-like in character and are not deceived by them. Each time this happens we grow a little stronger. Each time our faith in the ideal and in the teacher grows.

Many people ask us: "Is not this blind faith? Where is there any real proof that God exists?" But we answer: "Of course it is blind faith, but it produces results. Shall I refuse to use it merely because it holds no empirical proof of God. Sri Ramakrishna told the story of the milkmaid who, giving the excuse that she had to wait for the boat, was told by the priest that if she took the name of the Lord, she could walk across the river. Several days later when asked how she managed to be on time, she told the priest that she had carried out his instructions. The priest was amazed. As she left for home, he followed her and watched her confidently stride across the water. He started to follow but she, watching him said, "If you really have confidence in the name of God, why do you gather up your robes before you step on the water?"

Faith is blind until one has realized God. Real faith can only come after one has seen God, just as the child gets real confidence only after taking his first step. Maharaj said: "Faith, intense faith! He who has acquired faith has seen God. If you have faith a penny has great value; if you have no faith, a gold piece is worth nothing. He who has no faith in God, doubts everything. He who has faith in God overcomes all doubts."

(Reprinted from Vedanta And The West, November-December 1947)

Programme for May - June 2015

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

May	3	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 70	Swami Dayatmananda
May	10	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 71	Swami Dayatmananda
May	17	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 72	Swami Dayatmananda
May	24	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 73	Swami Dayatmananda
May	31	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 74	Swami Dayatmananda
Jun	7	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 75	Swami Dayatmananda
Jun	14	Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to Religious Thought	Swami Tattwamayanda
Jun	21	Crest Jewel of Discrimination	Swami Shivarupananda
Jun	28	Day Retreat	

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 28th June
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

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

I am not the body, and the sixfold change belongs only to the body. I am that eternal Supreme Being, ever pure, illumined and free. The Master has given me that knowledge in the fullest measure. That is why it does not make any difference whether the body is well, sick or old. The body will certainly follow its nature. The realizations and experiences which I used to have as a result of much effort are coming to me naturally without effort; the Master is graciously bestowing upon me those high experiences. He has made clear to me the way to the abode of immortality. Time, place and person are categories that belong to the world of phenomena. When the mind becomes absorbed in meditation one has no consciousness of these categories.

Having once tasted of the joy of the Infinite, earthly pleasures seem trifling. "That which is infinite is alone bliss; there is no joy in things finite. The Infinite is bliss itself." Only a portion of that infinite God has manifested Himself as this universe with its suns, moons, stars, and countless spheres of existence. The rest remains unmanifest. No one has ever been able or will be able to know Him. How can man with his limited understanding comprehend the infinite God?

Vedanta

is a bi-monthly magazine published, since 1951, by the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire
SL8 5LF, U.K.

Phone: (01628) 526464

www.vedantauk.com

Subscription rate for 6 issues: £9 or \$17.50 post free.

Editor: Swami Dayatmananda

£1.50

The moment you have a feeling of weakness or of lacking in anything, tell the Master about it. If you pray very sincerely, you are bound to get a response. Repeat his name often. The repetition of his name will purify your body and mind, washing away all impurities. You have renounced everything in order to be sadhus. The realization of God is the aim of your life, my child. Your ideal is "to remain unaffected by praise or blame, to be silent and contented with a little".

Swami Shivananda



A registered Charity