

Vedanta

406 MARCH - APRIL 2019

Search for Truth
Swami Siddheshwarananda

Levels of Consciousness
Swami Shraddhananda



Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 4



THE PLUNDERERS WHO GO ABOUT AS RELIGIOUS

THERE was a goldsmith who kept a jewellery shop. He looked like a great devotee, a true Vaishnava, with beads round his neck, rosary in his hand, and the holy marks on his forehead. Naturally people trusted him and came to his shop on business. They thought that, being such a pious man, he would never cheat them. Whenever a party of customers entered the shop, they would hear one of his craftsmen say, 'Kesava! Kesava!' Another would say after a while, 'Gopal! Gopal!' Then a third would mutter, 'Hari!

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Swami Vivekananda's Moral Ideas and Ideals – 2

Ethical and moral theology in major non-Hindu religious traditions

Though ethics developed as branch of philosophy independent of religious tradition in the west, yet it cannot be denied that religious traditions have considerably influenced and are still continuing to influence human moral behaviour, consciously or unconsciously, down the ages.

Judeo-Christian ethics

The basis of Judeo-Christian morality is the Jewish idea of morality as the contract between God and man. God has established a moral order in the world and by entering into a covenant with Moses, has made it obligatory for man to follow the 'Ten Commandments'. Not to follow any of these commandments is a violation of the Divine Covenant, a sin and is liable to divine punishment. An important Christian dogma is that through sin the indwelling of the Holy Spirit gets lost and can be regained only through confession and holy communion. Jesus Christ re-interpreted many of the Jewish Commandments and the main virtues stressed by him were: Love for God and for one's neighbour, humility and non-violence.

Islamic ethics

The Islamic view of morality is similar to the Judeo-Christian view but it rejects the doctrine of God's covenant. The moral order is established by God's (Allah's) will, and man is duty bound to follow it. Those who fail to do it are punished by God. Although Islam stresses several virtues like brotherly love, duty to family and society, charity etc., it is essentially a religion of heroism. In no other religion have the values of courage, strength and human dignity found such a prominent place as in Islam.

Buddhist Ethics

Buddhism has a highly developed system of ethics based on the law of Karma which itself is based on the doctrine of *Pratitya Samutpada*. Buddha discovered that a major part of human suffering was caused by one's own wrong attitude and merely by adhering to moral principles it was possible to attain peace of mind. All suffering originated from *trishna* or desire which itself was a result of ignorance or *Avidya*. He also developed a new metaphysical system to account for this cause of sorrow which is known as *Pratitya Samutpada*, translated as 'dependent origination or causal chain' with the help of it Buddha showed how the illusory self arose due to *Avidya* and how it became the cause of all suffering. A study of the teachings of Buddha shows that he was one of the first Prophets of the world who laid the greatest stress upon morality. As Swamiji has very aptly remarked: "That Man (Buddha) set in motion the highest moral ideas any nation can have. Whenever there is a moral code, it is a ray of light from that Man."¹

Hindu Ethics

The foundation of Hindu Ethics or Dharma Sastras are laid upon the firm rock of revelation, i.e. the Srutis or Vedas. The word '*Dharma*' has a very comprehensive import and the Dharma Sastras deal with practically the whole life of man in relation to his fellow men, to God and the lower animals as well and they help to regulate human conduct in all these various relations. The Vedic sages discovered the concept of '*Rta*' cosmic moral order which governed both physical events and moral experiences. So, in the early Vedic age the chief moral concern of people was how to live in harmony with '*Rta*'. This led to the development of the concept of *Yajna* (sacrifice) which in turn led to the discovery of the law of Karma. This doctrine of Karma that presupposes the immortality

of the human soul is the pivot on which the Hindu ethics revolves. It has exerted a tremendous influence in governing human conduct in India. According to the law of Karma, an action done here gets transformed into merit or demerits hereafter. How does this transformation take place? To account for this the Mimansaka philosophers have introduced a strange principle called *Apurva* with explaining (clearly) what it is. The Vedanta (and also Nyaya) philosophers reject the theory of *Apurva* and hold that the law of Karma is controlled by the will of God who is the dispenser of the *Karmaphala*. Whatever be the explanation, it is clear that there is a universal moral order that is known as *Dharma* in Indian religious tradition.

In the Hindu tradition it is firmly believed that the facts of *Dharma* (the moral ideal) and *Moksha* (liberation) which is the ultimate goal of human life, are beyond the pale of ordinary human reason and experience and they are based on fundamental spiritual principles which can be known only through Srutis (scriptures). These fundamental and universal spiritual principles which have been declared by the Upanishads or the Vedanta, popularly known as the Srutis, have been briefly summarised by Swami Satprakashananda as follows :

“The ever-changing world of phenomena, marked by interdependence and consisting of pairs of opposites is held by one eternal ideal Reality, usually called God, who is self-existent and self-manifest and answers to man’s conception of perfection in every way.

Every individual psycho-physical system of ceaseless change is sustained by a central principle, which is constant, self-luminous, ever pure and free.

The central principle of the microcosm, is not different from the central principle of the macrocosm. That is to say, there is kinship

or unity between the soul of man and the soul of the universe. The truth is, what is innermost in the one is innermost in the other.

To realise this kinship or unity is the goal of life: all human concerns should be regulated with this end in view.”²

The above spiritual truths form the basis of Hindu ethics. The recognition of the spiritual relation of oneness among all beings irrespective of their psycho-physical differences explains all moral standards such as universal love, goodness for goodness’s sake etc., which cannot be established by ordinary human experience or reason.

The Hindus also evolved an ethical science based on these universal principles and the unique philosophy of Samkhya developed by Kapila, that is broad enough to accommodate itself to all temperaments found in different human beings. A deep analysis was made into the nature of phenomenal existence and three principles called the three gunas of *Prakrti* were discovered which were applicable to material objects as well as to the moral nature of man. Thus, the analysis of morality into *Sattvika*, *Rajasika* and *Tamasika* types led to the scientific classification of man into *Varnas* (Caste) and *Ashramas* with their diverse allotted duties. These classification which are based on the subtle biological principles of the gunas provide scope for the moral development for all types of men according to their relative capacities. The conception of *Chaturvarga* which comprises *Artha* – material prosperity, *Kama* – happiness, *Dharma* – moral righteousness and *Moksha* – emancipation was also evolved in which we find almost all the ends that determine all the activities of man. The minor ends of *Artha* and *Kama* – however, are to be guided by *Dharma* and should sub-serve the final end of *Moksha*. Every person was given the freedom to pursue the line most suitable to him, keeping in view the final goal.

Religion as the basis of ethics

Swami Vivekananda firmly believed that ethics cannot stand as an end in itself if it is separated from religion. Utilitarian standards alone could not give a satisfactory basis for ethics. One could argue thus: 'Why should I care for the largest number, if I can make myself more happy through methods that will make others unhappy?' Secondly, social utility is too narrow a concept which could work for a limited period under existing social conditions. He said: '... any law that is derived from society alone cannot be external, cannot cover the whole ground of man's nature... but a morality, an ethical code derived from religion and spirituality, has the whole of infinite man for its scope.'³

But Swami Vivekananda's conception of religion was broad-based and Universal in nature and not one which was confined to temples, priests, ceremonials and profession of dogmas of a narrow type. He pointed out that the founders of all religions claimed to have discovered spiritual and moral truths not through reason or normal human experience but through super sensuous methods. All religions conceive of an Ideal Unit Abstraction either in the form of a Personal or Impersonal God, or a Presence or Moral Law. Even the humblest man tries to realise this Infinite in physical terms but finds he cannot do it. Then he renounces it in favour of supersensuous methods. This renunciation preached by all true religions is the basis of all ethics according to Swami Vivekananda. Therefore, he says: 'Religion is the greatest motive power for releasing that infinite energy which is the birth-right and nature of every man. In building up character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others and peace to oneself, religion is the highest motive power, and therefore, ought to be studied from that standpoint.'⁴

Vedantic background of Swami Vivekananda's ethics

Swami Vivekananda's ethics is a corollary of Vedantic metaphysics propounded by him and not an independent outgrowth. He says: 'My idea is to show that the highest idea of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest metaphysical conceptions and that you need not lower your conception to get ethics and morality, but on the other hand to reach a real basis of morality and ethics you must have the highest philosophical and scientific conceptions.'⁵

According to Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta is the essence of all systems of spiritual thought in the East and the West and is thus the rationale of all religions.

He says: 'the Vedanta applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India, in Hinduism. The first stage, that is Dvaita, applied in the ideas of ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity: as applied to the Semitic group is Mahomedanism. The Advaita as applied to its Yoga – perception form is Buddhism.'⁶

(To be continued)

References:

1. C.W. Vol.2 p.143
2. See "The Goal and the Way" by Swami Satprakashananda, Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1977
3. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, (Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol.2, p.64
4. C.W. Vol.2 p.67
5. C.W. Vol.2 p.355
6. C.W. Vol.5, p.82

Search for Truth

Swami Siddheshwarananda

I. From the point of view of evolution

If we examine the problem of truth from the point of view of evolution, bearing in mind the relation of cause and effect, we see a vital impulse working through the whole animal series towards knowledge of the Real. From the Sankhya point of view, which was accepted by Patanjali, or from the Darwinian point of view, we may consider evolution as the process by which the unconscious tends, step by step, to become conscious. Thus, in inert matter modifications appear, transformations take place, living forms manifest themselves. The man who has reached perfection has reached the highest rung of the ladder: he is the final product of that creative energy. The various successive products of the same energy were the different steps of evolution.

Thus speaks Jalaluddin Rumi, a Persian Sufi poet of the thirteenth century: "Consciousness sleeps in the mineral; it begins to quiver in the vegetable; it moves in the animal ; in man it becomes conscious of itself." From mineral to conscious man (*jiva*) through living beings (*prani*), an unbroken development takes place: the same impulse manifests itself. Always it is supreme Consciousness (Sat-Chit-Ananda) that expresses Itself.

The ground of human nature is immortality. The individual tries to continue to be; hence his attachment to life, his thirst after existence. In the Mahabharata, Yama, king of Death, asks Yudhishtira what the greatest marvel in the world is, and Yudhishtira answers: "Man sees all beings wending their ways, one after the other, towards earth, their grave, but he cannot believe that he also, one day, will die."

Certainly, we may suppress some of the settings; we may eliminate a part of the scene; but it is practically impossible to imagine the suppression of the spectator or witness—the Self. The sense of immortality is innate in us. This sense is the substratum of our personality and this witness, this Self, is indestructible. It is eternal; It is not conditioned by time and we cannot annihilate It. The whole vital impulse culminates in the expression, the efflorescence, of this pure Consciousness in the human being.

Let us now pursue our search on the philosophical plane.

II. From the philosophical point of view

Theoretically, no postulate is allowed, and for practical purposes, only the least possible. When we analyse empirical experience, we make a dichotomy: we establish a distinction between the objective and the subjective world.

1. **Analysis of the objective world:** In the objective world, the object's right to exist is recognized: all things do exist. According to Shankara's dialectic, Reality must fulfil three conditions:

(a) **Universality:** It must be beyond casual limitations (*upadhi*): therefore, it must not be conditioned, either by time, space, or causality.

(b) **Evidence:** Reality must be self-evident and must shine by its own light. Call it Brahman or call it God—who in this case is conceived independent of any special form or name—the Supreme Reality cannot borrow its light from a foreign source.

(c) **Non-contradiction:** All that our reason enables us to affirm today can be denied tomorrow. Reality must be beyond affirmation as well as beyond negation.

Here are three proofs, and by means of these proofs we can disentangle Reality from our experience of the outer world.

Perception is a unity of analysis in which, Vedanta states, there is a double consciousness at work: an unchanging consciousness and a changing one (see Shankara's Commentary on Bhagavad Gita. 2.16). The unchanging consciousness is the consciousness of existence. It is the common denominator: the invariable; the irreducible factor; that which contains all experience. The changing consciousness is the variable element, the temporary content, the casual modification of every experience: for instance. I see successively this pencil, this table, this chair.

This modification is not the Reality we are seeking, it is only the effect (*karya*). As soon as we see an effect, we try to connect it with a cause (*karana*). We cannot perceive the effect before it enters the field of consciousness and the effect ceases to exist as soon as it ceases to be perceived. We can never embrace in the same glance cause and effect; we see the thread that will be used to make a piece of cloth, or the piece of cloth that has been made with the thread: but we cannot see at the same time the thread and the cloth. From this we may conclude that the modification (*vritti*) is unreal: only existence (*sat*) is real.

2. An analysis of the subjective world: In his Commentary on the Taittiriya Upanishad, Shankara sees the Reality through the various elements which constitute our personality; so, he always finds a perceiving subject and a perceived object. But who is the real perceiving subject? If we keep to the orthodox Vedantic conception of analysis, we see that this personality consists of:

- (a) the gross sheath, the physical body (*annamayakosha*);
- (b) the sheath of vital energy (*pranamayakosha*);
- (c) the mental sheath (*manomayakosha*);
- (d) the sheath of the intellect (*vijnanamayakosha*);
- (e) the sheath of bliss (*anandamayakosha*).

Owing to false identification, the individual consciousness becomes bound to one or other of these elements. The intensity of this casual attachment may increase or decrease, but the pure Consciousness (*Chit or Prajna*) never changes; it is the support of every experience, the invariable element, whatever the modalities of its momentary expression may be.

This Consciousness we can never externalize or objectivize. We cannot isolate it as if it were a laboratory specimen: it is the basis and to that basis we relate all our perceptions. The existence of the Consciousness of the I, the Self, is not an imagination, a figment of our mind; on the contrary, it is the fundamental psychological truth. To sum up, the analysis leads to the discovery of:

- (a) externally, pure Existence (*Sat*):
- (b) internally, pure Consciousness (*Chit*).

Sat and Chit represent two complementary aspects of that Reality: the first, *Sat*, is the objective aspect; the second, *Chit*, is the subjective aspect; between them there is no difference. Both terms are equivalent, and we may write the equation: *Sat=Chit*. Ananda is the bliss which belongs to this higher Consciousness.

III. From the psychological point of view

We find the same approach to Reality if we look at things from a strictly psychological point of view. Shankara has explained the method in many passages of his commentaries. The analytic method (*jnana marga*) enables us to discriminate between the witness and the scene (*drik-drishya-viveka*).

The Western mind, faithful to the Hellenic tradition, considers that a true philosophy should approach all problems without any personal prejudice. One should not conclude that the East, dealing with the same problems, is unable to free itself from certain specific

beliefs—from the Liberation concept for instance. Indeed, so long as a personal problem persists, there can be no Liberation.

Vedanta offers us, in order to reach Truth, a method that is independent of any particular opinion or belief. The Upanishads had already taught an approach of this type, and Buddhism deals with the problem excluding any preconceived idea and refusing allegiance to any revelation. Hinduism generally accepts revelation, but it also offers the possibility of rebelling against tradition. Buddha only emphasized that revolt. Similarly, all sages have shown themselves independent of all preconceived ideas. The great post-Buddhistic philosophers, Ashvagosha and Nagarjuna, developed systems completely free from any personal prejudice. Shankara adopted the same method, except that he kept to the norms of Hindu thought. The method he presents leaves no place for conventional opinions: it rests on reason alone. It discriminates, by means of a psychological analysis, between the witness and the sight. In this way we can discern the individuality (*jiva*) and the outer world, the non-self. The book called *Drik-Drishya-Viveka*, which was written by an Advaitin, limits itself to this analytical approach. Professor Masson-Oursel, in his preface to the French edition of this book, wrote:

"Whoever will read in our language this very condensed, but all the more precise text will see how discrimination between the witness and the sight, brings, according to Vedanta philosophy, the key to salvation.

"Except we prove inattentive or superficial, we cannot help being persuaded that here is a rationalism which is as carefully worked out as much master of its means, as that of Spinoza."

This deductive and practical method enables one to approach the truth free from any dogma or belief. Even if the seeker should wish to retain a certain assumption, nothing would prevent him

from applying this experimental method and profiting by it. The only thing that Shankara's school admits right from the beginning as real is the non-existence of forms and appearances; this school, then, emphasizes the unceasing change, the moving flux of phenomena. We are thus enabled, by an exhaustive elimination of qualifications and determinations, to reach the supreme immutable truth, otherwise known as Sat-Chit-Ananda.

The supreme Reality is always with us; but we are not aware of it because false identifications make us confuse the changing with the unchanging. The first part of the analysis therefore consists of successive negations: truth is neither this nor that—"*neti, neti*". We reach through this process of investigation the fundamental basis, which is positive according to the Vedanta and negative according to certain Buddhist systems, such as the *Yogachara* and *Shunyata*. Let us add that this research, which is grounded in reason, is also supported by certain sacred texts.

Here is the method: First let us consider an object in the outward world. The sensation we have of it is that of a contact, a contact between the object and the corresponding organ, the eye for instance. But things change: after this or that object we see another. We establish, then, that the instrument of perception has not been affected by the change of objects. But the sensations themselves are subject to variations: the organ itself can be defective, and vision more or less clear. A one-eyed man has incomplete vision; a blind man has no vision at all. In the midst of all these variations, mind remains as a conscious unity. The impression left on the mind is therefore on a plane higher than that of sensations.

In mind, also, changes occur, but if we pursue our analysis to its end, we shall be able to disentangle an element which is higher, an irreducible element: it is the pure Consciousness which always

remains as an immutable witness. It is that simple, homogeneous Consciousness, which subsists in every circumstance and cannot be affected by any change whatever. This consciousness remains always apart, behind all the waves of the mind; this interior Consciousness is permanent; it never changes. It is the witness of all the movements of life in the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep. It registers the whole panorama of existence. It is the truth.

It is impossible to isolate Consciousness; it can never become an object of knowledge. However far our search may go, Consciousness is always beyond our reach; we cannot capture it and hold it before our eyes. If it were, otherwise, there would have to be another knower and thus we should be led to an infinite regress. This eternal knower, this indestructible identity, is the ultimate truth within us.

According to Vedanta. the centre of pure Consciousness is undifferentiated, indeterminate, inexpressible; the three words 'Sat', 'Chit', 'Ananda', suggest what its nature is. According to Buddhism, on the other hand, Consciousness is a compound; it is an aggregate made up of the antecedent and the subsequent thought. Desire (*tanha*) is the cohesive force in human personality. By annihilation of desire comes Nirvana; through purification (*shila*) we reach the superconscious state.

If we analyse the outer world, we find that the object perceived has no permanent value. To be, is to be perceived. Any object that is perceived, then, has only a passing, impermanent existence. The screen on which images of objects are projected is the stable, immortal Consciousness. It is always within us. Whatever we do, it is the constant witness of our actions. It remains identical in the three states of human life; nothing can destroy it : it is the very basis of our existence. And yet it may be maintained that

consciousness is the product of evolution and that it only appears in man. It would then be the expression of the whole evolutionary process. Instead of being the basis of all things it would be something born of the contact between subject and object. Indeed, whenever there is consciousness of something there is contact between two elements. Sometimes we see a narrowing of consciousness, sometimes even its complete disappearance as in fainting or in deep sleep. On the other hand, whenever there is contact or friction, we see a broadening of consciousness. This being so, how to admit that pure Consciousness (*Chit or Prajna*) can be considered as the basis and support of all existence?

Throughout the evolutionary process everything is subject to one force—the same creative energy that makes life continuous and gives it a constant direction. This force sustains the whole world. From the point of view of evolution, it does not act on inert matter only, or on the mineral world only, or on the involved, the unmanifest, that is to say, on the primordial: it also acts in the manifestation, producing effects. It is the very stuff of which the world is made.

It goes without saying that this positive basis can never become an object of knowledge: any attempt to make the witness enter the field of knowledge is bound to fail, however we may attempt to lay hold of him and isolate him. So, the force which supports the universe is identical with Consciousness. But we can disentangle the witness (the perceiving subject) of the false identifications that have taken place as a consequence of empirical experiences. Thus, we can isolate him successively: (a) from the physical body, (b) from the objects, (c) from any feeling of attachment.

Though we may never be able to see the face of truth, Yoga at least gives us a discipline that enables us to disentangle the witness from the content of our perceptions. By practising Yoga, we

progress towards nirvikalpa samadhi, the experience of Consciousness without content. After this experience, one can 'see' the truth in all beings and in all things.

Now we understand why Vedanta tells us, in the beginning, to deny all our perceptions as unreal: later, the whole scene will be for us the very expression of the truth. The negative approach enables us to distinguish the Real from the unreal. Thenceforth, this negative approach is followed by another, a positive one, which enables us to become and to be that very truth. All the modifications appear, then, as manifestations of the same truth—the first cause, Sat-Chit-Ananda, pure Consciousness. To realize that truth is the culmination of the Vedantic search.

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True civilization does not mean congregating in cities and living a foolish life, but going Godward, controlling the senses, and thus becoming the ruler in this house of the Self.

Think of the slavery in which we are [bound]. Every beautiful form I see, every sound of praise I hear, immediately attracts me; every word of blame I hear immediately repels me. Every fool has an influence over my mind. Every little movement in the world makes an impression upon me. Is this a life worth living?

So when you have realized the misery of this physical existence when you have become convinced that such a life is not worth living you have made the first step towards Jnana.

- Swami Vivekananda

Levels of Consciousness

Swami Shraddhananda

If we designate Consciousness as our foremost spiritual objective, our metaphysical inquiry is then very simple, because consciousness is a matter of familiar experience.

Western philosophers, psychologists, and physiologists have tried to examine and formulate the nature of consciousness from different viewpoints, and as a result, we have a wide variety of opinions about the origin and function of consciousness. Many of these theories oppose one another; a conclusion about consciousness acceptable to all seems a very remote possibility. However, on the following points these theories appear to have no disagreement.

Consciousness: (1) is a mental phenomenon intimately related to our brain and nervous system; (2) has no independent existence since birth, growth, and waking depend upon several factors: The Sense organs, external stimuli, and the body's physiological functions; (3) is a sort of guiding light for the biological organism; it is essential for purposive behaviour.

Contemporary thinkers seem to be more interested in how consciousness originates and functions than in what consciousness is. It is difficult for them to look upon consciousness as an entity independent of the object that one is conscious of.

We are always conscious of something—a flying bird, a wall, a sound, a touch, an odour, a thought or an emotion. According to many Western thinkers, objectless consciousness is an absurdity. We should not forget one important point: When we study objective consciousness outside ourselves, we actually do not perceive consciousness as such, but the phenomena associated with consciousness. When we see a man showing his fist in anger,

or a woman smiling in happiness, or an insect crawling in search of food, we are observing purposive phenomena. From these phenomena we infer that the man, the woman, and the insect are conscious beings. We never come into direct contact with their consciousness. Direct perception is possible only with regard to our own consciousness. To ourselves, consciousness is self-revealed. It is appropriate, then, that in the study of consciousness an important place is given to introspection.

An objective study of purposive behaviour can never help us understand the nature of consciousness. It is probably not necessary for science to delve into the nature of consciousness by introspection. Science can remain satisfied with observing the phenomena of consciousness objectively, by external observation. But Western psychological science should not be dogmatic in asserting that the domain of consciousness extends thus far and no farther.

In fact, the sphere of consciousness is infinitely vast, and it can be studied on different levels. On each of these levels, our approach can be objective as well as subjective. The objective approach tells us what consciousness on a particular level does. The subjective approach is necessary to determine what consciousness on that level is.

If we are introspective and think about our own consciousness, we will observe that our own consciousness is like a territory where all our experiences take place. Just as all objects are in space and all events occur in time, so all experiences are associated with awareness. When we perceive anything, we are "aware" of it.

When we watch a thought or an emotion within ourselves, the process has to be accompanied by consciousness. When we are walking or playing, reading a book, listening to music, or making an experiment in the laboratory, consciousness must be present in

the background of the mind. Even to perceive time and space, we first need consciousness. There is no thought unless we are conscious of it. We cannot speak of life if we dissociate it from consciousness, for our very existence is a conscious existence. Consciousness surrounds us at every phase of life; we cannot approach a single point of the universe without our awareness. So long as we are awake, we cannot escape consciousness. Is it then unreasonable to view consciousness as fundamental a reality as time and space?

This all-embracing characteristic of consciousness can be understood only when we approach it through our own intuition. Viewed objectively in another subject—like a dog or a worm or even a human being—consciousness can be inferred as a unique quality of the biological organism, strictly limited within the organism, functioning under certain circumstances, and subsiding when its function is over. It has no more intrinsic value than hunger or thirst. In this objective view, there is no continuity of consciousness. It is strictly a psycho-biological phenomenon within the organism. It comes and goes with the impulse producing it.

However, when we approach consciousness through our own intuition, it no longer remains a matter of inference. We are in the midst of the radiance of our own awareness. There is no break in that awareness. Objects both internal (thoughts, emotions, feelings, etc.) and external (houses, gardens, people, animals, etc.) pass before that radiance in continuous succession and are instantly "known" to us. But that which links these objects with knowledge is the immutable Consciousness in us—vast, immeasurable, self-existent. It is the core of the personality. It is also the core of our experience. All existence rests in that Consciousness.

Though the true nature of Consciousness has to be grasped through our own intuition, it does not mean that each and every person will acquire such knowledge. It has to be developed by years of patient inquiry and discipline. The Katha Upanishad clearly states that what prevents us from realizing the ever-existent Self is our own foolishness: "One who has not first turned away from wickedness, who is not tranquil and subdued, and whose mind is not at peace cannot attain the Atman" (1.2.24).

The true nature of Consciousness is always free. It has no birth or death. It undergoes no change under any circumstance. It is not bound by time, space, or laws of causality. It is the highest immortal Reality; it is Brahman. As conscious human beings, we always share that Reality.

Consciousness becomes "bound" when it enters into a subject-object relationship. Thus, all the knowledge and thought of our empirical life are manifestations of Consciousness in bondage.

Vedanta would say that this bondage is only apparent.

The true nature of Consciousness—Brahman—can never be blemished or undergo any change. The apparently transitory nature of Consciousness has to be ascribed to the mind with which it is associated. Thought-waves, or *vruttis*, come and go, but not the Consciousness which illumines them. In daily life, however, we cannot detect true Consciousness. As a rule, we confuse Consciousness with the thought-waves of the mind, and as a result, we assume that Consciousness is transient, fragmentary, and variable. It is no wonder that some Western scientists equate Consciousness with vibrations in the brain.

Conversely, bound consciousness, characterized by a subject-object relationship, exists at many levels apart from our familiar waking experience. The dream state is one such example. In the dream state, we have a perfectly valid world with its manifold

objects and occurrences in its own time-space-causality framework. Only when we wake up do we realize the absurdities of the dreams.

In deep sleep we find another level of consciousness, which is quite different from either that of the waking or the dream state. The object in deep sleep is not from this manifold universe—as in the waking and dream states—but a unified mass of cognition. Sense experiences like sight, sound, and smell, and mental waves such as thoughts, emotions, and feelings have all conglomerated into a formless whole, without any specific content. This experience is bound to give us great peace, since the movement of the mind and senses has stopped. The peace of deep sleep should not be interpreted as a negative perception. Sleep is not unconsciousness from the point of view of the total human personality; it is unconsciousness in relation to the waking person.

In religious and mystical experiences, Consciousness functions on yet another level. In this state, achieved by prolonged practice of self-control and contemplation, the mind becomes so subtle and pure that when Consciousness is reflected there, the experience assumes the form of diverse, super-sensuous perceptions. The form this perception takes depends upon one's spiritual approach. A devotee of Krishna may hear his divine flute; a devotee of Christ may see the beatific form of Jesus or Mary. A mystic who does not believe in the forms of God may experience peace and blessedness springing from the vivid revelation of an impersonal spiritual idea. While listening to religious music, an ardent devotee may have an ecstatic experience as the mind is lifted to an unusual level of calmness and joy.

Since these experiences imply a subject-object relationship (the subject is the devotee; the object, the forms and ideas of God), the experiencing consciousness still belongs to the category of the "bound." Spiritual visions have the Power to transform our senses

and mind remarkably; great calmness, purity, peace, and feelings of freedom, security, and joy invariably accompany these experiences. And yet Vedanta does not admit consciousness to have reached its highest level there. These experiences are significant stages on the path to the Highest.

The highest level of consciousness is reached when we realize it to be the eternal, infinite support of all experience, yet never attached to any objective content. This is the Atman, our true Self. The Atman is Brahman, the ultimate goal of our spiritual search.

Vedanta hesitates to use the word "reach" with respect to the Atman, since the Atman is always with us, our true nature. Never for a moment have we been separated from It. We are always That. The tragedy is that we have somehow forgotten our eternal heritage. This forgetfulness is called *maya* in Vedanta. All spiritual practices are for the purpose of removing *maya*—the basic ignorance of life—so that the ever-existent truth of the Self can be revealed to us.

Truly speaking, there are no "levels" in Consciousness. Its shining nature is retained under all conditions. What gives the idea of levels in Consciousness is the *upadhi*,¹ the adjunct with which Consciousness is apparently linked. Thus, we distinguish waking from dream, dream from sleep, mystical consciousness from empirical consciousness, and even in waking, we classify our experiences under various categories. However, from the standpoint of the Self, the essence of Consciousness remains unchanged in all these situations. It neither increases nor decreases; it is neither glorified nor debased. It is always pure, free, and immortal.

Supreme wisdom is to know that our conscious life is illumined at every moment by the Light of all lights, the Truth of all truths—our own Self. Rightly does the Kena Upanishad declare,

"Brahman is known when It is realized in every state of mind; for by such knowledge one attains immortality."(2.4) And the Katha Upanishad says, "It is through the Atman that one knows form, taste, smell, sound, touch and carnal pleasures. Is there anything that remains unknown to the Atman?"(2.1.3)

The Consciousness which surrounds us at all times—inside and outside like time and space—is the highest Reality when we can understand its nature by freeing it from objective ideas which give it the appearance of transience. Consciousness is our own Self. All the epithets that describe Brahman, such as Being, Bliss, and Immortality, really belong to the same Reality.

The simplest way to approach this Reality is through our own consciousness.

References:

1. According to Vedanta philosophy, an *upadhi* is a limiting adjunct, a bondage of ignorance which the Atman imposes upon Itself by its identification with the body, mind, senses, intellect, and ego.

(Reprinted from "Seeing God Everywhere, A Practical Guide to Spiritual Living" by Swami Shraddhananda, Vedanta Society, Hollywood, 1996, p. 116 to 121)

Meditation on the New Year - 2

Swami Chetanananda

Ramakrishna's mysterious "I" played out in different planes at different times. Swami Saradananda wrote:

It is evident that after he attained nirvikalpa samadhi, the Master's little, or unripe, "I" completely disappeared. And whatever I-ness was left saw itself as ever connected with the Cosmic, or ripe, "I". Sometimes it would feel itself to be a limb or a part of the Cosmic "I", and sometimes it would ascend gradually to the level of the Cosmic "I" and merge in It. The Master could therefore grasp all ideas within all minds because all ideas of all minds in the world spring from that Cosmic "I". Because the Master was always identified with that all-pervading "I", he was able to know and understand any ideas that arose in the Cosmic Mind. In that exalted state, the Master's feeling "I am a part of God" would gradually vanish and the Cosmic "I" or the Divine Mother's "I" would become manifest through him, and he would act as a guru, possessing the power of bestowing grace and inflicting punishment. At that time the Master would not appear to be humbler than the humblest: His demeanour, behaviour with others, and other actions took a different form. Becoming like the mythical wish-fulfilling tree, he would ask a devotee, "What do you want?" as if he was ready to use his superhuman power to fulfill the devotee's desire immediately.

When the Master became the kalpataru on that auspicious New Year's Day, he blessed his devotees. This blessing was infallible. It is not true that the Master became kalpataru only on that day; he had fulfilled the wishes of his disciples and devotees many times on different occasions earlier. Swamiji once said: "He is actually distributing love. Love, devotion, knowledge, liberation, and

whatever one desires—Gora [Sri Ramakrishna] is bestowing upon us whatever he wishes. What wonderful power!" Even now the Master listens to his devotees' prayers and fulfills them.

"Tomāder sakaler chaitanya hok—May you all be illumined!" This was Ramakrishna's last public utterance. The phrase is similar to the word "Tattwamasi—thou art that," a great Vedic dictum. In the Chandogya Upanishad, the sage Aruni instructed his son Svetaketu nine times using the phrase "Tattwamasi—That thou art." Tat = Brahman; twam = you; asi = are. Through this, Svetaketu attained Self-knowledge. Aruni told his son: "You have always been Brahman, but due to ignorance you were unaware of it. One attains the bliss of Brahman when ignorance disappears."

On that New Year's Day in Cossipore, many devotees were present, so the Master said, "May you all be illumined," meaning "Let your hidden Brahman-consciousness be awakened." The difference between "Tattwamasi" and "Tomar chaitanya hok" is the wording and not the meaning. But on that day the Master did not stop at saying "May you all be illumined"; he touched each devotee's chest, one by one, with the palm of his hand and transmitted spiritual power to them instantly. In Tantra, awakening someone's spiritual consciousness by touch is called Shāmbhavi initiation.

What is this consciousness? Spiritual consciousness is the chit aspect of Sat-chit-ananda Brahman. All kinds of knowledge come from this consciousness. This question arose in the Mundaka Upanishad: "What is that by knowing which all this becomes known?" That is Satchidananda Brahman. It is the light of all lights. When It shines, everything shines. Stars, moon, sun, lightning, and fire are lighted by the light of Brahman.

The Master once said: "One cannot know that Consciousness without awakening one's own spiritual consciousness. Futile is the human birth without the awakening of spiritual consciousness." For

this reason the Master awakened spiritual consciousness in the hearts of his devotees on this New Year's Day.

Spiritual consciousness is knowledge. The Master further said: "It is to know one's own Self and keep the mind in It. One must light the lamp of Knowledge in one's heart to see the Divine Mother. After attaining knowledge, when a man lives in this world, he can see clearly the difference between good and bad, real and unreal. The sign of knowledge is passion for God, the awakening of the kundalini, a peaceful nature, and the absence of pride."

The Master came to lead human beings from darkness to light, bondage to liberation. So he blessed the devotees, saying, "Be illumined." He knew the mind goes up and down in the dualistic plane, so there is no permanent peace and happiness there. The nondualistic experience is the final goal in spiritual life. The Master said, "First tie the knowledge of nonduality in a corner of your cloth, then do as you please. Consciousness is awakened after the knowledge of the nondual Brahman. After this realization comes eternal bliss." On that New Year's Day, the Master bestowed his supreme blessing not only upon those 30 devotees, but also for future human beings. Among the four goals of human life—*dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (aesthetic desire), and *moksha* (liberation)—*moksha* is the supreme or ultimate goal. The scriptures say "*Jnānāt moksha*—liberation comes from Self-knowledge."

The main intention of the Master's blessing was to impart the knowledge of Brahman to devotees by destroying the fetters binding their hearts. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says: "This Brahman is the supreme goal, supreme glory, supreme abode, and supreme bliss. On a particle of this bliss other creatures live" (4:3:32).

On this auspicious New Year's Day, the Master broke the jar of bliss in front of everybody assembled in that garden. Akshay Kumar Sen wrote in Ramakrishna Punthi: "Sri Ramakrishna promised that before he left the world he would break the earthen jar in the market

place. Let me tell you how the Master broke the jar.” Then the author described the events of 1 January 1886. Ram Chandra Datta also wrote what the Master had said: “When I leave the world, I shall break the jar of love publicly.”

The meaning of “breaking the jar in the market place” is “to reveal a mystery in front of all.” However, this also implies that if the earthen jar is broken in the marketplace, its contents (generally sweets) come out and can no longer be sold. The treasure within the jar is gathered up by the public to enjoy – as during a festival when sweets are scattered in honour of Lord Hari for the devotees to collect.

On that New Year’s Day, standing on the red brick-dust path at the Cossipore garden house, the Master became the kalpataru and broke the jar of love in front of his devotees. Tasting that supreme divine love, some became intoxicated, some peaceful, and some completely immersed in the bliss of the Atman. Out of exuberant joy they began to call others to partake of that joy. This is the sign of supreme love. The Master used to say, “Pure knowledge and pure love are the same.”

Ram Datta wrote:

On that day there was no limit to the devotees’ joy. But, alas, who knew that it was his last act? Who knew that Ramakrishna would not distribute love anymore? At that time we had not an iota of knowledge, or it did not arise in our minds, that it was the day of breaking the jar of love which he had promised. We did not have the slightest inkling that the Master brought an end to his divine play. We had so much hope and expectation to see more of his lila, but he fulfilled everything with that single blessing, which was beyond our imagination. We attained peace and bliss and fulfilled our self-interest. On that day a curtain dropped on his divine drama.

Ramlal also provided information about what happened after that event. The Master returned to his room after blessing the

devotees. As Lord Shiva drank the poison of this world to protect the creation, so the Master absorbed the poisonous sins of the devotees whom he had touched and began to suffer from a burning sensation. Ramlal recalled:

The Master said to me, “Ramlal, my hands and feet are burning. Please bring some Ganga water and sprinkle it on me.” He was extremely restless. I asked, “What happened?” He replied: “I came into this world secretly with a few close devotees, and now Ram [Ram Chandra Datta] is spreading my name. He brings all sorts of people here and asks me to touch and bless them. How much burden can I carry? I got this disease by taking the sins of these people upon myself. Look, I shall not stay in this world any longer.” I consoled him: “No, no. You will not have to receive any visitors or touch anybody.” Then I brought the Ganga water and washed his hands and feet, and gradually he calmed down.

From then on, to protect the Master’s body, Swami Niranjanananda would sit on the staircase leading to the Master’s room holding a stick to prevent new visitors and sometimes even familiar devotees from entering.

The Master’s kalpataru-lila and last public message are the objects of our meditation. On this day, the Master bestowed fearlessness to the devotees through Self-revelation, fulfilled their wishes, and lighted the lamp of wisdom in their hearts. However, God does not become the kalpataru only on one day; God is always the kalpataru. If we meditate daily on this lila of the Master, then he will appear before us every day as the kalpataru.

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The Dynamic Power of Vedanta

Swami Gnaneswarananda

The most powerful dynamo of strength and power, the infinite and inexhaustible source of eternal perfection, beauty and truth, is man. The sun, the moon, the planets, the oceans and mountains, fire, ether, electricity — all these are but by-products of this great Power which is man. A Vedantist, for that reason, worships man above any other power, any god, demi-god or spirit. He recognizes in man the immense possibility of the highest type of power and perfection. All his endeavour is concentrated on the awakenment and manifestation of the real man within. It is not the apparent man, the outer surface, which he considers to be the reality. He goes beyond these appearances and tries to find out that essence which sustains phenomena and realizing that underlying Principle he finds the Divinity of man.

Above all other expressions of nature man has greater possibility of manifesting that Divinity. Vedanta certainly recognizes the presence of the Divine everywhere. It does not say that the cosmic spark is present only in man, that it is not in beasts, birds, trees and stones. Vedanta declares that from the highest down to the lowest the same one Reality is present everywhere, equally, without any distinction. The reason a Vedantist worships man above all other manifestations is that in him Divinity finds greater expression than in other entities. Vedanta asserts that after going through millions of births and deaths, deriving experience from all kinds of existences, high and low, a soul at last incarnates as man, and in human life alone it can attain the highest perfection and illumination.

But, as in the case of all kinds of power, Divinity may remain in a static or a dynamic form. When power struggles, manifesting

strength and vigour at every step of its progress, we call it dynamic; when it remains in a static form, we hardly recognize its presence, as it does not express itself, as it is sleeping. When, in the case of this immensely powerful dynamo of man, that infinite storehouse of power remains in a static condition and does not manifest, we call it the degraded, degenerated or sleeping condition of man. By a skilful method static power can be transformed into dynamic power and the dormant Divinity in man can be aroused and manifested. That makes the difference between a saint and a sinner. According to the philosophy of Vedanta the same perfection is present in the murderer and in the sage, only in a sinner, so-called, the power is obstructed and does not manifest itself. If a lamp is covered with something opaque and dark, we will not see any expression of light. But for that reason, are we to infer that the light is not there? The light with all its power and effulgence is there but some external influence is thwarting its expression. In order to see the light, we do not have to do anything with the lamp. All that we have to do is to remove that dark, opaque shade. The power of Divinity is certainly present in all, the weak, the depraved and the degraded people of the world. But in order to manifest it they must remove the dark coverings. The endeavour of Vedanta is to aid man remove the obstructions that hide the effulgence of the glorious Atman, the soul, within. Again, Vedanta does not propose to give you something which you did not already possess. It helps to remove the obstructions to the manifestation of that perfection which is hidden within you. It is always within you, but it is hidden. The method is called Yoga, and there are several forms to suit the taste, temperament and aptitude of different individuals.

To be able to apply the power of this dynamo of the Spirit constructively we have to have a highly developed sense of

discrimination. If a huge dynamo of mechanical power is entrusted to one who has no sense of right or wrong or the slightest power of discrimination, he can turn that power to a destructive end; whereas, if a person of discrimination controls and manipulates it he can accomplish something of greatest good. With the power of the Spirit, also, different ends can be achieved. The power can be applied even in a destructive way. Spiritual power is applied by many for the attainment of worldly ends. And what is the result? Like all destructive forces it not only destroys in the outside world, but it eventually devours the mover of the force. So the most important thing is to know how to apply this gigantic dynamo of power.

In order to illustrate this truth a beautiful story is told in the Upanishads. The king of the Devas, Indra, and the king of the demons, Virochana, wanted to find out the eternal and infinite source of power, by possessing which they would be able to accomplish anything they desired. With that end in view they approached Prajapati, the Creator. Making no distinction between them Prajapati taught both the very same truth: "Thou art the infinite source of all power and strength. Know thyself, and the entire power will be at thy command." Both the students retired and contemplated upon this truth, given to them by Prajapati. The demon king, Virochana, saw nothing beyond his physical self.

He recognized only his body and mind and meditating on physical matter he attained what we call material power. He developed gigantic strength in his body, enormous resources, unconquerable military force and, in short, everything that contributes to the power of enjoying the world. He was greatly satisfied by attaining all this and he taught this materialistic philosophy to his people. His kinsmen and descendants are the

‘demons,’ who see nothing beyond the physical body and material power.

The other student, Indra, contemplated deeply, and sat for meditation over and over again. At first the idea came to his mind that perhaps Prajapati meant the body and mind as the source of all power, but he was not satisfied. He argued within himself: ‘This body will perish. It was born, it had a beginning, and for that reason it must have an end. Its life may be prolonged but one day it certainly will end. So, the infinite and inexhaustible source of power cannot lie in anything physical.’ He argued the same way about the mind. It was changeable, did not exist in deep sleep, and so on and so forth. He went back to the teacher and asked him, ‘Master, did you mean that my body and mind were the source of all perfection?’ The teacher smiled and said: ‘Thou art the source of all perfection. Know thyself and immense power will be thine’ Indra went back again to his meditation. He went deeper and deeper until he unfolded the inner spirit. Realizing That, he found that it was never born, and it would never die. The Atman was infinitely glorious, eternally existing, the source of all power and perfection. He found Brahman everywhere, in everything from the highest down to the lowest. He perceived himself in everything and realizing his larger Self in every atom he remained immersed in infinite bliss. That is why he is called a *Deva*. This story is a beautiful illustration of how one can misuse power and wrongly interpret any teaching.

Vedanta sounds a note of warning to man not to become attached to things that are perishable. ‘Do not trust appearances’ it says, ‘Remove the veil of Maya and behind appearances discover the Reality.’ Vedanta does not teach you to hate this world; it only asks you to find out the Reality of it. Do not get attached to a thing unless and until you know what it is. If appearance attracts you,

stop and analyse it and see what is influencing you. Is it only the surface which is fascinating you? Or do you know what it really is? If you analyse every phenomenon that is presented before you, you will find that, instead of being wrongly influenced, you will go deeper and deeper into the reality until every manifestation will reveal to you the light of truth, the depth of wisdom, and the vastness of absolute peace. Therefore, the culture of discrimination, analysis, and contemplation have been emphasized over and over again by the philosophy of Vedanta.

The trouble is that although this great power is present everywhere, although we are higher than gods, although we can do anything we like, there is a great force pressing us down. Being gods, we move about in this world like so many insects. Why? What is that negative power that has converted us, gods, into so many little earthworms? Vedanta has arrived at the definite conclusion that it is, fundamentally, ignorance, manifesting itself in the form of fear. Fear is the first-born of ignorance, through the influence of which we gods have been dethroned from our kingdom of heaven. Analyse how this one demon, fear, has invaded every department of life, cramping all endeavours, spoiling and devastating the beauty and the magnificence of the wonderful edifice of human life. Study the history of religion, for instance. You will find that almost all the religious systems of the world have originated from fear. Fear has been magnified, eulogised and deified by the church and priesthood of every religion. Whenever I come across the common expression, 'a God-fearing man,' I resent it. As if one who fears God is a very wonderful man!

Vedanta is the only philosophy that declares at the top of its voice that if there is even a small particle of fear existing anywhere within your system you are in the realm of darkness, and so long

as ignorance remains light cannot reveal itself. Light and darkness cannot exist at the same place at the same time. Know that you are the only Reality that exists, and all fear will vanish. We are overpowered by fear. We are afraid of suffering, we are afraid of death, afraid of losing money, social position, prestige or a little ease or comfort, and that is why destructive forces get the better of us. Try to analyse the mentality of a little child who has the habit of lying. Why does he start to lie? You will find that someone has put the poison of fear into his system, and it is expressing itself in the form of that disease of lying. Analyse every bit of weakness, depravity or sin from which humanity is suffering, and without a single exception you will find that fear is at the back of every evil.

If Vedanta recognizes anything as sin it declares fear to be the deadliest of all. It says: 'Wake up ye gods and dispel the darkness of fear. Assert your own God-given right. Know the truth, and the light of knowledge will reveal everything that is, was, or will be.' It is only fear that holds us confined to vain appearances. Suppose you are told that you are Brahman, that you have the possibility of all perfection within you, why does that truth not reveal itself through you instantly? No doubt, it is, because of that destructive force of fear. We are afraid to express ourselves. We are afraid openly to embrace the truth and live it. That is why, being told over and over again, we still do not derive any benefit from the wisdom presented so emphatically by this philosophy of Vedanta.

I had the privilege of sitting at the feet of a great Swami, Swami Turiyananda (a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) whose very presence radiated strength and fearlessness. My memory goes back to that gigantic lion of spiritual strength and courage. His voice still rings in my ears as he encouraged us by repeating from the Upanishads. 'Abhiih! Abhiih! Have no fear' he would exclaim. 'It is only fear that is holding you down. Dispel fear, and you will

find that you can accomplish anything in this world.' Once he wanted me to go to a place to do some difficult work. I went to him and told him that I had never done any work like that and did not think I would be able to carry it out. My fear displeased him. 'What!' he said, 'You come to me and say you cannot do it! What good has your philosophy done you if even now you are under the delusion that you are weak? What hallucination! Go ahead. Try to do it. You may not be able at first to overpower all the destructive forces but persist and you will get over the weakness of fear. Then everything you do will manifest great power, strength and vitality.' To make a long story short, let me tell you that I was aroused to a higher consciousness of strength and power, and certainly the very memory of the work I did under his instruction and encouragement gives me a thrill. It uplifted me for the rest of my life.

I would like to tell you a few instances of how he lived that principle of fearlessness in his own life. At one time he was living in a dilapidated old place, forsaken by people as being a haunted house. But there were many students who came to him there for instruction. Once they were having a beautiful discussion about the indestructibility of the soul and other higher truths of Vedanta. In the midst of the discussion an earthquake shook the house. Plaster and bricks were falling all around. Horrified, everyone jumped up and rushed out of the house, through doors and windows. The teacher, led by some instinct, also rose to run away. But as soon as he stood up there rang a distinct voice in his ears, '*Abhih! Abhih!* Have no fear! Have no fear!' He told me that the voice sounded so sarcastic, as if it was pointing out to him: 'Have you not just now been discussing the indestructibility of the soul? Then how is it that as soon as the house begins to shake you at once go down to the consciousness that you are the body? If an

earthquake could demolish anything it would only destroy the physical body. It could not even touch your inner, real Self.' That at once put him into a state of contemplation, and he sat down and remained absorbed in it. When the earthquake was over, the fugitives began to wonder where the teacher was. They saw the ruins and could not recollect if he had escaped from the house. Hurriedly they started to remove the debris and they found him where they had left him, without even a single bruise, He was absorbed in Samadhi.

On another occasion he faced a tiger. He was in the Himalayas, in one of those forest retreats, practising meditation and contemplation. One beautiful moonlit night he was sitting on a big boulder on the bank of the river Ganges. He was absorbed in the contemplation of that one fundamental Principle, without beginning, changeless, and free from destruction. Suddenly a huge tiger appeared before him. He felt frightened and his first thought was to run away. Sometimes, you know, old instincts get the better of us. In his case also, the Swami told us that his instinct was to flee to safety, but at once something held him down. 'Run away from whom? Is not the very same Brahman present in that tiger?' came the voice of truth from within himself, 'It is duality that always creates fear and enmity.' The Swami said that he sat down again and became absorbed in the thought of the oneness of all things. Suddenly, as if by a miracle, the man-eating tiger was frightened by some noise and it ran away and never appeared again.

In later life this great man suffered from diabetes. At that time there were no effective medicines for this disease and the Swami developed huge carbuncles on his back. These had to be operated upon. But, in every instance, he refused anaesthetic. He withdrew his mind from the body and allowed the surgeon to operate upon

these painful boils, much to the amazement of the doctors. They probably thought he was just immune to pain, for one day the doctor who was attending on him decided to cut some more flesh around the wound. Without saying anything to the Swami he cut through with his scissors. The Swami let out a cry of pain. When the doctor enquired about it the Swami said, 'When I know you are going to operate, I withdraw my mind from the body, and then I feel no pain. But this time I was not prepared.' He had perfect control over his mind, whenever he wanted to exert that. Such strength I have never seen or heard of before.

On many occasions I have seen how this great man was above all fear. Those who saw him pass out of his body are convinced that never in their lives will they find a second similar instance of fearlessness. He stared death right in the face. He challenged all the forces of destruction, saying in so many words, 'Death, you can take away my physical body, but over my spirit, the Atman— my real Self— you have no power.' Almost the last words that came out of his mortal lips were, '*Abhih ! Abhih!* Have no fear! Strength is God, Strength is Brahman!' He proclaimed that God is present everywhere, in the high and in the low, in phenomena as well as outside of it. 'Everything is Brahman, everything is real,' he said, 'The world is real, the world is Brahman!' When his attendants saw him trying to raise himself up, they gently asked him to lie down, but he said, 'What! I must sit up. I want to sit in the posture of meditation.' He meant that he wanted to pass out of the body in the state of Samadhi. This he did. So established was he in discrimination that he could feel the vital energy leaving his body. He observed it as an unattached witness. He watched the death of his body. He was completely detached from it. He saluted his beloved Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, and with a smile of God-realisation illuminating his face he entered into the state of

Absolute bliss. In my estimation there could not be any greater expression of power than I have seen in this great man — power that does not consider any catastrophe, any danger or difficulty as worth anything ; power that always remains in touch with that infinite source of purity, beauty and perfection; power that sustains a condition of happiness and effulgence; power that projects peace and bliss, and which cannot be subdued or surpassed by any force that we know of in our experience of the world. I have seen many demonstrations of uncommon physical strength. I have witnessed marvellous feats of mechanical power. I admire them but compared with the power of the Spirit they are only ‘drops in the bucket.’

It is my conclusion that these powers that we call physical or mechanical are only indirect manifestations of the one spiritual power. Power is one, but it can be expressed differently, and it can be applied for various purposes. One who sees in a huge engine the power of the Spirit knows the truth. It is not the mass of steel, gas, or fire, or even the sum-total of materials that makes the engine or power-plant so tremendous. It is the power of the Spirit behind, it is the power of man at its back, that makes it mighty. Analyse any manifestation of mechanical or physical power and you will find that directly or indirectly it is the manifestation of the power of man. When that power is focussed on man himself, when its force is applied within man instead of outside, man’s real nature is revealed to him. He realizes his own Self as the one source of all power, manifest and non-manifest. He becomes free for ever. He attains the kingdom of Infinite existence, knowledge and bliss.

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Exploring Swami Vivekananda's Perspectives on Knowledge

V. Srinivas

I

How is knowledge acquired?

“Knowledge acquired by the first means (five ordinary senses of man and by reasoning) is called science, and knowledge acquired by the second (supersensuous through Yoga) is called the Vedas,” says Swami Vivekananda.

Reflection:

Firstly, knowledge may be acquired through Science

- a. Knowledge through the senses (knowledge acquired through observation and experience) which helps us comprehend reality.
- b. Knowledge through perception and classification (knowledge acquired when we are able to group, classify, distinguish and separate into classes etc.).
- c. Knowledge through modification (knowledge acquired when we analyze, correlate knowledge across classes, synthesize & integrate existing knowledge, etc.)

Knowledge can also be acquired through “super sensuous” means – i.e., through sources beyond the senses.

1. Knowledge acquired through a deeper trans-sensory faculty of human beings, which we call intuition.
2. Knowledge acquired through an engagement with trans-sensory reality leading to an awakening of the deeper dimension of the human being.

3. Knowledge acquired through spiritual and other practices. This knowledge is “born” within us, where we are “awakened” to a deeper, higher dimension of ourselves and in the world as we see it.

Knowledge acquired through a transformation of one’s state of being. A different state of being leads to a recognition and acceptance of different level of ideas associated with that state of being (this is knowledge acquired due to a psychosocial evolution in the human being).

The first three levels of knowing are born through experience and engaging with the world outside us.

The second three levels of knowledge are born through diving deeper into the human consciousness and manifesting the results of this deep-dive through intuitive insight and discernible changes in the human being. These could also be called Inner Sciences.

Thus, science, as we know it, is the formalization of the first three levels of acquisition of knowledge, while the Inner Sciences (the Vedas in India), are the formalization of the second three levels of acquisition of knowledge.

The first three levels of knowledge (External Sciences) are engaged with observation and learning that results in helping human beings act differently in the world. When human beings act differently they impact the world outside.

The second three levels of knowledge (Inner Sciences) are engaged with knowing and becoming that results in human beings changing themselves. When human beings change themselves, they first impact their own selves and then change the world outside.

II

The universal yet individualized nature of subjective knowledge is not to be acquired from without. It is the innate nature of the human soul and the essential birthright of every man.

Reflection:

To appreciate this quote, we must, first of all understand what is meant by knowledge here.

Knowledge here does not mean data and information about the world around us. This is objective knowledge acquired by the study of the world around us.

By knowledge we mean here – subjective knowledge. Knowledge that helps us answer the deeper questions of life – Who am I, what is the nature of reality, why do we exist and where did we come from, etc.

Swami Vivekananda says that these deeper questions cannot be answered by searching in the world outside ourselves. Answers to these questions cannot be found in nature, and for that matter, even by trying to ‘follow’ or ‘learn’ from other human beings.

These answers are found only by ourselves and they are to be found within ourselves.

Why can't we get answers to these questions from other human beings, who might have found answers to these questions? Because we would not believe those answers, even if they were true, if we did not encounter or ‘see’ the answers for ourselves in the depth of our soul.

This is the primary difference between objective and subjective knowledge.

Objective knowledge can be acquired through (i) experiencing the world outside us, (ii) through our senses or instruments that amplify our senses, or (iii) through reasoning based on data that we accept to be true for various reasons.

Subjective knowledge is not acquired but discovered by diving deeper into oneself and ‘uncovering’ what is within us.

Swami Vivekananda makes a further point. This subjective knowledge resides in the soul of every person and therefore is

accessible to any human being who chooses to turn inwards and dive into the depths of one's soul.

This means that every human being has the right and the innate capacity to answer the big questions of his or her life related to identity, purpose, meaning, fulfillment, etc. to his/ her own satisfaction.

This also means that every human being is a light unto oneself and does not need to accept secondhand the truth about one's own life.

III

“Knowledge can never be created, it can only be discovered,” says Swami Vivekananda

Reflection:

This remark by Swami Vivekananda points to a profound reality. Is the universe objective or subjective? Put another way, is the universe ‘out there’, or is the universe only a product of the mind – ‘in here’?

Vedanta in its highest and purest form says that the universe is wholly subjective – a projection of an infinite consciousness we call God. Our own individual selves are also projections of this same consciousness from a specific point of view – as understood by our individual egos or identities.

In this standpoint, all knowledge already exists, in that it is born of that infinite consciousness. And all that we do, when we say we learn, is to discover this already existent knowledge, born of the infinite consciousness.

A second viewpoint to look at this statement is the idea that each individual soul is nothing but the Infinite Atman, covered by layers of ignorance.

As we remove each layer of ignorance – each ‘veil’ – a higher or more complete truth is revealed to us.

As we continue this journey of removing veil after veil of ignorance, we ‘discover’ more and more of the truth. When we have removed all veils and have realized the Atman, we are now in touch with, or have discovered that which is Infinite and Eternal (the “Ancient One” as some verses in the Upanishads call it).

By its very definition – all knowledge already resides in that which is both infinite and timeless (eternal). Thus, we can discover all knowledge as we remove all the veils of ignorance.

Both these viewpoints lead us to the same conclusion. In the first viewpoint, we begin with postulating an infinite consciousness of which we are a part. In the second viewpoint, we begin by postulating an infinite Atman that reveals itself as an individual soul by covering itself up with a veil of ignorance.

What does the “state of having knowledge” mean?

It is the state of superconsciousness, and includes both consciousness and unconsciousness. The man who attains that state has all that we call knowledge

– Swami Vivekananda

Reflection:

Human search for knowledge has spanned millennia. It has included within its scope the mysteries of nature, the occult, human behavior, the workings of the human body, the far-off universe and much else.

This search for knowledge has paralleled the evolution of humankind – not just in biological terms but also in social and psychological terms – over the centuries.

The question we ask is, where does this search end? Or does this search for knowledge ever end? Does humankind have the

possibility of 'knowing everything'? Swami Vivekananda answers this challenging question through this quote.

To appreciate this answer, we need to understand two basic building blocks of knowledge – the instrument of knowledge & the nature/ form of knowledge. The answer can be derived from either of two building blocks.

IV

Building Block 1: Instrument of Knowledge

The instrument of knowledge is the human mind, and its capacity to perceive knowledge depends upon the knowledge state of the human mind.

Each human being has access to multiple 'knowledge states' or 'states of mind' as much as different human beings have access to some 'knowledge states' or 'states of mind' which others don't. In modern language, we attempt to describe this notion through multiple 'intelligences' such as mathematical intelligence, musical intelligence, etc.

These descriptions, though limited, acknowledge that states of the human mind give us access to different zones of knowledge, access to different aspects or dimensions of Reality; or different visions of a Unified Reality.

These 'states of knowledge' lead to conscious, para-conscious, or even unconscious knowledge or understanding of the world.

Swami Vivekananda, draws our attention to a higher 'state of mind' or knowledge state which he calls the state of superconsciousness.

This state of superconsciousness is a state that transcends the difference between articulatable and intuitive knowledge, between the conscious and unconscious, and takes us one step further. It

gives us access to an even deeper vision of reality that explains and yet goes beyond both our conscious and unconscious glimpses of reality.

This 'state of mind' or 'knowledge state' is one where we, as human beings, gain access to a much vaster, far more comprehensive vision of Reality that transcends, but does not negate all our conscious knowledge of the universe, and furthermore accepts, integrates, and harmonizes our deeper 'unconscious' or intuitive knowledge of reality into an integrated whole.

Individuals who are able to access this state are thus able to gain a comprehensive vision of Reality – thereby realizing the goal that humankind has sought and strived for through the ages.

Building Block 2: The Nature of Knowledge

We can arrive at the same conclusion by looking not at the mind as an instrument of knowledge, but by examining the nature/ form of knowledge.

Knowledge as seen in the world around us is data – either physical or sensory data, or data about human beings or social situations, or even data generated from our every engagement with reality.

All these forms of data are not recorded in the same way. Some forms of data are recorded as explicitated descriptions of the external world – subject to different classifications, and conceptual and other mental categories.

Some other forms of data, for example human data, may be stored in the forms of patterns in the mind, morphologies or clusters, taxonomies of potential responses, protocols for behavior and engagement, etc.

Some of these are articulatable and some of them may yield answers through an unconscious or rapid para-conscious processing of the inputs from the environment.

This much is known and understood widely. What Swami Vivekananda adds to this is the 'principle of generalization'. The principle of generalization has been seen in science when scientists search for a more generalized theory that explains reality. Swami Vivekananda states that this generalization can be applied to knowledge in all its forms.

Knowledge carries within itself the unique ability to be abstracted or generalized to higher and higher orders of abstraction or generalization. This is the deeper view of knowledge.

As we dive deeper into knowledge, we discover deeper 'orders or layers of knowledge' – each order or layer of knowledge being able to explain fully all the lower or more shallow layers of knowledge.

Furthermore, as we dive deeper into any knowledge we come face to face with a deeper integration of one body of knowledge with another body of knowledge. This is because the more general a description is, the more aspects of our reality it can encompass in its description.

As we continue this journey, we will come face to face with an integrated vision or description of reality that is capable of explaining and including within itself all the orders of knowledge we have traversed in order to reach this state.

Implicit in this description is the Indian idea that the reality outside us may be diverse, complex and ever changing, but the descriptions or 'knowledge of that reality' are being stored in the human mind. Therefore, by diving deep into the knowledge within the human mind, one can gain access to deeper and deeper orders of knowledge about the reality outside us.

Thus, when we reach the most general order of knowledge within ourselves, we have automatically gained the capacity to access an equally deep and equally general description of the reality outside that can potentially express or describe Reality wholly, in its most generalized form.

This is described as the state of superconscious knowledge, attaining which state, a person has all that we call knowledge.

All human knowledge proceeds out of experience; we cannot know anything except by experience. All our reasoning is based upon generalised experience, all our knowledge is but harmonised experience. Looking around us, what do we find? A continuous change. The plant comes out of the seed, grows into the tree, completes the circle, and comes back to the seed. The animal comes, lives a certain time, dies, and completes the circle. So does man. The mountains slowly but surely crumble away, the rivers slowly but surely dry up, rains come out of the sea, and go back to the sea. Everywhere circles are being completed, birth, growth, development, and decay following each other with mathematical precision. This is our everyday experience. Inside of it all, behind all this vast mass of what we call life, of millions of forms and shapes, millions upon millions of varieties, beginning from the lowest atom to the highest spiritualised man, we find existing a certain unity.

Swami Vivekananda

Programme for March - April 2019

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation
at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Mar 3 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 30 Swami Sarvasthananda

Mar 10 Sri Ramakrishna's Puja

Mar 17 "God is True: all else is nothing" Swami Tripurananda

Mar 24 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 31 Swami Sarvasthananda

Mar 31 Day Retreat

Apr 7 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 32 Swami Sarvasthananda

Apr 14 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 33 Swami Sarvasthananda

Apr 21 The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 34 Swami Sarvasthananda

Apr 28 Day Retreat

Day Retreat

With Swami Sarvasthananda and Swami Tripurananda
at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on **31st March** and
28th April (Sunday)
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday Celebrations

Sunday 10th March at Bourne End from **10:00 am to 7:00 pm**

Fortnightly Saturday Class - Message of the Upanishads - Ancient Solutions for Modern Problems

by Swami Sarvasthananda

March 2, 16, 30 (Saturday)

April 13, 27 (Saturday)

Time 4:00 p.m to 5:30 p.m

Venue: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HE

continued from front cover

Hari!' Finally, someone would say, 'Hara! Hara!' Now these are, as you know, different names of God. Hearing so much chanting of God's names the customers naturally thought that this goldsmith must be a very superior person. But can you guess the goldsmith's true intention? The man who said 'Kesava! Kesava!' meant to ask, 'Who are these? Who are these customers?' The man who said 'Gopal! Gopal!' conveyed the idea that the customers were merely a herd of cows. That was the estimate he formed of them after the exchange of a few words. The man who said 'Hari! Hari!' asked, 'Since they are no better than a herd of cows, then may we rob them?' He who said 'Hara! Hara!' gave his assent, meaning by these words, 'Do rob by all means, since they are mere cows!'

Vedanta

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Everything progresses in waves. The march of civilization, the progression of worlds, is in waves. All human activities likewise progress in waves art, literature, science, religion.

Great waves succeed each other, and between these great waves is a quiet, a calm, a period of rest, a period of recuperation.

All manifest life seems to require a period of sleep, of calm, in which to gain added strength, renewed vigour, for the next manifestation, or awakening to activity. Thus is the march of all progress, of all manifest life in waves, successive waves, [of] activity and repose. Waves succeed each other in an endless chain of progression.

Religion, like everything else, progresses in waves; and at the summit of each great wave stands an illumined soul, a mighty spiritual leader and teacher of men.

Swami Vivekananda

