

Vedanta

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God - Kind or Cruel?

Towards Meditation
Swami Yatiswarananda



Divine Wisdom

The Awakening of the Kundalini

Awake, Mother' Awake'
How long Thou hast been asleep!
In the lotus of the Muladhara'
Fulfil Thy secret function, Mother:
Rise to the thousand-petalled lotus within the head,
Where mighty Siva has His dwelling'
Swiftly pierce the six lotuses;
And take away my grief,
O Essence of Consciousness'

MASTER: The song speaks of the Kundalini's passing through the six centres. God is both within and without. From within He creates the various states of mind. After passing through the six centres, the Jiva goes beyond the realm of maya and becomes united with the Supreme Soul. This is the vision of God.

One cannot see God unless maya steps aside from the door. Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita were walking together. Rama was in front, Sita walked in the middle, and Lakshmana followed them. But Lakshmana could not see Rama because Sita was between them. In like manner, man cannot see God because maya is between them.

Seven planes of the Vedas

There is much similarity between the seven -planes' described in the Vedanta and the six -centres' of Yoga. The first three planes of the Vedas may be compared to the first three Yogic centres, namely, Muladhara, Svadhithana, and Manipura. With ordinary people the mind dwells in these three planes, at the organs of evacuation and generation and at the navel. mind rises there, the aspirant sees God. But still there is a barrier between God and the devotee. It is like the barrier of glass in a lantern, which keeps one from touching the light. King Janaka used to give instruction about Brahmajnana from the fifth plane. Sometimes he dwelt on the fifth plane, and sometimes on the sixth.

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Editorial
Worship of The Divine Mother –10

(Continued from The last issue)

‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.’

Bhuta shuddhi or Divinization of the worshipper

Now follows an important ritual called Bhuta shuddhi (Purification of the five elements) . This is a highly developed Yogic process whereby the worshipper purifies his inner personality in order to be fit to worship the Deity and meditate on Him in his heart. In order to understand this highly elevating process we must have a little background knowledge.

Vedanta teaches us that the world is composed of five elements—Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. These are the elements of which the human organism (body and mind) is also composed. These five Elements each have one centre of operation in the five *Chakras* of the spinal column. The *kundalini* (It is believed that there are seven Yogic Chakras or centres of consciousness in every human body) is supposed to pass from the Muladhara to the Sahasrara Chakra, absorbing the Elements one after another at each of these centres.

Let us, here, recollect the experience of Sri Ramakrishna with Kundalini.

‘Just before my attaining this state of mind, it had been revealed to me how the kundalini is aroused, how the lotuses of the different centres blossom forth, and how all this culminates in samadhi. This is a very secret experience. I saw a boy twenty-two or twenty-three years old, exactly resembling me, enter the Sushumna nerve and commune with the lotuses touching them with his tongue. He began with the centre at the anus and passed through the centres at the sexual organ, naval, and so on. The different lotuses of those centres—four-petalled, six-petalled, ten-petalled, and so forth—had been drooping, but, at his touch they stood erect.

'When he reached the heart – I distinctly remember it – and communed with the lotus there, touching with his tongue, the twelve-petalled lotus, which was hanging head down, stood erect and open its petals. Then he came to the sixteen-petalled lotus in the throat and two petalled lotus in the forehead. And last of all, the thousand-petalled lotus in the head blossomed. Since then I have been in this state.'

After absorbing all the five elements the *Kundalini* reaches the Ajna or the mind centre where the *Akasha* (Space) is absorbed into the mind and the latter into subtle Prakriti. This Prakriti, in the form of Kundalini Shakti, thereafter unites with Shiva (The Supreme Consciousness) in the Sahasrara Chakra. The worshipper meditates on the *kundalini* power as rising from (*Muladhara*) the base of the spine, to the head (*Sahasrara*), where it gets united with the light of the Supreme Spirit.

The worshipper, during this process, imagines that his impure gross and subtle bodies become dried and burnt up by the mystic fire. This drying up process is accomplished by uttering the Mystic Syllables *yam*, and *ram*.

Thereafter he imagines that he is putting on a new divine body, free from all taints of sin, created out of his luminous Self. After this the worshipper invokes the divine Presence in the heart of the new luminous body. (The Deity thus invoked inside is thereafter worshipped mentally called *Manasika Puja*.)

In Yogic practice this process actually takes place (See Sri Ramakrishna's experiences given below) but in the process of worship this is only imagined to take place in the heart of the worshipper.

Thus, in imagination, the whole universe is dissolved in Brahman. Then the black man of sin (*Papa Purusha*) in the body is burnt and the body is purified. The *Papa-Purusha* is the evil-principle in man. With the destruction of this evil principle and the creation of the new divine body the process of Bhuta shuddhi is complete.

Repeating 'Soham' the worshiper infuses his body with the life of the deity.

Let us take a look at some of the experiences Sri Ramakrishna had when he performed worship at Dakshineswar. Although these experiences came to him at different periods of his life, we mention them here all together:

'The Master used to say that at the time of performing various rituals he actually saw the letters of the mantras in bright colours set in the body.

Again, when according to the prescribed method of worship he uttered the mantra ram, sprinkled water all round himself and imagined a wall of fire existing around the place of worship, he actually saw an impassable wall of fire with a hundred tongues spread out, protecting the place of worship and the worshipper from all obstacles.'

'At the time of performing Sandhya and worship [said the Master] I used to think, according to scriptural prescription, that the Papa Purusha (sinful self) within had been burnt up. Who knew then that there was actually such a man of sin within the body and that it could be actually burnt and destroyed? A burning sensation came on the body from the beginning of the Sadhana.

I thought, 'What is this disease?' It increased by degrees and became unbearable. Various kinds of oils prescribed by physicians were used; but it could by no means be alleviated. One day, while I was sitting under the Panchavati, I saw that a jet-black person with red eyes and a hideous appearance came reeling, as if drunk, out of this (showing his own body), and walked before me. I saw again another person of placid mien, in ochre-coloured dress, with a trident in his hand come out similarly from the body, vehemently attack the other and kill him. The burning sensation in the body decreased for a short time after I had that vision. I suffered from that burning sensation continually for six months before the Papa Purusha was burnt up.

Bhuta shuddhi is a highly effective process. Done sincerely the practitioner gradually comes to feel his divinity and feels blessed. After all this is the real purpose of Puja.

(From Sri Ramakrishna the great Master)

(To be continued)

GOD—KIND OR CRUEL?

(Editorial from *Prabuddha Bharata*, April 1963)

I

All scriptures, all religions, all saints and all savants say with one voice that God is Goodness, Bliss and Truth and that there is not the least taint of imperfection in Him. Numerous hymns and songs are there gloriously extolling His merciful nature. Ardent prayers for descent of this divine mercy have been uttered throughout the ages in all parts of the world and are being uttered even today.

Not only the individuals but the communities and nations too, do so. In times of war or national catastrophes, worships and rituals are performed officially and communally. Mass prayers are held in churches, temples and mosques to propitiate the Divine Power to bestow its grace for perpetuation of peace and plenty and amelioration of misery and want. There is an innate faith in man that God, who is the final Disposer of all events—good or bad— is kind, and this kindness has the power to rescue man from impending misery or encircling gloom.

There are numerous instances especially in the lives of devotees and pious men, when God's mercy has been so clearly manifest that there cannot be any doubt about its presence and power. In our day-to-day life also, many of us feel the consoling touch and witness the vivid expression of His love and concern for His creatures.

But at the same time, the existence of sorrow and suffering in this world is a hard and undeniable fact. From the earliest of times; one poignant question crops up again and again not only in the common minds, but also in minds that are fairly cultured and have the understanding of things. They seem to ask: *'Why should there at all be misery, evil and pain in this world which is created by God who is said to be all kindness, all justice, and all mercy? Why this imperfect creation by a perfect God?'*

This question never ceases to agitate the minds of men and women. It may be that some closed or grosser minds are not troubled by such problems. The closed minds are ignorant of the existence of God and the problem in this form cannot, therefore, arise in them. The grosser mind too, is not bothered with such questions, if it or its group gets the requirements and conveniences of life. Its needs are limited to the plane of gross matter and further investigation or interest is of no use to it. Though no life however gross or mundane can ever be completely free from happiness and misery, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, plenty and poverty, there are many who do not bother themselves with philosophical or altruistic problems connected with them. For them the emergency of the present is so compelling that they are not guided by principles or questions of a theoretical character. They feel satisfied if the ordinary needs for self-preservation, which in most cases pertains to the sustenance of the body alone, are fulfilled. But sometimes even such people, especially in moments of tribulation, defeat and despair; are driven to think and ponder over the unsatisfactory nature of their existence and allude its cause to some mysterious power, which they of course cannot clearly conceive of. The fact remains a fact whether we recognize it or not; and the problem of evil, misery, sorrow and injustice in this created world is always there. We find that even the greatest minds have been exercised by this almost insoluble problem of obvious imperfections and inequities in the creation of a perfect and impartial Creator.

II

Not being able to find any satisfactory answer to such questions, some have tried to solve the problem by cutting at the very root of the question itself. They have denied the existence of 'God' altogether. If there is no God, the question of His being kind or cruel does not arise at all, and the happiness or misery of the world need not be connected with Him in any way. These people seem to say that joy

and sorrow, gain and loss, fortune and misery are only actions and reactions of physical laws and come as accidents, where causes cannot always be alluded to the effects. Such people have always been there.

In Europe, we have the Nihilists and the Agnostics. In India also, which is traditionally a land of religion and philosophy and where belief in God is almost natural, there have been and are people and schools of thought denying the existence of God. The *Charvaka*, the *Lokayatika*, and other schools of thought and such learned men as *Purna Kashyapa*, *Ajita Keshakambali*, *Mankhali Goshala*, and many others have been mentioned in the Mahabharata and other ancient books as preachers of Nihilistic philosophy of life and creation.

Referring to such persons, Lord Krishna in the Gita says that there are men who say that the universe is without a God, without truth, without any moral basis; and is brought about by mutual action and reaction of physical laws alone. Like the modern materialists, they also have denied altogether the existence of any God whatsoever as conceived by saints, philosophers and scriptures.

But this method of solving the problem is like denying the existence of light by the blind, because he cannot see it. The crudest and perhaps the easiest way of dismissing a problem are to say that the very hypothesis of the problem is wrong. Such surface rationalists, unable to understand the implications of the questions and impatient to pursue it to a reasonable degree; ignore the necessity of finding an answer to the question thereby calling it absurd. Without taking into consideration the case of such people, we would do well to look at the problem from another angle. We see that the doubt about the mercifulness of God has sometimes clouded the conscience of even the believing souls.

We read in the Mahabharata that Princess Draupadi, the great devotee of Lord Krishna, was unable to explain the cause of the mountain of misery that fell on the pious Pandavas and on herself,

though Lord Krishna Himself had befriended them. It seems for a moment, her faith in a beneficent and just Creator of the universe and in the goodness of righteousness was badly shaken.

She bluntly says:

"It seems to me that God controls all the worlds at His own sweet will and dispenses pain and pleasure, happiness and misery as He thinks fit. ... Men are controlled by God like the falcon tied to a string or like the bull by a rope through its nose. ... The Rishis who are supposed to know the reality of things speak in one way, but things happen contrary to their teachings, like the tumultuous blasts of wind which have no definite direction. ... The Creator does not behave like a father or a mother towards His creatures. He behaves like a low-born person as if in anger. Seeing noble men of character deprived of their wealth and property and means of earning a decent livelihood, and seeing ignoble men happy, I am, indeed, in great anguish of mind."

Kunti, the noble mother of the gentle and law-abiding Pandavas, also, felt similarly. When she painfully witnessed the unjust and cruel exile of her dear children, she cried out:

"A mother should give birth only to lucky children and not brave and intelligent sons. For look at my children, who are brave and well-educated, come to this pass!"

Bhishma, that wise and sagacious grand old man, too, unable to unravel the mystery of God's strange ways, said to Lord Krishna:

"O Krishna, I am unable to understand the ways of your Maya, for the Pandavas are the wisest, bravest, and best among men, and they have you as their friend, philosopher, and guide, and yet there is no end to their trials and sufferings."

The story of King Harischandra who had to suffer the loss of his kingdom, wife, his only son and ultimately of his independence by selling himself into slavery to a scavenger, brings into bold relief the

inscrutable but apparently cruel ways of destiny. His pious wife Saibya also doubted the existence of a merciful God.

That piety incarnate—Sita, the divine consort of Rama—was the very example of suffering itself. Yet unable to bear the pain and prick of it all and satisfy herself as to the goodness of Divine Will, Sita wished at last to enter the womb of Mother Earth for peace and rest.

The Bible tells us of Job, *'perfect and upright'*, who *'feared God and eschewed evil'*. He had so much of the good things of this world that *'this man was the greatest of all the men of the East'*, and God said of him, *"There is none like my servant Job."* Now, Satan refutes this statement of God and puts with God's permission, the faith of Job to the test. In no time Job loses all his worldly goods and then his sons and daughters are killed. Still his faith is not shaken in God and His goodness. Job says: *"Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"*

But Satan exasperated at this again begins his work. He smites Job *'with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown'*. Now, even his wife taunts Job for his belief in a kind and merciful God. She says: *"Curse God and die."* But Job's faith is not shaken even at this. He says, *"Foolish woman, shall we receive good at the hands of God and shall we not receive evil?"* But such a Job, too, at last loses his confidence in the justice and goodness of God, though he maintains his faith in His existence. In his own person now he sees that he has not done anything to deserve such a lot. In the moment of his bitterness he asks God: *"Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldst oppress, that Thou shouldst despise the work of Thy own hands and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?"*

Such cries of anguish must have risen, time and again, from the throats of bereaved mothers when their only sons have died before their very eyes; from the hearts of the faultless, devoted wives when they have lost their loving husbands; from the minds of the broken

people when their near and dear ones have been lost to them for no fault of theirs. The innocent sufferers of appalling earthquakes, devastating floods, ravaging famines and other natural catastrophes must have raised their eyes to the heavens and tried to find out the cause of their miseries.

The God-fearing *Lamas* of Tibet and the poor *Monpas* of NEFA must have cried aloud to God to let them know why their peaceful life was so rudely shocked and why their hearths and homes so brutally destroyed. Similar cries are rising every day from the depths of the agonized human souls all over the world. The faith in a just-God is put to severe test every now and then; and a painfully big, unanswered, question mark persists before the suffering people.

Now, can religion, theology or philosophy offer any solution to this knotty problem, give us consolation in our miseries and sufferings, and reinstate our faith in a just and merciful God?

III

Abstruse intellectual arguments apart, it is perhaps the better part of wisdom to admit that in the realm of space-time-causation, no answer to the dark and vexed problem of human suffering and the presence of evil and injustice on this earth can be satisfying to the hearts of troubled men and women. Unless the grace of God descends on them as it did on Yudhishtira when he said to Draupadi: *“O Draupadi, in your distress you have lost the balance of mind and so you talk like this. ... In your ignorance, O Draupadi, don't reproach God the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the universe. Pray to Him; bow down to Him in all contrition and humility, so that you may be illumined. Never blaspheme the Lord through whose grace the mortal becomes immortal.”*

Thomas Carlyle once said: *“In this God's world with its wild whirling eddies and its mad foams of oceans, where men and nations perish as without law and judgment for an unjust thing is sternly delayed; dost thou think that there is therefore no justice? That is what the fool hath said in his heart.*

I tell thee again, there is nothing else but justice. One strong thing I find here below: the just thing, the true thing."

One theory says that the justice of God may not always be discernible but it is there. As Swami Vivekananda has said: *"The mercy of God is eternal and unchangeable; it is we that make the differentiation."* We suffer or enjoy for our karmas done in ignorance and in a state of attachment.

There is another way of solving the problem. Some say that good and evil, mirth and misery, joy and sorrow are all relative experiences and change with the subjective conditions of the witness. Also, what we call evil or suffering are really good and necessary for our spiritual or moral, nay, even material progress. All this is the sport of the Divine. These people see good in everything; though such a vision is not for the common people.

All religions speak of the necessity of giving up attachments to the things of the world. The Hindus say that suffering will cease only when we are aware of our real nature. According to Vedanta, this knowledge dawns when the unity of Brahman is realized. One attains a state transcending all dualities of pain and pleasure, loss and gain, good and evil. The Buddhists say that misery ends when our desires are completely annihilated and one attains the state of Nirvana. The Christians and Muslims say that unless we make ourselves one with the will of God, our miseries will not come to an end. The common feature of these solutions is that, unless we go beyond ignorance and be one with the Infinite (by whatever name we call It), there will be no safety, no security from suffering. Swami Vivekananda says:

"Is there no way out, no hope? That we are all miserable, that this world is really a prison, that even our so-called trailing beauty is but a prison-house, and that even our intellects and minds are a prison-houses, have been known for ages upon ages. There has never been a man, there has never been a human soul, who has not felt this sometime or other, however he may talk. ... We find that with all this,

with this terrible fact before us, in the midst of this sorrow and suffering, even in this world, where life and death are synonymous, even here, there is a still small voice that is ringing through all ages, through every country, and in every heart: 'This, My Maya is divine, made up of qualities, and very difficult to cross. Yet those that come unto Me, cross the river of life.' 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' ... This voice comes to men when everything seems to be lost and hope has fled, when man's dependence on his own strength has been crushed down and everything seems to melt away between his fingers, and life is a hopeless ruin."

The Upanishadic seer said the same thing: "*The Knower of the Self crosses the ocean of sorrow. ... Knowing the great, infinite, bodiless Being existing within the perishable bodies, the wise and brave man goes beyond all suffering and sorrow*".

IV

But to those (and most of us are such) to whom such a spiritual outlook is denied or whose minds are tormented by doubts of various kinds, we would say that they should keep an open mind and try to seek the truth in all reverence, humility and earnestness. Whether we ascribe the fact of suffering to the unalterable nature of maya or as a part of divine sport or to our karmas or to ignorance, the fact still remains that we find it difficult to reconcile ourselves to its existence. This will be so in the realm of relative existence.

As Swami Vivekananda says: "*The question remains to be answered, and it cannot be answered. The philosophy in India was compelled to admit this.*"

Once Sir James Jeans the great scientist was asked by his friend J. W. Sullivan: "Do you think that the existence of suffering presents an obstacle to belief in a universal scheme?"

The scientist answered: *“No, I think it possible that suffering can be accounted for along the usual ethical lines. That is to say, evil may be necessary for manifestation of greater good, just as danger is necessary for the manifestation of courage.”*

“But does not suffering, in many cases, seem to be entirely pointless—to lead to no good that we can see?” asked his friend.

“I agree that we cannot understand the scheme of life—if there is one”, said the scientist. *“At present, we hardly understand anything. I hold very strongly that our present knowledge in comparison with what man’s knowledge may become, is merely infantile. In fact, on all these questions my philosophy could be summarized by the unpopular phrase ‘wait and see’.”*

Here is an account by Pundit Shivanath Sastri on Sri Ramakrishna’s views, which may be found illuminating on this point. This we think also provides the best solution for the common man to this vexed and knotty problem with which we were unsuccessfully grappling for so long.

Sastriji states: ‘On one occasion, I was present in his (Sri Ramakrishna’s) room along with a few others, who during the saint’s temporary absence from the room began to discuss the reasonableness or otherwise of certain divine attributes. I was getting tired of the discussion when the saint returned. Whilst entering the room, he had caught some words of that discussion and had observed the heated nature of it.

At once, he put a stop to the discussion by saying: *“Stop, stop! What is the good of discussing the reasonableness or otherwise of divine attributes? These things are got by other ways, by prayerfully waiting and thinking. For instance, you say God is good; can you convince me of His goodness by reasoning? Take for instance that mournful incident, the encroachment of the sea on the land that lately took place at Dakshin Sabazpore—the great inundation during a storm. We hear that thousands of men, women, and children were carried away and drowned by that flood. How can you prove*

to me that a good God, a beneficent Deity ordered all that? You will perhaps answer by pointing out the attendant good that the flood did; how it carried away filth, fertilized the soil, and so on. But my question is this: 'Could not a good God do all that without carrying off hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children?'"

At this point, one from the audience interrupted him by saying: *"Are we then to believe that God was cruel?"*

Ramakrishna: *"Who tells you to do that? Join your hands in reverential humility and say, 'O God, we are too weak and too incompetent to know Thy nature and Thy doings. Do Thou enlighten our understanding.'"*

Then he illustrated the truth by the following parable:

"Take the case of two men travelling by a certain road, who take shelter in a mango grove. It is the season for mangoes. One of them sits with pencil and paper in hand and begins a calculation. He counts the number of mango-trees in the garden, the number of branches in each tree, and the average number of mangoes in each branch. Then he tries to imagine how many cart-loads of mangoes that garden will supply, and then again, taking each cart-load to be worth so many rupees when taken to market, how much money that garden will fetch. When one man is engaged in counting up the probable income from the garden, the other is engaged in plucking the ripe mangoes and eating them. Which of them do you consider the wiser of the two?"

"The second one is certainly wiser," said the visitor; *"for it is certainly wiser to eat the fruits than counting up on paper the probable income from the garden."*

Then the saint smiled and remarked: *"Likewise it is wiser to pray to God and to cultivate communion with Him than to argue about the reasonableness or otherwise of His attributes. Pray and open your hearts to God and the light will come to you."*

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, April 1963)

Towards Meditation

Swami Yatiswarananda

I

As in material affairs, so also in spiritual matters we should be perfectly clear and definite in our thoughts and actions. The modern man says lightly, "*Oh, God is everywhere.*" But when he really tries to think of this, he finds he cannot. All these hazy ideas are like those of the so-called worshiper of the formless God who, when he comes home from church, simply busies himself with his physical affairs as he cannot think of and have dealings with God, who to him is indefinite, abstract.

When we have strong body-consciousness, when we take our personality to be the only reality, we need a Holy Personality for our spiritual practice and growth.

On a lower plane, the Absolute becomes abstract, although It is real on a higher plane. While remaining on the lower plane of form and personality, we cannot counteract all bad and unwelcome pictures and thoughts that rise in the mind by means of abstract ideas. We must be able to raise opposing good and holy pictures and thoughts to counteract them, and here the necessity of a Holy Personality comes in; in Whom we find our highest ideals realized. We need a definite holy form so long as we consider our own forms to be real. However, at the same time, we must find a connecting link between the form and the formless. Form is only a manifestation of the formless. The Holy Personality is a manifestation of the Principle that stands at the back of all.

The Holy Personality serves as the connecting link between the finite and the Infinite. When it is understood in this fashion, it satisfies the head and the heart. The intellect wants the Infinite while the feelings want the finite. In the Holy Personality, we find both finite and infinite if we see it in the right light, i.e. as manifestation

of the Principle. The Holy personality is always conscious of The Principle. Visualization plays a great and important part in spiritual life especially at the beginning when we are still on a lower plane, the plane of forms and pictures, taking them to be real. The holy forms are always to be looked upon as luminous and living, forming parts of an Infinite Ocean of Light.

Visualize the Holy Form arising out of an Infinite Ocean of Light, and after that, you may think of the Holy Form merging again into this Infinite Ocean of Light.

As the mind of the aspirant grows, it comes to have a very vivid imagination with reference to everything—good, bad and indifferent. And the best way to counteract the bad fantasies is to have good fantasies, which must be made even more vivid and strong than the others.

The Holy Personality calls up in us the sense of Purity, the sense of Divinity, and at the same time connects us with the Infinite, the Formless and the One Principle, in which all things have their being. In calling up this Holy Form, one may use the help of the sound-symbol, which is the Holy Name or Om. This may be used first with reference to the form and then to the formless.

Every time your mind threatens to lose its balance, repeat the sound and try to think of the Holy Form in the centre of your consciousness.

The sound is a symbol of Divinity; the form also is a symbol of Divinity. We use both the symbols to call up the Divine Consciousness. With the help of the Holy Personality, we try to realize the Principle, manifesting itself as Name and Form, and we begin to feel that we too are a manifestation of that Principle. We begin to feel that everybody and everything is a manifestation of that Principle.

After getting a glimpse of the Immanent in the Holy Personality, we get a glimpse of the Divine in ourselves and also in others. We have to learn to see the Divine in all forms, good and bad, without of course, losing the distinction between good and bad. Then the bad forms cannot affect us at all. We should try to see the Divine not only in the forms that dwell in the physical world but also in those that rise in the mind.

And for those who do not like to dwell on the form, the only way for them is to recognize the Divine in oneself and also in others. The body is a temple, in which the soul dwells. God is the Soul of the soul.

One point should always be borne in mind; we should stress more on the soul than the body and God more than the soul. The body is the dwelling house of the soul and God is the Soul of the soul. If one does not stress on this principle, it will become idolatry.

Of course, even idol-worship with reference to a Holy Personality is far better than worship of our body.

The immanent aspect of the Divine is greatly to be stressed. Without realizing the immanent aspect, it is not possible to realize the transcendent.

Visualization:

Visualization plays a very important part in the spiritual life of the beginner and in all this visualizations, a luminous and living form is to be called up. The Infinite Ocean of Light takes shape as the Holy Personality.

In *Tantric form of spiritual practice*, there is a method of visualization:

The aspirant, after taking his seat, tries to fix the mind at the centre of his consciousness. He thinks of the centre of his consciousness as luminous; thinks that this luminosity forms part of an Infinite Ocean of Luminosity into which he merges his gross body as well as all physical forms. Then he merges his subtle body as well as all subtle forms and finally his causal body as well as all causal forms into this

Infinite Ocean of Luminosity. He tries to think the One Undivided Ocean of Luminosity as living, the source of all conscious life, the source of all Consciousness. Then he tries to merge in that Ocean of Consciousness.

If one could achieve this, if one could really dwell on this not as a mere imagination, then one gets Samadhi. But most people have to be satisfied only with the thought of the Unity. Even that is helpful.

Next, the aspirant thinks that out of this Infinite Ocean of Luminosity rises his own form and the form of the Holy Personality that he has chosen as his object of worship.

Think of your body as a luminous body, i.e., make the old ideas of the body perish and come to have a new body, fashioning it out of this luminosity. This is one of the steps in higher Tantric Sadhana with Unity at the background. Being forgetful of one's own form, one should worship the Divine Personality.

Japam:

One may dwell on the Divine luminous form along with the repetition of some holy sound-symbol. When one is not in a meditative mood, one may go on with *Japam* (repeat the Holy Name or Symbol) a thousand or two thousand times without any break. It does not matter even if it is a little mechanical. Practicing in this way, one may later on find meditation easier. Hold on to the sound and think of the meaning. If we are able to do this for some time, great steadiness will come. Then our muddled brain will become somewhat clearer, our thinking and feeling will become more definite. Japam removes many an obstacle and prepares the aspirant for meditation.

Whether you feel inclined or not, do it, go on with it. Why should you stop japam, merely because your mind does not feel inclined to do it? Why own defeat? Why be deceived by your own mind? Go on repeating the Holy Name, or sound-symbol, along with the ideal it

represents; never allow yourself to be defeated. Go on repeating it, so that your ear may hear the sound and your mind may dwell on its meaning.

The Holy Sound gives a sort of support to the mind. When there is any great trouble, one should try to be a little calm and introspective, and should pray to the Divine from the very bottom of one's heart. Why allow yourself to be swept off your feet, when any trouble arises? The moment you let go the chain, you are lost.

When there is absolutely no help, the Divine is your only help, and by the Divine we mean that, which is in us, the Soul of our soul, this Soul of all.

At the stage we are in now, Japam is one of the most important practices. It takes us nearer and nearer to the Soul of our soul.

Sri Ramakrishna says:

"Each Japam is like a link of a chain, and holding this chain, you reach the very end of the chain, that to which it is fixed."

Proceeding step-by-step, as it were, holding on to the chain and never letting it go. In course of time, we reach our goal. The sound calls up the thought, the thought brings us in touch with the Divine. If Japam does not appeal, then you may say some prayer, constantly repeating this prayer, making the sound audible only to your ears. Along with it, think of the Divine. Your prayer should not be aimless: It should be directed towards the Divine.

Even when we seem to be swept away, let us try to hold on to the chain. Very often we magnify the danger that threatens us. Afterwards we find that we have been enlarging it too much with our vivid imagination. The situation may seem bad, but usually it is not so awful as we suppose. Very often it does not take such an awful turn as we imagine. And even if matters are really awful, why give up the struggle and allow yourself to be defeated without any resistance? Always go on with your Japam and prayer, and try to

meet the situation as well as you can. Even if you are defeated, your defeat will prove to be a stepping- stone to success.

When the storm is raging, we should hold on to the chain— Japam and prayer. If you do not, you will cut yourself away from the higher forces and allow yourself to be defeated by the lower ones and consequently, you will have to suffer.

When you try to be in tune with the higher forces, you may find the discrepancy between the higher and the lower forces, no doubt. But then you don't feel any discrepancy between the higher forces and yourself. On the other hand, if you identify yourself with the lower forces, you find the discrepancy not only between the higher forces and the lower ones, but also between the higher forces and yourself. So you come to have a double discrepancy. The discrepancy between the higher forces and the lower ones cannot be avoided, but there need not be any discrepancy between the higher forces and yourself. We lose sight of the Divine and the higher path completely if we stop all struggle and are fully overpowered by the lower forces. The whole thing comes to this: you need a ladder to take you up; but you kick it away just at the moment when you need it most. Then you can never get up. Japam, prayer and meditation form the ladder that should never be given up.

In our case, Japam is the only thing we can really do. It is out of courtesy that we sometimes give it the name of meditation. There can be no question of doing anything higher like real meditation, unless we prepare ourselves first through ethical culture, performance of duty, Japam, prayers, regular readings from the holy books and trying to dwell on the meaning from the readings; as much as possible. These preliminary practices help us in withdrawing the mind from the manifold distractions, and then in making us dwell on holy thoughts, naturally with breaks in the beginning. Later on through persistent practice, we are able to continue the thought-current in an unbroken way. As we become purer in body and mind,

in thought, word and deed, we are able to have greater concentration, and better meditation. In course of time, we come in touch with the Divine, in both its Personal and Impersonal aspects. Then within our own selves, we feel the contact between the finite and the Infinite, between the soul and God, the Soul of our soul, and the World-Soul. Meditation thus attains its goal, the highest state of super-consciousness, in which the soul comes into direct touch with the Divine Reality, its true Self, and attains its natural perfection and freedom, peace and blessedness.

II

Both good and evil belong to the relative plane. There is a difference between good and bad, but both belong to the relative plane, the plane of phenomenon.

The thin cloud reflects the light, the dark one also, but very little. When the thick cloud becomes thin, then it reflects the light all the more. The real substance is not the *thick or thin* cloud, but the light. Both the thick and the thin clouds only limit the light, i.e., the cloud is the limitation that must be got rid of.

Even when we speak of God and the soul, this is limitation but of the highest form of limitation. Since we are still on the staircase and not on the terrace, we should think of the higher parts and the lower parts, stressing the steps very much, but always remembering that our goal is beyond all steps, beyond the whole staircase. So long as we worship, so long as there is the worshiper and the object of worship, even in the subtlest form, it is dualism. Monism is a state, an actual experience, but all these steps take us slowly to the final realization. It is a graduated course.

Now, we need not worry about the One without a Second, about getting merged into the One, but we should see that we bring the One into the many. You need not be afraid of getting merged as this

will take a long time. So there is no imminent danger of your losing yourself and getting merged into the One.

In the path of devotion, the aspirant always has something to support him. Everyone needs an amount of personal support, a Holy Personality, to some extent. When you feel that you are drowned in an Infinite Ocean of Consciousness, you feel that your personality is something subtle, that has become gross. Think that both the vast mass of light, your object of worship, and the small particle of light are drowned in a vast, infinite ocean of light.

First, we think more or less of the body only and there is only an indefinite idea of the Principle of Life standing at the back of ourselves, of everything. Then we begin to stress on the Principle of Life more than the body and try to see the Divine spark living in all bodies, giving life to all.

It is possible for a devotee to love the Formless God as much as God with form. This is only a question of temperament. In this, there are three steps:

- 1) With form and with attributes.
- 2) Without form but with attributes,
- 3) Without form and without attributes.

In the greatest Incarnations and Prophets one sees a manifestation of the Purity, Knowledge, Love, etc., that are godlike. At the nucleus of our small personality there is this same purity, knowledge, love, etc., but covered with ignorance. Our personality is a combination of the True Self, and the false self. We forget the true Self and identify ourselves with the false self. The spark of light forgets its light-nature and identifies itself with the cloud-nature, and then all the troubles and miseries of life arise.

The body may be the centre of our consciousness. The mind may be the centre of our consciousness. The little soul may be the centre of our consciousness. The Infinite may be the centre of our

consciousness. Our whole attitude, all our actions and thoughts, depend upon what centre of consciousness we have chosen, and where we have our centre of gravity.

All our thoughts, ideas and imaginations must be clear-cut, definite, not hazy and vague. Very often, the churchgoer goes to church and tries to pray there to something hazy, indefinite, vague, feeling himself to be nothing. But when he comes out again, he stresses his personality all the more in his every-day actions and thoughts and does not believe himself to be nothing. Our prayers, our worship, etc., must be directed towards something definite; be it in the form of a human personality or in some other non-human form. So long as we take our personality to be real, we must also take other forms to be real and have a Holy Personality to centre our thoughts and feelings upon. This personality may be a Christ, a Buddha, a Ramakrishna, etc.

We have two forms of consciousness: we make the soul the centre of our consciousness and feel the Infinite in that, or we make the Infinite the centre of our consciousness and feel the soul as a manifestation of this Infinite. Making our soul the centre of our consciousness, we feel this Infinite in the soul. Making the Infinite the centre of our consciousness, we feel that the soul is its manifestation. We come to feel the Infinite Ocean of Light, joining, combining every point of the circle. At the beginning, this may appear to be a fantasy, but ultimately it becomes an experience.

As regards our spiritual practice we must be very definite, do away with all hazy thoughts and feelings. If you are able to catch the Formless, do it by all means. If not, take hold of the form and realize the formless in the form, next realize the formless in yourself, then the formless in all.

There are some devotees, who in a certain mood, would have the form and the attributes, and in another mood the formless with

attributes. At every step we must be in touch with the Divine, whatever be our mood.

Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of a Sanskrit passage:

"When I think of myself as identified with the body, I am Thy servant and Thou art my Master, my will is controlled by Thy Will.

When I think of myself as a Jiva (individualized soul) as distinct from the body, I am the part and Thou art the Whole.

When I recognize the spiritual Principle in me as distinct from body and mind and Jiva, I realize that I am one with the Divine."

During all our practices, we must take a definite standpoint, from whence to proceed. A dualist with experience is infinitely better than a Monist without experience.

There are some aspirants who are not satisfied with having only one form of meditation. They think of the Infinite Ocean, in which there is the worshiper and the worshiped. The devotee thinks more of the Divine than of himself. Then he tries to think of the Principle in the object of worship and in himself. The next step will be that both these are merged, that the bubble and the wave are merged into the Infinite Ocean.

So long as there is even the slightest clinging to personality, one must pass through birth and death. When this clinging stops, then the water-particle becomes one with the ocean.

Before we die, we must get at least a few glimpses, and then move on. If in this life we don't succeed, begin again and again, move on life after life until you reach the goal.

If some day you are going to realize the Self, why not try to do it now? So the ideal of Vedanta is to realize Truth while we are alive. *"Until you fall asleep, until you die busy yourself with the Vedantic thoughts."*

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The Sadhana of Mira Bai (Gleanings from her Songs)

Mrs. C. K. Handoo

("I have watered the creeper of love with my tears..." ...Mira Bai)

Mira Bai is a much loved poetess, singer and saint of medieval India. Though the main features of her life are too well known to bear repetition, the details of her spiritual struggle are not available to us. There is a tendency of the human mind to extol the great and make them appear as perfect beings from the very beginning of their career. Accordingly, we often see that the disciples of saints and prophets either deliberately suppress, or carelessly forget to hand over to posterity that most important and interesting period of their lives when they are still striving for the desired end. To us, as to the vast majority of mankind who are less ardent than them; the distance that is thus created is the cause of much despair. Though our eyes look up to the skies our feet are set in clay and we anxiously seek for some common bond of humanity to unite us with the ennobling lives of the great. To know that they also suffered from human weaknesses makes them infinitely dear to us, and we rejoice in thinking that if we but faithfully trudge on the chosen path, in some far off future life we also may attain to those heights that seem to be an impossible dream at the present moment, but are nevertheless the guiding light of our own prosaic and mundane lives.

However pronounced a talent one may have in a certain direction, no one is born an artist, a craftsman, or a scholar, and it is good to remember that all knowledge or skill is gained by sheer perseverance and hard work. If this is true in the ordinary walks of life, how true it must be of life in the spiritual path. It is said in the scriptures that the act of creation has to be prefaced by the austerities of the Creator, and even the incarnations of God have to struggle considerably before they become fully conscious of their divine nature and mission. It is

sufficient to say that greatness acquired in any sphere of life is largely due to self-effort. We would like very much to know: what was the effort that Mira Bai put into her life and how she fought against the overwhelming odds that faced her. Did her steps ever falter and did she despair of reaching the end? Not mere idle curiosity impels us to lift the veil of four centuries and peer into a heart while it was still weighed by the frailties of the flesh, torn with different loyalties, and wounded by the insults of an uncomprehending husband and the intrigues of the proverbially jealous sister-in-law.

Unfortunately most of our questions will have to remain unanswered, for the very early songs are either lost or not recorded, and the psychological struggle of her life, overlooked or ignored by those who first wrote her biography. Still, common sense may help us to reconstruct to a certain extent a picture which, had it been preserved, would have been of great value to all spiritual aspirants. From her own words such as the following:

"I have made friends with Giridhar since childhood.

The bond has grown too strong to be broken"

And also from stories current about her we can safely conclude that her deep devotion to God was visible even in early childhood. Later it seems that she became conscious of a continuity of purpose that had been guiding her from life to life as she constantly brings into her songs the well-known line "*Mira is thy servant since many lives.*"

It is often said that Mira was an incarnation of one of the *Gopis* (the milkmaids of Brindaban, totally devoted to Lord Krishna). But while recognizing the similarity in the purity and intensity of her devotion like the blessed milkmaids of Brindaban, we do not think that such an assumption, in any way, adds to the greatness of Mira. Though the *Gopis* set up a great ideal—and far be it for us to detract from it—it is not as if they were the only chosen ones for all time to come for the expression of *madhurya-bhakti* (Devotion as God's bride). Infinite

are the avenues of approach to the Divine, and infinite is the store-house of the universe which contains in its womb innumerable perfected lives in latent form. It is therefore, but natural that great saints should appear from time to time to shed light on the path of humanity and inspire earnest seekers of God. It is more in keeping with common sense to believe that the suffering of Mira was as real as ours would be, if we were placed in the same circumstances, and her greatest claim to our love and homage lies in the fact that she went on her path undaunted in the face of all opposition and calumny.

Scholars are of the opinion that Mira might have been influenced by the followers of Nimbarka, and the life of Chaitanya Dev. The former was a South Indian who lived in the twelfth century and preached the Radha-Krishna cult from Brindaban. Mira was an immediate successor of Chaitanya Dev in time, and we can easily imagine how greatly attracted her pure and devoted heart must have been to this living apostle of the divine love of Radha and Krishna. In one song at least she makes a loving reference to Him when she says:

*“He whose feet were bound by mother Yasoda for stealing butter;
That boy of dark hue became Gora whose name is Chaitanya.
In the garb of a Sannyasin (monk) he depicted the emotions of the
yellow-clad One,
Mira is the servant of Gaur Krishna and Krishna’s name dwells on
her lips.”*

In her ‘Notes on Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda’, Sister Nivedita has recorded that in comparing the two, Swamiji held that while Chaitanya preached love for the name of God and mercy to all; Mira in contrast taught submission, prayerfulness, and service to all. The whole of Mira’s life is an expression of her touching and deep self-surrender to the feet of God. She also says in one of her songs:

*“I dress as He dresses me; I eat what He gives;
I sit when He commands, and*

*I would sell myself if He wished.
My love for Him is of longstanding;
I cannot live for a moment without Him."*

It is evident from Mira's songs that she eagerly sought the company of *sadhus* (holy men) and was in her turn greatly influenced by them. To cultivate the friendship of holy men and serve them in love and humility is a recognized way of progressing in the spiritual path. As man is essentially spirit and not matter, so knowingly or unknowingly his innermost nature responds deeply to the uplifting influence exerted by the seekers of God. That an advanced soul like Mira should be devoted to holy men is therefore nothing to be surprised at. Much of the anger that her behaviour aroused amongst her in-laws was due to her mixing freely with the *sadhus* and admitting them to the royal temple, where she sang and danced in divine ecstasy. The following conversation with her sister-in-law is typical of the attitude of both parties.

Udabai: *"The Rana is angry with you. Do not seek the company of holy men. People are defaming you, and the family name is being abused. You roam from forest to forest with holy men, and have also lost your sari. You are born in a royal family but dance to the clapping of hands. Amongst Hindus your husband shines like the sun, but your mind like stagnant water is covered with scum. Give up the company of Giridhar (Lord Krishna) and the holy men, and come home with me. "*

Mira replied:

*"The sadhus are my parents, family, friends, and dear ones, good and wise;
I always say that, day and night I seek refuge at their feet.
Please tell Rana I cannot agree to his proposal.
Giridhar is the Lord of Mira and she has sold herself into the hands
of the holy men."*

There are two holy men to whom she openly owes her indebtedness: - one is her guru Raidas and the other is the great saint Tulsidas, who befriended her in time of great perplexity and trial. Though Mira's surrender to God was direct and her relationship with Him intimate, yet she recognizes the greatness of the guru, and pays homage to him in the following words.

*"I have surrendered myself at the feet of the guru,
I am attracted to nothing but his feet and the world is but a dream,
The ocean of birth and death has dried up for me,
I have no anxiety to cross it.*

Mira's Lord is Giridhar Nagar and my eyes have turned inwards."

In other songs she mentions the name of Raidas, such as "I met my sadguru, the Saint Raidas," — which leaves no doubt that he was in fact her acknowledged guru.

Her letter to Tulsidas is of special significance. It is the only record of a conflict in her mind when she seems to waver on her path and admit of the intense suffering she was undergoing due to the unkind treatment of her family. The provocation must have been great to have induced her to write such a letter seeking guidance and help. The letter is as follows:

'Sri Tulsi, Abode of happiness and Destroyer of sorrow, I bow to you again and again. Please destroy the accumulated affliction of my life. All the members of my family are creating trouble. I suffer greatly because of my worship and association with sadhus. You are like father and mother to me; you bestow happiness to lovers of God. What is the right path for me, please write and explain!'

Understanding her mental anguish Tulsidas promptly sent the following reply:

*'Those who do not love Sita and Ram,
Give then up like you would a million enemies,
though they are your dear ones.*

Prahlada gave up his father, Vibhishana his brother and Bharata his mother. Bali gave up his Guru, the Gopis their husbands but all of it resulted in joy.

Love and serve only those who accept relationship to Ram.

What use of collyrium if it destroys the eyes? What more shall I say?

Tulsi says, those only are worthy of respect and are dearer than life who are devoted to the feet of Ram.

This is my advice to you!

Thus it may be that this letter helped to resolve her doubts and give her courage and strength to go on in her difficult path in spite of opposition.

If we are to study the external environment of Mira the first thing that strikes us is the complete blindness of the members of her family to her great spiritual genius. It is often disputed that the Rana to whom she makes a constant reference in her songs is not her husband (who, it is alleged, died early), but is her brother-in-law. But we find there is nothing in her songs either in support of her widowhood, or of the Rana being her husband's brother. This is a theory which is hard to believe, in face of lines such as the following:

"I will go neither to father's house nor father-in-law's nor to my husband. Mira has found Govinda (Lord Krishna) and for guru she has found Raidas."

We cannot therefore help concluding that the Rana who provided the background to her colourful life was none else than Bhojraj, her husband. He plays such an important part in the development of her character that he deserves more than passing attention. He was a typical man of the world, deeply conscious of his position and with little or no finer feelings of the human heart. He was neither vicious nor deliberately unkind, and any other problem of life he would have solved according to the tradition of the Rajput race, but here was a situation which his rigid conventionalism and narrow heart could not cope with.

Why did not Mira, his queen, dress herself in gay clothes and spend her time in joy and merriment with the ladies of the court? His coffers were full of treasures he could shower at her feet; but the jewellery that Mughal princesses would envy remained untouched. The remark that *'she was the queen who would not be queen but would wander the world with the lovers of Krishna'* (Swami Vivekananda) has been very aptly said of her.

She was obedient and loyal to her husband, but in her uncomfortable presence the enjoyments of life turned cold. Unfortunately he did not heed the call of a greater destiny following which he could have been a helpmate and companion to her and thus would have made her life smooth and his own life blessed. Mira never scorned him, but her very meekness and docility exasperated him. Soon his patience wore off, and he who would have been a devoted husband to a woman of a less fine calibre turned harsh and bitter. She tore at the very roots of his heart; she eluded him though he possessed her, and her desire to obey his slightest command and fulfill his whims to the letter baffled and annoyed him beyond measure. Then only he resolved to break her indomitable spirit by means so unworthy and questionable that he excites in us nothing but a supreme contempt for the utter stupidity and meanness of his small and selfish mind.

The best comment we can pass on him is in the words of Somerset Maugham, when he says: *"In the ordinary affairs of life stupidity is much more tiresome than wickedness. You can mend the vicious, but what in Heaven's name are you to do with the foolish?"*

And it is only when we think of the repentance that filled his heart in later life that we are inclined to excuse the blindness that was ultimately the cause of his own sorrow. If we but believe in the maxim of the Gita that says:

"There lives a master in the hearts of men, who maketh their deeds by subtly pulling strings and dance to the tune of He will."

We shall be obliged to admit that, had it not been for the ordeal that the Rana provided, Mira's devotion would have remained untested, and to those of us whose minds are dulled by worldliness the radiant purity of her life might not have been discernible. So let us not weigh his sins in grudging scales knowing him to be a mere pawn in the divine *leela* (drama) and a fellow-sufferer in the same spiritual darkness as ourselves.

No character sketch of Mira can be complete without enumerating the horrible way in which the Rana tried to get rid of her by putting an end to her life by foul and unfair means. Wherever the name of Mira is known these stories are repeated endlessly and yet no one tires of them. They are the wealth of the common man to whom they stand for the ultimate triumph of the forces of good over evil and of spirit over matter.

Briefly they may be told in the words of Mira:

"Rana sent a serpent in a basket,

it was delivered into the hands of Mira.

*When she examined it after her bath, she found an image
of the Lord.*

The Rana sent a cup of poison; it turned into nectar.

When she drank it after her bath she became immortal.

Ranaji sent a bed of poisoned nails for Mira to sleep on,

At night when Mira went to bed, she slept as if on flowers.

The Lord is ever the helpmate of Mira,

He removes her obstacles.

Mira moves about absorbed in an ecstasy of love for Giridhar."

Three distinct periods in the sadhana of Mira Bai seem to be reflected in her songs. The first is that of a calm and steady devotion which may be likened to a smoothly flowing river. These are the songs that are least known at the present day.

A typical song of this period is as follows:

*“Make Mira thy true servant O Lord.
Free me from the false duties of the world.
My house of discrimination is being robbed,
Though I resist with all my intelligence and strength,
Alas I am helpless!
Run O Lord, I die without succour.
Daily I listen to the teachings of religion;
Yet, I fear the vagaries of the mind.
I serve the sadhus faithfully.
I set my mind to remembrance and contemplation.
Show thy maid servant the path of Devotion,
Make Mira thy true servant O Lord.”*

In this song we find that the element of self-effort and struggle is emphasized, and her mode of life is laid down in simple language.

Another song which may be classed in the same category, but seems to come later, is as follows:

*“Listen to my prayer O Lord, I take shelter in Thee.
Thou hast purified many sinners and freed them from the
bondage of the world;
I do not know the names of all, but only a few are known to me;
Ambarish and Sudama you took to Your abode,
Dhruva, a child of five, saw Your vision of deep blue;
You ripened the fields of Dhana, grazed the cattle of Kabira;
You ate the fruit that Shabari had defiled.
Your actions please the mind.
You accepted the barbers Sadana and Sena,
You ate Karma’s khichri and freed the woman of ill fame.
Mira has coloured herself in your hue and the world is well
aware of this.”*

Here there is a greater awareness of the grace of God and the main idea is of surrender to Him, which comes only after struggle and effort.

Just as the current of the river, as it nears the ocean, becomes swift and deep, so we find that slowly the quiet prayer and silent meditation of Mira gained in momentum and calm devotion gave way to the pain of *viraha* (intense pangs of separation), when the absence of the beloved can no longer be suffered with equanimity. There is an arresting sweetness in the songs of this period, and they are also the best known and are most widely sung by our own generation. The yearning is so intense that it pierces the armour of all mundane interest and occupation, and for a moment, even the hardest of hearts trembles in sympathy as it listens to these songs:

*“O Lord of my house, come home to me.
Cool the fire of my feverishly restless body.
I spend the whole night in weeping,
I have lost appetite and sleep but the wicked breath of life goes on;
Make the sorrowing one happy by blessing her with Thy vision;
Do not delay any longer for Mira is suffering the pangs of thy
separation.”*

Among the poet-saints of medieval India no one has depicted the feeling of pangs of separation from her beloved Lord like Mira. Surdas has developed a variety and abundance of emotions, but in poignancy and depth of feeling Mira's poetry is unsurpassed. In the abandonment of love she sings:

*“O Friend, my sleep is destroyed.
I spend the night waiting for my Beloved;
My mind is set on meeting Him so I am restless,
Each limb of mine is aching and my lips can only utter Piya! Piya!
No one knows the pain of my heart stricken with the anguish of
separation,*

*As the chatak pines for the rain cloud and the fish for water,
Mira has lost outer consciousness in deep yearning for Thee."*

In unendurable agony she cries out:

*"I wander about wounded; no one knows the pain of my heart.
My life is lost through sorrow; my eyes are lost through tears.
If I had known that there was so much suffering in love,
I would have sent a crier round the town saying that no one should
love."*

In our present age Sri Ramakrishna has said again and again, "Cry to the Lord with an intense yearning and you will certainly see Him." Again he says, "Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God."

Accordingly, Mira's irresistible cry could not be denied for long and her unendurable suffering at last changed into the joys of God-vision. Thus we come to the fulfilment and end of her sadhana. In the gladness of her heart she sings:

*"Mira dances with anklets on her feet.
People say Mira is mad, the mother-in-law says she has destroyed
the family,
But Mira has found the eternal with ease, and Giridhar Nagar is
her Lord."*

As we of lowly understanding cannot properly appreciate the intense sorrow of Mira in the seeking of God, so in great awe and wonder we look upon her joy in the finding of Him. In her songs we now hear the happy murmuring of a river which after carving its way through hard rock and flowing through dry and parched land, finds itself in the embrace of the infinite and fathomless ocean. We hear her singing joyously:

*"My friends are drunk with wine, but I am drunk without it.
I have drunk from the pot of love and
I wander night and day in my intoxication."*

*I have lighted the lamp of remembrance and renunciation.
My mind is the wick; the oil has been drawn from the machine of
the Inexhaustible One;
And the lamp burns day and night."*

We would fain follow her into that realm of the pure spirit which is as deep as the ocean and as infinite as the sky and having reached which most people are struck dumb. But our earth-bound feet prevent us from doing so, and we are constrained to stand outside this enchanted circle, straining our ears to catch some echo of the ineffable sweetness that now flows through the blessed life of Mira. Before we close we cannot help but hear her sing once again:

*"I have coloured myself in the hue of Shyam.
Decking myself and with bells on my feet, indifferent to the
opinion of the world, I dance.
In the company of Sadhus gone is my ignorance; and I am truly
transformed into the form of the devoted.
Singing the glories of God day and night.
The serpent of Time cannot harm me.
Without Him the world is tasteless and all else is fleeting.
And Mira has developed sweet devotion to Giridhar Lal (Krishna)."*

Before the last echo of her song dies out we swiftly move across the centuries hoping to catch a glimpse of this vision of heavenly joy, and we are struck by the utter self-effacement of her song and dance as well as the joyful radiance of her personality. With heavy hearts we at last turn back reluctantly, but the tinkling of her anklet bells and her sweet voice linger strangely in our memory. And finding now that she is in a world where our intellectual criticism and comment is of no avail, we end in proper orthodox fashion by laying our hearts and those of our readers in loving homage at the magic of her dancing feet.

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An Eckhartian Dialogue

Philip L. Griggs

(Continued from the last issue)

Q. I know that Christ died for our salvation, sir; but it is beyond me yet to understand why, by even his death, I am in the least affected.

A. Actually, God died that I might die — to the whole world and all created things. This is the meaning of his crucifixion, just as he was born man, that I might be born God.

Q. Why do you think Christ said to his disciples: "*It is expedient for you that I go away?*"

A. That is not hard to understand. His disciples loved him as a man and a mortal, so that in spite of his being, the most perfect good God ever sent, yet he was a hindrance to, his followers by his bodily presence. You have forgotten the latter half of the saying: "*For unless I go away, you will not receive the Holy Spirit.*" Unless the soul is raised to a higher power, from physical to spiritual things, the Holy Spirit cannot enter it to do its work.

Q. Meister Eckhart, by what name should we call on God?

A. God is called by many names in scripture, is he not? David said, "*The Lord is his name.*" You should remember that words have enormous power. They have got it from the emanation of the eternal Word. All beings are trying to speak God in their actions; they all speak him as well as they can; but they cannot really pronounce him. Nevertheless, all are trying to utter God, who still remains unspoken. For God transcends name, transcends nature. We can find no name to give to God, but we are permitted to use the names his saints have called him by, those whose hearts were flooded with his divine light. We ought to say: "*Lord, in those very names, which thou didst instill into the hearts of saints, suffusing them with thy light, we praise thee and adore*

thee." And again, we should know that in giving God no name at all we also praise and honour him.

Q. When I think of all the saints I always think of my own impurities. What is the way to be rid of them, to become pure?

A. Pray to him to purify you, to empty you. If you are empty, God of his very nature is obliged to fill you. The way to be pure is by steadfast longing for the one good—God. How to acquire this longing? By self-denial and aversion to creatures; self-knowledge is the way, for created things are all naught, they come to naught with lamentation and bitterness. So do not concern yourself with worldly trivialities; we are not made for trivial things, and the glory of the world is only a travesty of truth, a heresy of happiness.

Q. The prophets of old spoke much about the fear of God. Do you think there is any place for fear in the spiritual life?

A. Only the fear of losing God, of forgetting him. Man should not be afraid of God. Fear is only the veriest beginning of wisdom. God loves man immeasurably, and man should love God the same. Is it not a wonder that man can be without him without whom he cannot be? And if a man truly trusts God, he will leave himself in His hands—no fear.

Q. Who can say he really trusts God?

A. True. Few there are. Only he can say he trusts God who keeps overnight not so much as a pennyworth of possessions.

Q. Are you speaking literally, sir? Is this what renunciation really means?

A. In truth, my boy, renunciation of self is true renunciation. The other day a man came to me and told me he had given a quantity of land and goods, to save his soul. Alas, I thought, how paltry, how inadequate, the things you have resigned. It is blindness and folly so long as you care a jot for what you have renounced. Renounce yourself!

Q. Which would you call the greatest virtue?

A. The masters praise humility more than most other virtues, but I rank detachment before any meekness, and for several reasons. Meekness can be had without detachment, but complete detachment is impossible without humility. Also, humility means to abase oneself before all creatures, and in doing this one pays heed to creatures, one goes out to them. But detachment abides in itself. Perfect detachment is without regard, without either lowliness or loftiness to creatures; it has a mind to be master of itself, loving none and hating none; the only thing it wants to be is same.

Q. I think the practice of detachment is most difficult, because the unruly senses do not obey the dictates of the mind. How can the passions be made to obey?

A. When the mind is fixed on God, and stays there, the senses become obedient to the mind. As you would hang a needle to a magnet and then another needle on to that, until there are four needles, say, hanging from the magnet, so long as the first needle stays clinging to that; and when the leader drops the rest will go as well. Just so, while the mind keeps fixed on God the senses are subservient to it, but if the mind should wander off from God the passions will escape and be unruly.

Q. Sir, what is the "dryness" of which so many spiritual seekers complain?

A. When the mind is exerting itself in real earnest, God interests himself in the mind and its work, and then the soul sees and experiences God. But since the uninterrupted vision and passion of God is intolerable to the soul in this body therefore God withdraws from the soul from time to time, as it is said: "*A little while ye see me, and again a little while ye see me not.*" Our Lord hides himself sometimes, for if the soul were conscious of God immediately, uninterruptedly, she would not be able to take care of the body. Some people complain much of having no interior life, no devotion, no

sweetness, nor any such consolation. I say these folk are unrighteous as yet, and though they suffer, it is not the best, for they seek not God alone.

Q. We may know all this, intellectually, yet when distractions arise, in prayer and remembrance, it seems at times almost too much for us!

A. If we fail to see God, my children, that is due as much to our feeble desire, as to the distraction from creatures. Aim high, be high! To see God requires high aspiration. Ardent desire and abject humility together work wonders. I vow God is omnipotent, but he is impotent to thwart the humble soul which has towering aspiration. I say, and I would stake my life upon it, that by will a man may pierce a wall of steel; and we read about St. Peter that on catching sight of Jesus he walked upon the water in his eagerness to meet him.

Q. Some say, Meister Eckhart, that salvation comes by knowledge; others say, by works. Which is it?

A. It is by neither. For the soul is unable to encompass God by any means. Did I not tell you, no man ever found God—he gave himself away?

Q. You did, sir; but this implies dependence on grace, and what if God does not choose to be gracious?

A. Ah, but the higher is ever more ready to pour out its power into the lower, than the lower is ready to receive it. You see this is nature. So God is vastly quicker to pour out his grace than man is to take it in. Do you know, God likes forgiving big sins more than small ones? The bigger they are the gladder he is and the quicker to forgive them. It is the same with grace, and virtues, the greater they are the greater his pleasure in giving them; giving of largess is his nature.

None of you should think it difficult to arrive at this detachment from all things, however hard it may seem at first. Having once got into it, you will find no life more easy, more delightful. God is so very careful to be always with a man, to guide him to himself in case

he takes the wrong way. No man ever wanted anything so much as God wants to make the soul aware of him. God is ever ready, but we are so unready. God is near to us, but we are far from him.

Q. Will you tell us which you think is to be preferred, the life of action, or the contemplative life?

A. Precious few succeed in living the contemplative life at all here upon earth. Many begin, but fail to consummate it. It is because they have not rightly lived the life of Martha. As the eagle spurns its young that cannot gaze at the sun, even so it fares with the spiritual child. He who would build high must lay firm and strong foundations. The true foundation is the very way and pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ, who himself declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Perfect rest is, of course, absolute freedom from motion, and is our goal. St. Bernard says, "The most subtle temptation that can beset us is to occupy ourselves too much in outward works." Our least interior act is higher and nobler than our greatest outward one, and yet our loftiest interior act halts in God's unveiled presence in the soul.

Q. So then we must all be active for some time to come. But how can we know right action from wrong?

A. If any man acts in such a way that his deeds are able to degrade him, be sure he is not acting according to God's law. That is one test. Works done outside the kingdom of God are dead works, but works done in the kingdom are living works. If you want to live and have your work live, you must be first dead to all things, and reduced to nobody. So enter into your own Ground and work: acts done by you there are all living. But there is another aspect to this question. Actually, a man should orient his will and all his works to God and having only him in view go forward unafraid, not thinking, Am I right or am I wrong? One who worked out all the chances before starting his first fight would never fight at all. And, if going to some place we must think how to set the first foot down, we shall never get there. A man should not dragoon himself: "This you must do at

any cost." That would be wrong for thus he lends importance to himself. Follow your principles and keep straight on; you will come to the right place; that is the way.

Q. Then we need not always know what is best for us?

A. No, my child; whatever it is that lights devotion in your heart and knits you closest to God, that is the best thing for you in every case.

Q. Does the time come, then, when we feel it is the Lord alone who works in us, and not we ourselves?

A. Yes, this God does when he has given us himself first. Any man who would attain to this must stay in the presence of God the whole time and refuse to let God be put out of his mind by fortune or misfortune or by any creature whatsoever.

Q. Although I try to practice the presence of God in every place, still I find it, so much easier in the church and other quiet places, than in busy ones.

A. True. One may go to the fields and say one's prayers and be conscious of God, or go to church and be conscious of God; if we are more conscious of him by being in a quiet place, however, that comes of our own imperfection after all, for God is in all things and all places and just as ready to give himself so far as he can; and that man knows God aright who always finds him the same.

Q. Are we to take literally what Genesis says about creation?

A. Do not foolishly imagine that God, when he created the heavens and the earth and all beings, made one thing one day and another the next. Moses describes it that way, it is true, but he knew better; he did so merely for those who are incapable of understanding or conceiving otherwise. All God did was to will, and these things were. God works without instrument and without image.

(To be continued)

Leaves from an Ashrama:

A Closer Walk

Swami Vidyatmananda

It wasn't a piece that I liked very much--Tennessee Ernie Ford and his gospel singers' recording of '*Just a Closer Walk with Thee*'. A sort of watered-down Black Christian Gospel choir sung with a certain unctuousness. The lyrics were practically meaningless. The worth of the work was in the title, which gave one something to think about. (Later I learned that the eighteenth-century English poet William Cowper had composed a hymn called: '*Oh! for a Closer Walk with God*'.) I found the title of the Ford piece much in my mind, so I began to reflect on its meaning.

To have a closer walk with God, I reasoned, was squarely up to me. I recalled the title of another song, popular years before: '*Walk a Little Faster*'. It was like that. One could go as fast as one wished, draw as near to God as one wanted to. I knew full well what it was that kept me lagging behind and what I had to do to narrow the distance. State of grace: it was a matter of establishing a state of grace, of living in the light. That's what walking close did for one.

For example, on those days when I skipped meditation, using as excuse that I was too busy to spare the time, I seemed to have dropped perceptibly behind. Well, wasn't it asked in the book of Amos: 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' In avoiding meditation or failing to do *japa* (meditative repetition of a mantra or a divine name) when there was an opportunity, one said in effect: '*You go ahead; I'll catch up later.*'

Then there were diversions like too much fiction, read, heard, or seen, which widened the gap. Scenes of chases and shootouts, literal or figurative, blot out the image of the Companion walking in front; one has, it might be said, chosen cops and robbers as preferred comrades. Or excessive delights of the tongue, whether of gossip or of the table, which can so easily provoke the heaviness which makes a walker puff and drag his feet.

And those more subtle distractions one allowed oneself, too beguiling to be easily rejected--remembrance of past delights and the manufacture of fantasies depicting hoped-for future joys. In 1936 an English woman visited Sri Ramana Maharshi in order to ask him one question: "*What keeps us from realizing?*" The Maharshi's reply was equally concise: "*Memory.*"

Held back, waylaid by memory. Yes it is true. And anticipation is just as inhibiting. One is like the courtesan Pingala in the Indian fable--waiting up late night after night, hoping to encounter that someone who would finally satisfy the heart's yearning; and night after night forced to give up and go home frustrated. Finally Pingala renounced hope and at last gained peace. It must be like that. Attaining hopelessness is the only hope! Remembering and fantasizing are brakes to progress.

I knew full well that it was up to me at what rate I preferred to move ahead. The rules for gaining a state of grace were clear, and I could observe them if I wished. "*I am the light of the world,*" said Jesus. "*He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.*"

He that followeth me' - Certainly the closer one follows the clearer the light, and the closer one follows the more abundant the life.

Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play **(Book review)**

Swami Chetanananda

Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play by Swami Chetanananda might well have been titled “Sri Sarada Devi: The Great Mother.” Sri Sarada Devi, affectionately known as the Holy Mother among devotees and admirers, is the subject of this fascinating book, a companion volume to the swami’s previous book, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*. During her birthday celebration at Belur Math in December of 1930 when Mahapurushji Maharaj, Swami Shivananda, was president of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, he prayed:

Mother, Mother, O Thou Great Mother, glory to Thee! . . . Is this an ordinary day? This is the birthday of the Great Mother. It was the Great Mother Herself who took birth on this day for the good of the world and its creatures. It is hard to understand how God plays by accepting human bodies. . . . How commonplace a life she led! How hidden remained her spiritual stature, as though She were in disguise!

Sarada Devi was indeed the Great Mother: her life was a mysterious play of human and divine. As with Sri Ramakrishna her spiritual counterpart, she remained almost completely veiled, her divinity concealed by her humanity. The swami quotes an incident when a woman devotee questioned Mother why it was so difficult to recognize her as the Divine Mother. Mother, who always appeared so ordinary and ever reluctant to draw attention to herself, replied with a story.

How can everyone recognize divinity, my child? There was a big diamond lying at a bathing ghat. Considering it to be an ordinary stone, people rubbed their feet against it to smooth their soles. One day a jeweller came there and immediately recognized it as a large and precious diamond. . . . In fact, the Master was God. He assumed a human form to mitigate the suffering of humanity. He came to this world incognito, like a king who visits the city in disguise. I am Bhagavati [the goddess].

She was our mother in all respects. As she told Girish Chandra Ghosh, Sri Ramakrishna’s bohemian disciple, “I am your real mother, not a step-mother.” On the other hand, she also proclaimed that Sri Ramakrishna left her behind after his departure to manifest the motherhood of God. Swami Chetanananda has masterfully portrayed Sarada Devi’s divine play in all its fullness and sweetness in this monumental biography. Weaving the details of her simple life with stories, examples, firsthand accounts and her teachings has made the

narration vivid. We feel her vibrant presence through every page we turn. Some incidents, though repeated by different people, simply provide different views of her personality, adding another dimension to the charm and grace of her daily life and her interactions with others. We learn how Mother managed to live serenely in the most difficult-to-imagine domestic setting, how she poured her love on all without distinction, how detached she was, soaring above praise and censure—a true woman of steady wisdom, *sthitaprajna*.

The swami has skilfully drawn on material from three previously published biographies in English—those of Swami Tapasyananda, Swami Gambhirananda, and Swami Nikhilananda, as well as from reminiscences and diaries in Bengali of some of her monastic disciples and accounts from householder devotees, magazine articles and other publications. Since the author’s mother tongue is Bengali, he had a decided advantage in translating the Bengali sources into English and also in interpreting the culture, local traditions, and village customs prevalent during Sarada Devi’s lifetime.

A detailed list of the swami’s main source material is given in the preface. We are presented with a kaleidoscope of the Mother. With each turn of the scope we see a different aspect of her infinite manifestations—grand, humble, big, small, significant and apparently insignificant. Nothing has been left out. The book is divided into thirty-five chapters, each preceded by a relevant verse, most often in praise of the Divine Mother. It is divided into three parts: her *Adi Lila*, consisting of details of her early life, including meeting Sri Ramakrishna and serving him from 1853-1886 until his passing away; her *Madhya Lila*, 1887-1908, which details various pilgrimages, spiritual practices, the budding of her spiritual ministry, and her domestic life; and finally her *Antya Lila* or final *Lila*, 1909-1920, wherein she assumed the role of a spiritual teacher, often revealing her divinity. The swami explains in the Introduction that Holy Mother “was the embodiment of shakti, the cosmic energy of God. In this book, the reader will be able to visualize how that divine energy manifested in this world over a period of sixty-seven years.” This statement is the key to understanding the author’s intent: to demonstrate Mother’s multi-faceted expression of divine power.

Swami Shivananda remarked over eighty years ago that with the advent of Mother’s coming there has been “*a very striking awakening among women in all fields of life—in spirituality, politics, science, art, literature, and so on; it is going to be more striking in future. . . . She is the ideal for the womanhood of this age all over the world.*”

The swami’s comment is clearly evident when we observe how women have risen worldwide in all these areas. One might wonder how Holy Mother’s

unadorned village life and simple message of loving compassion, purity of life, forbearance, and moral strength can help modern women in both the East and West in today's fast-paced world. And yet, paradoxical as it may seem, it is exactly the message that is needed to counterbalance the materialistic influences of the times. How modern she was in her thinking and attitudes is amply demonstrated throughout this book. The expression is often quaint, but the deep insight behind her words and actions is astonishing.

Mother has shown that women's liberation, empowerment, and recognition are to be gained neither through license nor mere self-assertion, but through nobility, dignity, and refinement of character. Self-restraint and self-respect are the foundation of real freedom. Holy Mother is an ideal model which fosters a vastly profound paradigm shift that today's modern women would do well to emulate in their lives for lasting peace and true fulfilment.

In addition to a chronological biography, there is also an epilogue, five appendices, and a detailed chart of her life events. The glossary and meticulous references facilitate further study for those interested in Holy Mother's simple but deeply profound life.

In keeping with its tradition, the Vedanta Society of St. Louis has done a magnificent job in producing this book. The elegant jacket design, high-quality art paper and binding, and artistic layout, in addition to the nearly 100 illustrations, including all photographs available of the Holy Mother, are superb. Many of the photographs are not only rare but have been exceptionally reproduced.

We are indebted to Swami Chetanananda for bringing all this material together in one comprehensive volume highlighted by his own insights and lifelong reflections on her compassion, patience, and above all, loving acceptance of everyone as her own child. A thorough study of this book will give us all we need for our spiritual journey: inspiration, sustenance, and reassurance that after all, no matter what, "I have a mother."

Pravrajika Virajaprana

Vedanta Convent

Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco

Sri Sarada Devi and Her Divine Play

Price: \$ 35=00

By Swami Chetanananda

Programme for May - June 2017

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

May 7	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 14	Swami Shivarupananda
May 14	Jnana Yoga 14	Swami Dayatmananda
May 21	Jnana Yoga 15	Swami Dayatmananda
May 28	Jnana Yoga 16	Swami Dayatmananda
June 4	Jnana Yoga 17	Swami Dayatmananda
June 11	Jnana Yoga 18	Swami Dayatmananda
June 18	Day Retreat	
June 25	Crest Jewel of Discrimination 15	Swami Shivarupananda

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda
at the Vedanta Centre,
on 18th June from 10:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.
Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

continued from the front cover

(To M.) The Kundalini is speedily awakened if one follows the path of Bhakti. God cannot be seen unless She is awakened.

Yoga and the six centres

MASTER: 'Yoga is not possible if the mind dwells on 'lust and gold'. The mind of a worldly man generally moves among the three lower centres: those at the navel, at the sexual organ, and at the organ of evacuation. After great effort and spiritual practice the Kundalini is awakened.

According to the yogis there are three nerves in the spinal column: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. Along the Sushumna are six lotuses, or centres, the lowest being known as the Muladhara. Then come successively Svadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, Visuddha, and Ajna.

These are the six centres. The Kundalini, when awakened, passes through the lower centres and comes to the Anahata, which is at the heart. It stays there. At that time the mind of the aspirant is withdrawn from the three lower centres. He feels the awakening of Divine Consciousness and sees Light. In mute wonder he sees that radiance and cries out: -What is this? What is this?'

'After passing through the six centres, the Kundalini reaches the thousand petalled lotus known as the Sahasrara, and the aspirant goes into samadhi.

(From The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)

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Two friends went into an orchard. One of them possessing much worldly wisdom, immediately began to count the mango trees there and the number of mangoes each tree bore, and to estimate what might be the approximate value of the whole orchard. His companion went to the owner, made friendship with him, and then, quietly going to a tree, began at his host's desire to pluck the fruits and eat them. Whom do you consider to be the wiser of the two? Eat mangoes! It will satisfy your hunger. What is the good of counting the trees and leaves and making calculations? The vain man of intellect busies himself uselessly with finding out the 'why' and 'wherefore' of creation, while the humble man of wisdom makes friends with the Creator and enjoys His gift of supreme bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna

