

Vedanta

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The Psychological Verities of Spiritual Life
Swami Siddheswarananda

Cosmic Vision
Swami Shraddhananda



Divine Wisdom

Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 11



The jar of desire can never be filled up

A barber who was passing under a haunted tree, heard a voice say, "Will you accept seven jars full of gold?" The barber looked around but could see no one. The offer of seven jars of gold, however, roused his cupidity, and he cried aloud, "Yes, I shall accept the seven jars." At once came the reply, "Go home, I have carried the jars to your house." The barber ran home in hot haste to verify the truth of this strange announcement, and when he entered the house he saw the jars before him. He opened them and found them all full of gold, except the last one, which was only half-full. A strong desire now arose in the barber's mind to fill the seventh jar also, for without it his happiness was incomplete. He therefore converted all his ornaments into gold coins and put them into the jar, but the mysterious vessel was, as before, unfilled. This exasperated the barber. Starving himself and his family, he saved some amount more and tried to fill the jar, but the jar remained as before. So one day he humbly requested the king to increase his pay, as his income was not sufficient to maintain himself. Now the barber was a

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No one is saved alone - Interfaith Harmony

How does a divided world learn to come together to face a shared crisis?

This is the question that we - as representatives of different faiths, different streams of thought and tradition, different visions of human destiny, and different understandings of the goals of human life – must all answer together.

The time has come for us to develop a new template for positive, mutually enabling encounters between diverse and often incompatible faiths, traditions, and cultures. The need for such a template for positive interfaith encounters cannot be understated.

In the past, the templates for interfaith encounter have included (i) violence leading to decimation of the weaker group, (ii) forcing the weaker or smaller group to give up their “incorrect” ways in favour of the “correct” ways of the dominant group, or (iii) swamping the unique identity of the weaker group through cultural and economic dominance.

But today, we need a template for interfaith encounter that will enable all faiths to come together and face the shared crisis that humanity faces, which includes not just the present crisis but also the ecological crisis facing our planet, and the crisis of continued military and economic conflicts erupting all over the world.

India may have something useful to offer in this new direction. India has been unique in that it has experienced the influx of several cultures during its 5000 years of civilization – from the Iranians to the Greeks, to Turkish invaders, to the Mughals from Uzbekistan, to the Portuguese, the French, the English, and along the way, Jewish settlers, the Syrian Christians in Kerala, the Persians now known as Parsis, and so on.

The assimilation of these groups into Indian Culture has been unique in that each of these cultures has continued to thrive in India, enriching the larger Hindu mother culture, while continuing to retain

their individual identities. Nowhere else in the world have unique subcultures been allowed to thrive without being forced by the larger dominant group to give up their ways – not just for a few hundred years, but for a few thousand years.

What does this unique process of assimilation, developed and demonstrated over a 5000-year history, teach us when we seek to come together to deal with a collective challenge facing all of us?

India teaches us that to come together in peace and fraternity, we need to go through three stages of interfaith encounter.

Acceptance

Acceptance of another faith or culture or tradition means going beyond tolerance (i.e., allowing the other to even exist), and intolerance (destroying the other). It means accepting every faith, every tradition as one more pathway of human growth, making its own contribution to the collective evolution of humankind.

Affirmation

Acceptance is not enough. We also need to affirm the other faith. This means letting go of the traditional templates of establishing superiority (i.e., claiming that any one path is the only true path), or establishing inferiority (claiming that the other path can only lead to moral and personal destruction).

Acknowledge our Shared Destiny

To come together to solve common challenges, we must go further than affirmation and acknowledge our shared destiny. This means giving up the belief that the very existence of the other is a threat to our own faith, and instead recognizing that we are all independent elements in the ecosystem of human well-being and fraternity.

These three stages offer a new template for interfaith encounter for the world today. It is this new template that we must introduce not just into the very discourse within our faiths and the interactions between our faiths. Together they represent a ladder of interfaith engagement that we can all climb together.

The Psychological Verities of Spiritual Life

Swami Siddheswarananda

The study of mind and the nature of consciousness was being carried out in India and satisfactory solutions arrived at when civilization had not yet dawned on European soil. In the modern age, when we find reputed scholars giving out opinions similar to or approximating to the truths discovered by Patanjali and other psychologists of ancient India, we cannot but admire the scientific precision with which studies in such a subtle subject as psychology were made by our forefathers. Charles Baudouin, in his book *Suggestion and Auto-suggestion*, has the following words of admiration: "As one of the curiosities of history and further as a lesson in humility, we may point out that the states just described are described with considerable psychological acumen, though not of course in modern psychological terminology, in the precepts by which for centuries past the yogis of Hindustan have been accustomed to attain self-mastery." Again, in his concluding paragraph, he makes another beautiful statement that is well appreciated in India: "The work of modern science is a great achievement, but is incomplete. For its completion a certain change is required both in outlook and method. As the philosopher has well put it, 'We are masters of nature externally alone, inwardly we are nature's slaves!' Studying only too well all that surrounds us, we have forgotten our own personality, and now or never is the moment when we must put into practice the maxim of Thales, 'Know thyself'. The doctrine of the New Nancy School in conjunction with other doctrines of contemporary psychologists enables us to make a great advance in this knowledge."

To understand the contribution of contemporary psychologists towards the knowledge of our own selves, we have to study the history of the findings made by different scholars in these years.

Of these scholars, we can mainly speak of three schools of opinion. Their teachings, different though they may be in their pursuits, only supplement one another.

First of all, we have to consider the Freudian school of psychologists. Freud is a doctor by profession who unwittingly embarked on a new sphere of knowledge in diagnosing his patients. The results of his experiments have made it possible for a genetic theory of mind to be gradually built up. Freud is mainly a clinical psychologist. "In his efforts to ascertain the significance and therefore the genesis of neurotic symptoms, he made the remarkable and quite unexpected discovery that these have a remarkable psychological meaning and purpose; one, however, that is totally unknown to the patient ... He found that the patient opposed a dynamic resistance to the revealing of his previously unconscious thought and Freud concluded that the force thus manifesting itself outwardly was the same one that had hitherto prevented the patient from becoming aware of these thoughts. To the force operative in the latter (inward) direction he gives the name of repression." For tracing the unconscious thought Freud used a technique known as psychoanalysis. As a result, he found himself in a region of mind which was quite different in character from the conscious mind. This sphere of mind he calls the Unconscious. The nature of this buried stratum of mind next engaged his attention and he was able "to detect the contribution made by the unconscious to various modes of mental activity".

Mental life is summarized by Freud under two principles: (1) the pleasure principle, and (2) the reality principle. The former represents the original form of mental activity and is characteristic of the earliest stages of human development. In its primary manifestations we find a tendency to avoid pain and disagreeableness, and a never-ceasing demand for immediate gratification of various desires—of a distinctly primitive and lowly

order. This principle is essentially anti-social. But in the reality principle we find the attempts made by the ego to adapt itself to the exigencies of the real world outside. In other words, the reality principle checks the animal impulse in man by social and ethical considerations. These two principles are always in conflict. Man becomes ethically perfected and advances socially as a civilized being only when he is able to change the under-currents of his animal nature into very healthy humanitarian channels.

Freud asserted that man is merely a sexual being and all his actions can be explained by this nature alone. This created a wave of excitement against the author who wanted to explain the richest and noblest sentiments of man by "the reproach of the basest naturalism". "To present religion, morality, art and the like as sublimated sexuality would be as lacking in taste as to characterize the execution of Beethoven's violin concerto as a refined form of the vibration of catgut."

In this connection we have to remind our readers that Freud used the word 'sex' in a sense quite different from what we ordinarily mean by it. A lack of understanding regarding the true implication of the term has caused all this opposition. In India we need not be astounded at this discovery. In the Vedas it is declared that desire first arose in the mind of the Creator. He declared: "*Ekoham bahusyam*"—"I am one: let Me be many". The whole universe is projected from the mind of the Creator because of this impulse. This process of bifurcation goes on ad infinitum and this is called evolution. The unconditioned appears as the conditioned—the path of *pravritti marga*. At the same time, this order can be reversed: if this impulse is checked and transmuted into a higher energy, that will carry us back to the centre. The energy that finds expression in diversity is the same energy that would achieve unity. The former, Freud calls the sex energy. If he had stated that the primitive passions of man would never change

their colour, in spite of all adjustments made by the reality principle to accommodate them for social purposes, then there would be some appropriateness in the charges levelled at him. But when he states that man can sublimate elementary emotions, primitive and anti-social in character, to high levels of mental achievement, he unconsciously admits that man is also a spiritual being. Freud being a Doctor of Medicine, his main concern was his neurotic patients in whom he discovered that emotions undergoing inhibition had found expression through diseases. By the technique of psychoanalysis, he found a way to open up the buried stratum of the mind in which unrealized emotions had undergone repression. Such a process alleviated the illness.

All the facts of the mental world cannot solely be explained as Freud has done. In the make-up of our minds, we have to consider not only the emotional aspects, but also the cognitive and the volitional. As on the conscious plane emotion, cognition and volition determine the course of thought and action, so also, in all the subconscious or unconscious workings of the mind, the counterparts of these are equally discernible. The work of intellect is accomplished by instinct and intuition. Instincts can be traced in the primitive tastes of man realized in dreams. Intuition is seen in the revelations that flash on the conscious mind which cannot be explained away by intelligence or instinct. The French philosopher Bergson understood the existence of the intuitional faculty in man. The Vedantic philosophy posits another sphere called the superconscious and Bergson's intuition touches but the fringe of it.

Only when all the other different veils of the mind are removed, can we gain access to this region. The emotions have to be sublimated, the instincts purified. There must be, to use a Sanskrit phrase, *bhava-shuddhi*, to reach this terminus of knowledge.

The work of volition is equally noticeable in the subconscious regions of the mind. But the character of this volition undergoes a change when it functions in the lower strata of the mind. One word for 'volition' in French is *vou/oir*. Though sometimes meaning 'will', this word often means 'wish'. The process of wishing is on the road to volition but has not reached it. If, in that transformation from wishing to willing, to volition, the imagination is lighted up and intensified by some disturbing emotion, it may prevent the wish becoming will. Imagination then wins. So if an idea is planted in the mind which will be worked out by the force of imagination when the wish is strong for the fulfilment of that idea, that idea will be realized and the wish fulfilled, provided there is not the counteracting force of any opposite idea. The reality of this theory as a workable hypothesis was experimented upon by M. Coue at Nancy. He has ushered in a new epoch in the wonder-world of psychological realities, by the miraculous cures effected in patients who sought his advice, and who, according to him, cured themselves by practising the theory of auto-suggestion he has propounded. Before his time, Nancy was already the seat of another school of psychotherapy. From his predecessors Coue learnt that even in the so-called hypnotic state the condition was brought about really through the influence of the imagination of the patients upon themselves. Baudouin is the first great theoretical exponent of Coue's teachings. There are three novel features in the teachings of the New Nancy School:

1. In hypnotic phenomena, it is not the suggestion given out by the operator that is the operative force; the real cause for success lies in the subject himself. The suggestion thrown out by the operator has to be accepted by the subject and become a real auto-suggestion. As a corollary, the chief advantages of psycho-therapeutic cure can be got without outside suggestion and

without even producing a hypnotic state. Thus, for auto-suggestion, the subject can produce a state of passivity by himself, and freed from any state of tension of body or mind, he can present to himself the idea he wants to place before his mind. Thereby the subject can transform his whole outlook on life.

2. Coue lays great stress on his Law of Reversed Effort. The operation of this law is the cause of the failure of our attempts. "It means that so long as the imagination is adverse, so long as a counter-suggestion is at work, the effort of the conscious will acts by contraries. We must think or imagine rightly before we can will rightly. In a word, our formula must not be 'who wills can', but 'who thinks can', or 'who imagines can'."

3. The most significant phenomena occur in the domain of the subconscious. The new powers which auto-suggestion offers to mankind are based upon the acquirement of a reflective control of the operations of the subconscious. Therein the teachings of the New Nancy School are at one with the findings of the Freudian school of psychologists.

Coue has shown to the world the practical value of his teachings. The sensation created by the system of cures he recommended made people look up to him as a worker of miracles, a title which he disclaims totally. He made people turn to themselves for help in all mental and bodily ailments. He has upheld the value of faith and shown how in man lies the solution of all the mysteries that confound him. The effects of his experiments have a far-reaching value. It is creating a revolution in the minds of many. The laws of criminology, the principles of education, theories of medicine and cure, and the growth of social institutions have to be reinterpreted in the light of these new discoveries of the modern schools of psychology. In an understanding of the workings of the subconscious and its education we have the key for the moulding of the future. In the subconscious is recapitulated the cultural

history of mankind. In studying the actions and motives of man we must understand that the whole contents of his subconscious mind equally contribute in directing their course. As a man is most powerfully influenced by his external environment, so also his internal world must be strongly reckoned with in estimating the make-up of his character.

Psycho-analysis is the weapon wherewith to dig into the different layers of the mind, and suggestion and auto-suggestion are the seeds to be implanted therein. By understanding properly the mechanism of character formation, it is possible that we shall be able to convert this human life from a vale of sorrows into an eternal pleasure-garden.

Suggestion may be defined as the acceptance of an idea by the mind, especially by the so-called subconscious (Baudouin's 'Unconscious') independently of adequate logical grounds for such acceptance. "It is an instance of ideo-motor action. The idea is placed before the mind . . . when the mind is in a state where opposing and conflicting ideas have no chance of making themselves felt; whereupon this implanted idea tends to realize itself." So the things necessary for working out suggestion are a passive state in the subject—muscular as well as sensory—together with concentration upon the idea. One must put oneself into 'a state of contentment', a state of concentration without effort. "It is essential", Baudouin says, "that the attention should remain spontaneously immobilized. This is what happens when one tells the beads." The religious aspirant does the same thing. The whole course of his sadhana (spiritual practices) is to de-hypnotize himself. All along he has been thinking himself to be finite matter bound by all limitations. He has to awaken permanently the consciousness that he is the Atman, ever free, ever perfect. For that, he has a regulated course of practices laid down in the Ashtanga Yoga. Baudouin is astonished at the teachings of the Hindu Yogis,

for he has the following: "The two states, whose acquirement must be the novice's first aim, are known as *pratyahara* (mental examination) and *dharana* (concentration of mind upon a thought)." He then quotes from a treatise on yoga. He says: "As for auto-suggestion, we encounter it in yoga, but tinged with mysticism. The sacred word Aum is repeated a myriad times . . . This, we are told, produces a mental transformation in the subject, which is preparatory to great spiritual progress."

For suggestion and auto-suggestion to work effectively, genuine faith has to be developed. Coue recommends methods whereby the subject can increasingly feel that the springs of success in life are in himself; he can then overcome all obsessive fears. Or if he believes in God and the ever-merciful nature of a benign Providence, then any stand he may take on the basis of this belief will work miracles. Dr. Pfister, while estimating the value of religion, says: "I confess that the beauty of a healthy, ethically pure piety has become overwhelmingly clear to me." At present it is the therapeutic value of the discoveries of the New Nancy School that has attracted the attention of the world. These discoveries have also a far-reaching effect upon the development of spiritual life.

The difficulties of fashioning one's life on a spiritual basis are too numerous to be mentioned. Our scriptures have said that it is as difficult to attempt this task as to walk on the edge of a sharp razor. Yet the game has not been given up and history is not wanting in examples of men who have truly lived the life of holiness and spirituality. The discoveries of the modern schools of psychology only help us to understand ourselves more, and to steer clear of the cataracts and currents of life that often wreck our hopes and make us despair of knowing the Truth.

We have noted that the emotional, cognitive and volitional functions of the mind are to be found in the workings of the

subconscious mind. The blessed feeling that we must live the life spiritual often comes to many of us, but we are deterred from our path mainly because our subconscious self has not properly responded to the call of the spirit. So the aspirant after spiritual life has to educate and refine his subconscious mind. All the primitive feelings of man are there, and this can be easily seen from the ideas that crop up when the subconscious is tapped. In the phraseology of Freud, the war between the pleasure principle and the reality principle is very intense. As a result, most of our emotions undergo 'repression'. They lie in wait in some form or other in our minds and often take us unawares. These emotions have to be sublimated. In the degree a man is able to sublimate his baser passions into finer emotions lies his success in the spiritual life. If he is unsuccessful, his life will be a struggle in the darkness. All the repressions have to be cleared up. And the best way of doing it is by active work. There should not be a lop-sided development in the aspirant. He must try to educate his emotional, cognitive and volitional faculties as best he can without starving any one of them for want of sufficient exercise. Very often the aspirant, once beaming with hope and strength, turns out an abject, neurasthenic, crazy, passionate or eccentric person, because he has disregarded some of the psychological verities of spiritual life. The aspirant is unable to meet the opposition from his lower self. The most powerful demand on him is made by the sex impulse and on his success in transmuting this impulse into a higher energy depends his success in the spiritual life. Extraordinary vigilance and intense activity are demanded of the aspirant, for the enemy comes to him in different forms. He must be able to find out the real feeling behind all the confusing emotions to which he is prey at times.

Once a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna went to him, and in his youthful enthusiasm to lead the spiritual life requested the Master

to bless him that he might be successful in killing his passions. But Sri Ramakrishna affectionately told him, "My boy, increase them a thousand-fold, but only change their direction Godward." The same energy that works as the sex impulse is transformed into the divine impulse. We have to realize this secret. The demands made on us by the sex impulse are often exacting and the aspirant must be sufficiently fortified not to succumb to them, nor allow them to undergo inhibition in the lower layers of the mind. Hence it is that a life of activity is required. A monk's life in the cloister, a life of inaction, before one is fit for it, accounts for the miserable failure of many aspirants. The great Swami Vivekananda has laid out a plan of action for his disciples in which he recommends a harmonious application of all our mental faculties for the development of our spiritual life. So in the beginning the aspirant must work consciously to find out ways of sublimating his emotions. If one applies oneself to a life of intense work, of service to one's fellowmen, one gets ample opportunities to sublimate one's emotions. These tendencies in one's mind are the result of past karma and the seeds of future karma. These can well be worked out by service. It is a fact that they must find a way out.

In serving our fellowmen and country with the idea that they are but expressions of the Cosmic Being, we not only find outlets for our emotions, but also raise ourselves to the spiritual plane. But on the other hand, if we do not allow these emotions to be sublimated, the force of 'repression' will so barricade our spiritual life that ere long we shall have to vegetate all our lives with our ideals unrealized. These repressed emotions will give rise to all kinds of mental, moral and physical illness that will baffle the attempts of all doctors. It will then be our karma to suffer perpetual illness and disease—the expressions on the physical plane, according to Freud, of these repressed emotions. The Lord we have to serve is a jealous God, and if we do not serve Him in His

creatures, we shall have to pay the penalty in the form of illness and disease.

One of the primary requisites for the aspirant in spiritual life is to get the blessing of a teacher, a guru, one who has realized God. The guru tests the earnestness of the student by noting the tendencies of his nature. He then prescribes for him a course of action. The student has only to follow this to enable him to achieve the results. By personal service to the master and by constantly living with him, a mental rapport is established between the guru and his disciple. When the mind of the disciple is sufficiently fertilized by faith in the Reality, the teacher plants the seed of spirituality in this mind. This instruction is generally done in India in an imposing and sublime manner. With prayers, fasts and vigils, the disciple awaits the appointed hour when the man of realization will impart the highest truth to his disciple. The student was being tested by the master for many days, or even months and years, for he must be a proper candidate. His attention must be keenly riveted spontaneously on the Ideal; for then only will his subconscious-self accept his choice of the life-ideal. And when the guru gives the *upadesh*, they become sacred words to the student, the precious possession of his life. This ceremony, ever coveted by all spiritual aspirants, is known as *diksha*, the imparting of the spiritual power. If the master is a gigantic personality, no word or sign is required for the transmission of this power. He is able to do it by a mere wish or a touch.

After this ceremony is over, the student is to meditate on the teachings until he becomes one with them. Some of the difficulties he has to meet with we have mentioned already. If the progress is slow, or if there are periods of darkness, called by mystics "the dark night of the soul", the aspirant should subject his mind to severe analysis—*vichara*. Thereby he will be able to find out the obstacles, the various 'complexes' of his mind that block his path.

Very often the sadhana is done with the help of the various *bhavas*, mainly the five classical ones—*shanta*, *dasya*, *sakhya*, *vatsalya* and *madhura*. These *bhavas* help the great ideal to blossom and flower by the force of an 'enveloping emotion'. The ideal has always to be vivid before the mind's eye. If the mind thinks more of the obstacles they become an obsession, and by the working of the Law of Reversed Effort our attempts will be frustrated. If we march on to the east, the west must fall away naturally from us. The positive ideal should be our beacon light and we have to proceed with that pole star to guide us.

Above all we have to avoid, in the words of Sri Ramakrishna, all thefts in the chamber of our own hearts. Very often we assume we are meditating on the ideal, but in reality we are only being duped by our own day-dreams that have no bearing at all on that ideal. In the subconscious mind a regular current of thought, in tune with our ideal, should be established permanently. When this is accomplished, the ideal of our life will come within the range of practical achievement, and the purpose of human existence will be achieved in that true resurrection of the spirit of man from all the tabernacles of thought and form that constitute this material world.

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Cosmic Vision

Swami Shraddhananda

The recent spectacular achievements of science and technology in the exploration of space have roused greater interest in the heavens than at any time before. Novel adventures in regions of space remote from this old familiar earth of ours are increasingly capturing our imagination. Pascal's sense of awe at the thought of the vast celestial regions sounds childish now. A new self-confidence and courage inspire man with the hope of bridging the gulf that separates him from other worlds.

Surely this is a landmark in the history of man. Yet there is a gloomy side to the picture. In spite of man's plumbing the mysteries of the heavens with his penetrating intellect, his heart has not expanded to any appreciable degree. When questioned about the future benefits of space achievements, many of our scientists cannot but think and talk in terms of military strategy. For example, a rocket base on the moon would be an invulnerable point from which the enemy could be crushed without fear of retaliation; an artificial satellite might serve as an 'eye-in-the-sky' for watching enemy territory; and so on. Our cosmic achievements, then, are significant only if they can further our well-known selfish interests: subjugation of the enemy, acquisition of material power, etc. Increased scientific knowledge of the heavens has not brought any widening of our moral, humanitarian or spiritual outlook. We are cosmos-minded but do not have a cosmic vision.

There was a time when the 'starry heavens' used to move the heart of man in a different way. They instilled a profound sense of wonder, joy and freedom from the petty desires and conflicts of our everyday life. Though man's knowledge of the cosmos was extremely meagre compared with what he possesses now, he was

surely richer in another type of synthetic wisdom that embraced a unity and harmony throughout the vast universe and established a spiritual kinship between himself and his surroundings, near or remote. The benefits of this wisdom could not, of course, be tabulated in terms of military strategy, but it certainly brought to man a wonderful expansion of his basic emotional and spiritual values.

Cosmic vision has been the dream of not a small number of men at various periods in the history of human thought. There seems to be something fundamental in the nature of man that inspires him to this dream. It is the dream of comprehending and contacting the infinite. We know of poets who have flown on the wings of fancy beyond our moon and sun and have sung for us the music of higher spheres. We are acquainted with philosophers who based their systems of thought on the sublime speculation of an all-inclusive reality—God, Substance, Absolute. We read accounts of mystics who claim to have supersensuous experience of a mighty Divine Love pervading all creation. All these 'visions' do not, of course, possess the same degree of validity. Some are pieces of creative imagination, some are intellectual conjectures, and some may be classed as individual psychic experiences with a colouring of subjectivity. Yet one fact is undeniable. These visions have a special appeal to the human mind. They seem to express a powerful subconscious urge of man. Somehow man seems to feel that the vast universe over and around him is not alien to his own being. Some sort of inseparable unity must comprehend him and his entire cosmic environment. And he wants to experience this unity tangibly in knowledge and love.

We have to look to Vedanta for a rationale of this strong unitive urge of man. The Upanishads declare that the human consciousness, below its surface manifestation in thoughts and emotions, is a deeper reality—an infinite existence-awareness-bliss,

free, self-proved, unchanging. Our familiar psycho-physical personality is grounded in this true core of our being. All our knowledge and activities receive their light and power from this pure Consciousness—our true Self. Psycho-physical personalities—the egos—are many, but this basic reality, our true Self, is one undivided universal entity. All men are really brothers, nay they are one, because they live and move in one existence—the Self.

The universe of our experience, too, according to Vedanta, has two faces: one superficial, transient; and the other, deeper, truer. The former is presented to the psycho-physical personality as a multiplicity of spatio-temporal objects and phenomena which change incessantly. The other face is an abiding reality unaffected by the space-time flux. In fact, it is the same infinite Existence-Consciousness below our surface personality. The true face of man and the true face of the cosmos are one. It is this underlying fundamental unity of man with his universe which is responsible for man's dreams of a Cosmic Vision. Poets, philosophers and mystics have been stirred by the intuitional feeling of this unity in different degrees.

The Upanishads declare that cosmic vision is a necessary corollary of self-knowledge. If, in the last analysis, the true Self of man is one with all existence, then it is reasonable to assume that when man discovers himself, he cannot but see the cosmos as part and parcel of his own truth. Whatever is, is in him. We read in the Chhandogya Upanishad (8.1.2-3) a question posed by the disciples: "In this City of Brahman (i.e., the human body), in that small mansion in the shape of a lotus (the heart), in the small inner Akasha (space) within—what is it that has to be sought and understood?" And the teacher replies: "As vast indeed is the external space, so is that space within the heart. In it indeed are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and air, both the sun

and the moon, lightning and the stars. Whatever there is in this world and whatever is not, all that is contained in this internal space of the heart."

By "the space within the heart" the Upanishad means pure consciousness—the true Self of man. So the above indicates that what we see as the vast spatio-temporal universe is contained in our true Self as modes of consciousness. Similar utterances are abundant in almost all the Upanishads. These words should not be taken as mere figures of speech. Vedanta claims that the nature of our Self as Cosmic Consciousness is a scientific fact, true for all men and universally verifiable by anyone who is prepared to undertake the task seriously. Each science has its own background and specific methods of research. The scientific study of the deeper strata of our consciousness too should naturally have its own pattern of investigation. Vedanta has clearly delineated the details of this pattern.

Cosmic vision as well-defined valid knowledge is surely much more worthy of attention than as mere rhetoric, speculation or subjective ecstasy. The latter are, no doubt, pointers to a distant truth and as such may have a certain charm and power, but the case appears to be quite different when that distant truth becomes precise knowledge without any shadow of doubt or confusion. The Upanishads unequivocally assure us that it is possible for man here and now to have a direct, clear and immediate knowledge of his Self as the total reality encompassing everything in this universe, animate or inanimate.

What happens to a man when and if such a vision enters into the texture of his mind? Does he live or die under the weight of his knowledge? Does he move and work or become useless to society? Well, if we believe in the testimony of Vedanta, we may be certain that the person enjoys a wonderfully new life and becomes a great asset to humanity.

Self-knowledge brings a radical transformation in one's ideas, ideals and behaviour. All the meanness, selfishness and restlessness of one's character give place to a spontaneous magnanimity, fellow-feeling and calmness. A person no more thinks and talks in terms of his sense-bound little self. No falsehood or hatred or lust or greed can animate him. No vested interest can prevent him from acting for truth and justice. The background of his thoughts and actions is a lived experience of unity with all. His is a Cosmic personality. He has become godly, divine.

Adventures and achievements in outer space have their own worth. Our purpose is not to minimize them. But it is up to man with his urge to explore the unknown not to forget the tremendous possibilities of an ancient science: the exploration of human consciousness. Never before has the study of this science been more needed than at the present time. Modern man, to escape from his plight, must discover a basic harmony in his own life as well as in the world in which he lives. This harmony can only be achieved if he can attain the Cosmic Vision springing from the knowledge of his own true Self.

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How to Attain Self-Realization

Swami Yatiswarananda

In every one of us there is a yearning for life, for knowledge, for happiness. We all desire to live consciously and happily. Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute are the very essence of our true nature, and when we examine the outside world also we find that same thing at the back of all phenomena. Everything exists, and everything has the capacity to force itself on our consciousness, possessing as it does a sort of luminosity that shines through it. Difference lies not in kind but in degree; all things, more or less, fulfil the wants of the individual. The desire for happiness is always there and the mind runs after sense objects only because of the enjoyment it hopes to derive from them, and not because of the intrinsic value of that particular object. Thus, not merely in ourselves, but in all outside objects, sentient and insentient, we get a glimpse of what may be called Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Name and form hide the face of Truth, but all names and forms reflect dimly the glory of the Reality at their back. In us there is always a subconscious feeling with regard to this Reality. It may be very vague, very indefinite, but still it is there, and the task of all spiritual life is to make the indefinite consciousness definite. If we really want to come face to face with Truth, we should begin with ourselves, try to find out that which exists at the back of the ego.

So long as there is a false identification and a false sense of personality, the truth of God can never be realized. This false identification exists in every one of us, and because of it our centre of consciousness is continually shifting. It is possible to have one's consciousness rooted in the transcendental, even while working

or living on the phenomenal plane, but this can never be achieved as long as the false identification with the body and mind lasts. When we identify ourselves with the body we feel pleasure and pain, and when we identify ourselves with the mind we feel happy or miserable, and the common factor underlying this wrong identification is always the "I" that comes in different forms. As long as the "I" lasts, we cannot get even a glimpse of Brahman. Yet there is one important point to note in this connection: even at the time of wrong identification, there is the consciousness of something that abides, that does not change. And it is the task of the spiritual man to find out what that abiding and unchanging something is. No thought of the finite is ever possible without the thought of the infinite, however indefinite it may be. To posit one is to posit the other. The Infinite, Pure Consciousness, the Atman, cannot be formulated, it can only be realized.

"The Truth can be realized by him whom It chooses and to whom It reveals Itself." From the monistic standpoint you are your own Chooser, because this Self, this Truth, is not something distinct from you, and if you choose yourself to be the knower of this Truth and really strive for It, you become It. Spiritual realization is Self-Realization. Be bold, and face the Truth. There must be merciless self-analysis. First of all you must try to find and regain your own soul, only then will the question of higher Realization arise.

Spiritual life begins with the recognition of the fact that we are neither bodies nor masses of emotion, neither men nor women, but spiritual beings. This ideal is necessary as the basis of all our striving. It is essential for us to have a true conception of freedom. Do we want freedom for the senses, do we want license, or do we want freedom from the senses? Which is the right idea of freedom? Is it freedom to allow the mind to run after enjoyment, to be the slave of the senses? Is it freedom thus to dig our own graves? Or

is it freedom to control, to master all desires and become free from the senses and their cravings? This alone is what is called the attainment to the freedom of the Atman. Freedom of license is not freedom. As long as we cling to our slave mentality, and allow ourselves to be driven like slaves by our senses, we cannot progress. Only the life of sense-control and purity leads to freedom. There is no room for romance in spiritual life, neither materially nor mentally. It is a hard life, a life of struggle and strain. We want freedom and fearlessness. We want to break free from the limitations of the body and the mind, but this we can never attain as long as we cling to our different desires and cravings.

The great sage Sankaracharya says, "A human birth, desire for emancipation, and association with holy men, these three are very rare and are attained only through the grace of the Lord." But even these three advantages do not suffice unless we are eager to profit by them, and willing to sacrifice everything for the higher life. Without paying the full price we cannot become free and fearless, and without freedom and fearlessness there can be no happiness for us, either in this life or in any other life. Therefore, we must be prepared to sacrifice all our petty sentiments and personal desires for the Highest, then alone, one day, the Highest will be ours. Struggle, struggle, struggle, this is the only way. Let us bear in mind that salvation is to be attained here and now, in this very life.

Spiritual practice can never be successfully performed without true renunciation and dispassion. Only to the extent to which we can renounce our desires, our clinging to others through attachment or through aversion, can spiritual practice be performed with profit and can any progress be made. Let us never allow our mind to delude us on that point. The mind is always ready to bring forward some plausible reason or excuse why we cannot renounce this or that person or object; it is ever ready to

be the spokesman of the subconscious or half-conscious desires. Therefore we need not only Japam, and prayer and meditation and other spiritual exercises, but also renunciation and non-attachment, and only to the extent to which we succeed in acquiring true renunciation and non-attachment can all our strivings have any real, appreciable effect.

Things or persons whom we love passionately affect the mind and bring attachment, hatred, and aversion. Attachment and aversion are but the obverse and reverse of the same coin. They come under the same category. Therefore we must rid ourselves of all forms of attachment and all forms of fear, by becoming dispassionate and free from personal likes and dislikes. We must be kind without ever becoming too personal, and there should never be any personal or selfish claim on anyone, nor should we allow anyone to have any personal claim on us or on our affections. Christ said: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." There is nothing truer than this, and he who allows himself to be loved more than the Divine is also not worthy of the Divine, and will never attain the Divine, however hard he may strive. We reap what we sow, and so long as we sow petty affections and hatreds, likes and dislikes, so long as we fetter ourselves and others with the chains of so-called love, so long shall we remain bond-slaves, and so long shall we bring misery upon ourselves and others.

The secret which all spiritual aspirants should know is this: since there is both love and hatred within each one of us, and since it is not possible to rid ourselves of them all at once, we should try consciously to direct our love toward the Highest, never toward any person or thing, and our hatred should be directed toward everything that prevents us from realizing our true nature, toward everything that stands in the way of our spiritual progress.

Without a working ideal, spiritual life cannot begin. If we put this working ideal too high nothing can be achieved, but, at the same time, the ideal should never be lowered; we must rise to it step by step by taking higher and higher working ideals. There should be faith in the words of the seers, and teachers, and faith in one's own potentiality, strength, and purity. Faith of itself is not sufficient. We must strive our utmost. Ethical culture means chastity, purity in thought, word and deed, purity in food, purity in one's associations, and purity in what one hears.

First comes physical purity. Then purity of mind. The control of speech, too, is most essential. We must never listen to any speech that is not perfectly pure, and we should behave in such a manner that others will not dare to discuss anything impure in our presence. We should try to maintain the steady flow of the undercurrent of pure thought, and try always to keep our mind on the goal. The undercurrent of pure thought will protect us and create around us an atmosphere of purity and morality.

A new attitude must also be developed with regard to all objects and persons that tempt us in any way until a state of detachment toward them is reached. We should keep a strict watch over the movements of our mind so as to become more and more conscious and definite in everything. There should be no unconscious movement in our life so long as we are awake. This is most essential, because, in the first period of spiritual life—and the first period may extend over many, many years—the body consciousness becomes stronger, and the mind tends to wander more than it did before commencing spiritual practices. At the same time, affections and aversions become more prominent and dangerous if we do not scrupulously avoid coming in touch with their objects, both mentally and physically.

Before going to bed or before falling asleep we should make it a point never to read anything of a worldly nature, because even

after we go to sleep this goes on working in the subconscious mind, and has very bad effects. We should let the mind dwell on some holy thought or sound, and try to fill our whole being with the thought of the Divine. As we sink into sleep there should be concentrated and peaceful dwelling on the Divine name or form or idea, or upon all the three, which is the most efficacious way. Only by so doing can we succeed in transforming the contents of the subconscious mind.

Good habits are to be formed and strengthened. Spiritual life then becomes easier and loses much of its initial strain. Certain fixed hours for spiritual practices should be strictly preserved, then meditation gradually becomes possible even when the mind is restless. The time of spiritual practices should be gradually increased in the case of the beginner and also in the case of the more advanced student, for it is only after much practice that one is able to make full use of the undercurrent in one's mind which keeps a part of the mind busy with the practices in all circumstances and conditions. Before that state is reached, the greatest regularity regarding the hours and the minimum amount of spiritual practices which are to be done is absolutely necessary in the case of all aspirants.

We should always conduct ourselves in such a way that we shall be able to face death with a smile when it comes. Death should become for us the gateway to immortality, to be welcomed, never to be feared. This life is nothing but a passing show, a phase. Our future depends on what we think in this life, on what we are, never on what we appear or pretend to be.

Whatever be the truth, let us face it undauntedly. An unpleasant truth is always infinitely better than a pleasant falsehood, even if it breaks our hearts or shatters our fondest hopes and illusions. Let the true light come to us under all circumstances. Nothing is truer than the fact that someday this body will fall off; let us

therefore give ourselves no occasion to repent for having wasted our time, our precious human birth, and our Divine possibilities.

Death is always of the body, never of the spirit or Self. Then why fear death? The bier is as real as the cradle, the burning-ground as real as the nursery, yet we rejoice at one and recoil from the other. Why? We should neither cling to life nor recoil from death, because the Self remains untouched by either; it is something infinitely greater than this shadow of life, this phenomenal existence.

We cling to our bodies and to those of others, to our minds and to those of others, and think that we have got hold of life; we have not. We are hugging a mirage! The true aspirant, he who has true spiritual yearning, neither clings to life, nor yearns for death, because, to him, neither of them has any true reality. The world is a training ground, and we should make the very best use of the short span of time given to us. The worldly minded and those who cling to their personal attachments alone are afraid of death. The spiritually minded do not lose anything. It is like passing from a grosser plane of existence to a subtler one. It is the body that dies. The Self never dies. Even if we fall in this battle of life, through newer and newer lives we shall work with renewed vigour. Step by step, stage by stage, we shall move onward until we attain life's final Goal.

Generally speaking, we ourselves create all the obstacles that stand in the way of our spiritual progress or Self-realization. We think of ourselves in terms of body and mind, and then form direct relationships with others as men and women, from which relationship springs attachment and aversion in due course. On what does this whole life of the body and the mind depend? Not on name and form, but on consciousness. The moment the Self leaves the body, the body becomes lifeless. All its charm vanishes. That which had attracted us was not the form but the

consciousness which we had mistakenly identified with that particular body or mind. There is much blind infatuation in the world owing to this superimposition on the Reality.

Without undermining all these wrong notions and conceptions, likes and dislikes, our attractions and repulsions, we can never make any spiritual progress. If I love the life of the body so greatly, why do I not then look to that on which it depends for its very existence? We should learn to love the Self, since it is only because of Its existence that there is any life in the body at all! The cause is greater than the effect, and the cause of all life is the Self alone. If I want life and love, permanent and unchanging, I must look to the Self, and never to any of the limiting adjuncts. But it takes us many, many lives to see this and to realize our stupendous mistake.

Our great task is to go beyond this phenomenal world, and reach the Reality, and this can never be done without chastity in word, thought, and deed. Unity, ultimate oneness, cannot be reached so long as one remains physically and mentally tied to duality. There are some spiritual aspirants who say, "Lord, I am Thine," while others again say, "Lord, I am Thyself." There is a difference of expression but the ultimate goal is the same. In both cases the Lord alone is the sole actor and agent. The ego has disappeared, and this should be our aim.

None is forced to follow the spiritual path, but all those who have decided to do so should go forward with great enthusiasm and perseverance, and never swerve from the path. We should learn to be tremendously sincere and one-pointed, and never allow ourselves to be swayed by indecision and doubt. We must strive earnestly to attain full illumination even in this very life.

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Is Renunciation Negative?

Marie Louise Burke

One of the greatest obstacles to an understanding of Indian thought by the Western mind is the doctrine of renunciation. Despite the fact that Christ placed as much emphasis upon renunciation as have the religious teachers of India, it is a doctrine that has come to be thought of as peculiar to Indian tradition. When the average Western man comes upon it in his reading, he feels as though he has run up against something foreign and dangerous, something unsuited to his temperament—a way of life that is negative, pessimistic, somewhat abnormal, and of no practical value whatsoever—in short, 'Oriental'.

According to the Indian conception, renunciation is that way of life in which the individual endeavours to eradicate the sense of personal gratification from all his actions and thought. To this end he voluntarily abstains from sense pleasures, from the pursuit of fame, wealth and even the simple contentments of ordinary existence. His aim is to turn his mind inward to the contemplation of a reality higher than that of the phenomenal world, and to this end he throws all attachments and calculations to the winds and avoids involving himself in worldly pursuits.

Naturally enough, such a way of life is, at face value, incomprehensible to the average Western man. Religious sentiment notwithstanding, the life of renunciation amounts in his eyes to a wilful and irrational rejection of all that makes life worth living. It appears obvious to him that because of some deep-rooted incapacity to effect a proper response to the vicissitudes of civilization, the man of renunciation denies himself the compensating joys. He is like one who, because of the thorns, destroys the rose-bush. He turns morosely from beauty and love, from the warmth and drama of human relationships and from the

comforts and pleasures of the senses, to embrace a sterile and monotonous existence. He crushes out in himself all the desires and ambitions which make action possible and which give meaning and zest to life, and, for reasons that are mysterious and no doubt unwholesome, cuts himself off from human experience in all its fascinating variations and depths. In other words, he wilfully stagnates. With this view of renunciation in mind, one cannot wonder that the whole procedure is repellent to the normal man of common sense.

Many modern psychiatrists have justified the layman's instinctive recoil from renunciation by pointing out the dangers of retreating from the world of empirical reality. Such a retreat, they say, is not only motivated by a morbid sense of anxiety or guilt, but can in itself bring about further neurosis, and constitutes an escape into a world of dreams that have no bearing upon the world of fact. It is the displacement of the will to live by the will to die, and is anything but conducive to the well-rounded, integrated life.

The prevailing schools of modern Western philosophy judge the man of renunciation no less harshly. Those who renounce the world, the followers of these schools say, are not only attempting an escape from the harsh facts of empirical reality with which they cannot cope, but, what is worse, they are seeking a goal which is totally unattainable and should not be even spoken of—transcendental reality. To the modern philosophers who follow in the footsteps of science such words as 'transcendental reality' are branded as meaningless. Speculation upon 'absolute truth', 'absolute knowledge' and the like is considered to be the bane of logical inquiry—sheer nonsense serving only to clutter the mind and side-track it in the pursuit of truth. Human knowledge, these philosophers insist, is limited, whether man likes it or not, to those data which he derives through his senses and which can never give him absolute certainty in regard to anything at all. 'Absolute' is a

word we can never use with good judgement, for it connotes something which can never have real meaning for us, or, rather, it does not connote anything at all, for we can never touch, see, hear, smell or taste it.

It is granted among some thinkers of the present day that the individual who persists in aspiring toward 'absolute truth' may have some kind of subjective experience which he finds highly satisfactory, but, it is maintained, such experience can have no more bearing upon objective reality than can the dream of an opium-smoker. That which it reveals can never be communicated to others and can never be verified empirically. It can make no contribution to the world's fund of knowledge, and, as far as the scientific inquiry into the workings of the universe is concerned, it is of no value whatsoever. It is generally agreed among those who hold this view that man's most sensible approach to life is one in which he faces the facts of his own mental and sensory limitations and makes the best of them. If man must renounce, let him renounce the childish and retarding dream of 'certainty', and face the accident of his existence with whatever courage he can muster.

Aside from being considered psychologically unsound and philosophically illogical, the man who chooses the life of renunciation has also been branded as selfish and amoral. He not only fails to contribute actively to the collective welfare of the community, but irresponsibly withdraws even his passive support. He takes no interest in the improvement of man's life on earth, but is concerned solely with his own private, dubious and socially-useless salvation, sitting, perhaps, in some remote corner with folded hands and closed eyes, leaving it to the rest of humanity to carry the burdens of the world.

But although the life of renunciation has received a good many condemnations, some of them shrill, none are based on an actual knowledge either of men who have renounced or of their reasons

for doing so. Moreover, all of them, by stigmatizing Indian thought at the outset as 'world- and life-negating', tend to prevent further inquiry into a metaphysics that the whole world today is actually, if unconsciously, seeking with a desperate need.

Perhaps the most obvious refutation of the view that Indian philosophy is pessimistic and suffused with the will to die is the five thousand years of India's history. How so long a span of life has been possible for a people and culture whose primary purpose has been, in the words of a Western scholar, to reduce 'earthly existence to a condition of being which has no content beyond the waiting for the cessation of being', is inexplicable. India's continuous civilization, the early days of which are found by some scholars to be contemporaneous with the early Sumerian, bespeaks a vitality and will to live that are unique in the history of the world. Nor has India's long history been a drab and stagnant one. It is studded with periods of tremendous creativity—golden ages during which great monarchs ruled with wisdom and benevolence, in which social life in all its aspects prospered and genius in all fields of human activity flourished. It is also a history scarred with periods of subjugation under foreign rule, times of enforced quiescence in which the cohesive social life withdrew behind the walls of the caste system and shut its doors to the intruder and in which creative vitality took the form of unshakeable endurance and fortitude.

How can one reconcile the facts of Indian history with the notion that all along the Indian people have been bent on self-destruction? It is not as though India lived a double life—the one negative and pessimistic but confined to the forests, and the other vital and creative, independently pursuing its own interests in the cities and villages. Religion, philosophy and secular life have always been interwoven in Indian culture. Like an unbroken web, India's religious and philosophical thought has always spread over the

land, embracing her richest courts and lowliest villages, guiding the lives of emperor, warrior, farmer and artisan alike, imbuing all with its doctrines. And yet India survives!

The simple explanation is that the philosophy that gives vitality to the tradition of renunciation is far from being negative; it is one of the most profoundly positive and invigorating systems of thought the world has ever known: and the life of renunciation, far from being based on the will to die, is the very soul of India's will to live. The sadhus and sannyasins—the men of renunciation, who from time immemorial have wandered homeless throughout the land teaching their philosophy from village to village, or who have dwelt in forest ashramas surrounded by disciples—are the embodiments of profound and life-giving truths, sources of vitality and goodness that have enriched the entire culture. It is little wonder that through the ages men of secular power, wealth and genius have bowed their heads before them.

Men of renunciation are not fundamentally different from the majority of human beings. Their goal is the same toward which all men—saints or sinners—strive: their search is for self-fulfilment, for truth, goodness and beauty, for freedom and unity. The human soul deeply knows its own ends and cannot be turned aside from them. Man strives incessantly for self-expansion and for unity with his environment and with other men. Indeed, the whole history of civilization might be viewed as the collective attempt of men to add to themselves the universe, to break the barriers that separate them from other living beings, to extend their power infinitely, and to throw the light of knowledge into the most minute corner of the earth and across all space so that there remains nothing beyond their control.

Individually, man attempts to enlarge his scope by adding to himself innumerable possessions; he strives to extend his influence by gaining control over other men; he seeks to perpetuate himself

endlessly through progeny; he reaches for love and joy through every pleasure the senses and mind can give; and he thirsts for knowledge. He would become the centre of the cosmos—eternally freed from limitation, possessing all things, knowing all things, and loving and being loved by all beings. Man in his hunger would swallow the universe. He is by no means resigned to his limitations; on the contrary, he is continuously fretting against them. He feels hatred toward those who threaten to hamper him, and dejection when his hope of fulfilment is dashed. The human struggle for existence is not a simple matter of keeping body and soul together: collectively and individually men are driven by an insatiable hunger—a need not for mere survival but for omnipotence.

This struggle is universal. When the man who leads a life of renunciation turns aside from worldly pursuits, he does so for precisely the same reasons that the worldly man involves himself in all manner of activities. Both are endeavouring to shake free of limitation, both are attempting to fill a hunger. The only difference is that the man of renunciation does not disparage the immensity of his need by offering it bits and scraps. He has learned once and for all that man's hunger is an infinite hunger and can be filled only by infinity. Nothing short of that will satisfy. He has long since learned the facts that Western poets bemoan: the fading of finite beauty, the cooling of the most ardent human love, the decay of power, the elusiveness of knowledge, the ennui that stifles enthusiasm, and, above all, the inevitability of death. But the man of renunciation does not brood, as the poets, in sweet melancholy upon the effects of the passage of time. Rather, in a burning rebellion of spirit he searches for that which does not fade or crumble, that which is a match for his hunger and which will fill him to the brim forever. Far from turning away from life in a slump of pessimism, he so loves it that he searches into its inmost depth for the imperishable treasure that he is sure is there.

One of the main difficulties between Eastern and Western philosophers seems to lie in the definition of reality. In fact, most Western philosophers of today refrain from defining reality at all, for they are very frank in acknowledging that they do not know, and probably never will know, what it is. Our experience, they say, is limited to that which impinges upon consciousness through the medium of the senses, and it is the data given by sense impressions which have upon us the impact of 'reality'. But we can never say what reality is in itself: it is never the same from one moment to the next; it has no independent existence; and, when it is analysed, no substance.

As far as sense-knowledge goes, Indian and Western philosophers are, on the whole, in agreement, but while the Western philosopher stops here and endeavours to make the best of a hopeless situation, the philosopher of India inquires further into the very nature of experience itself. Why does the phenomenal world, which upon analysis is found to be not real at all, seem so real to us? The question probes into both the fundamental nature of reality and the fundamental nature of experience. The answers given by various schools of Indian philosophy are intricate and fine to a hair's breadth and involve all the problems of metaphysics that man has puzzled over since he first attempted to explain himself to himself, but these complexities need not be entered into here.

Some of the highest schools of Indian philosophy have asserted — to put the matter simply — that the sense of reality is like a light that shines through all levels of perception, and that it is this light alone that makes for experience. Moreover, the sense of reality derives from the Real itself, which is identified with unqualified Consciousness. It is the shining of this pure Consciousness through the medium of the mind and senses that imbues the phenomenal world with the reality it seems to have. Reality actually lies not in the form, but in the fundamental essence of experience. The beauty

and joy that man intuits in the objects of his senses—the beauty and joy of being that seem to shine forth from all things of space and time—reside not in the form of those things themselves, but in the eternity of man's own Consciousness: the infinite, all-pervasive Self or Spirit. It is Spirit or pure Consciousness that is alone real and unchanging. It is Sat-Chit-Ananda, ultimate Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. It is Brahman, eternal and immutable.

But is not 'Spirit' one of those nonsense words so irritating to most modern thinkers? What is Spirit? Who has seen It? And who, having seen it, can tell others of It? What bearing can It have upon our knowledge of the universe? Is not Sat-Chit-Ananda—Existence without form, Consciousness without content, and Joy as an essence rather than a quality—a mere abstraction and meaningless to us who are, after all, limited to knowledge derived through the senses? The answer to this is that man is limited to sense-knowledge only in his present state. Actually, he is not merely a bundle of sensations, but is an infinitely profound being, capable of deeper and ever deeper levels of experience until, at last, all the media through which Consciousness shines are cast aside and Consciousness itself is known in Its pure state. That which is less dense and gross seems less real to us now only because we identify ourselves with the gross. But when the individual discovers his true identity with Spirit, Spirit is real to him: it is, in fact, the real.

Far from being an abstraction, Sat-Chit-Ananda is the very substance of all phenomena, seen now fragmented and distorted through a veil of sense perception, but capable of being known in and for Itself. To know, in this sense, is to be; it is to have become at last identified with that for which we have always sought. For has not our struggle always been toward the real, our effort always to discover not what is less real but what is more real, until reality itself is reached?

We seek that which is ultimately real without quite knowing what we do; the man of renunciation, on the other hand, seeks it consciously and persistently. To him this search is not only the sum and substance of all religions, but is the meaning of his total existence. But why, we might ask, must he renounce? Cannot sense experience lead us into the heart of existence? Can it not widen our knowledge and make our minds and hearts more subtle and sensitive to an ever richer and more profound contact with reality? To be sure, this is the hope that springs eternal. But in the final analysis, if experience teaches us anything at all, it teaches us that it is a false hope. Cultural and moral experience can lead only so far—it can lead to the recognition that in itself it is not enough, that the infinite cannot be attained through the finite no matter how refined our perception of the finite may be.

At best, it is only in rare flashes that we intuit the true state of affairs. To everyone brief moments of self-forgetfulness come when, in the contemplation of the beautiful, one seems suddenly to glimpse something beyond the world of form, some piercing beauty and joy that are indescribable in terms of sense qualities and unforgettable in their impact. In such moments one seems to come closer to pure being, and to taste reality in a deeper and far more satisfying sense than one has ever tasted it before: and one speaks of such rare and precious moments both as 'having lost oneself' and as 'having really been alive'.

What has momentarily been lost, at least in part, is the small ego, which continually refers the universe and all in it to the hard and dead shell of its own finitude—a process which ordinarily we call 'experience'. What has been discovered, or, rather, dimly, faintly intuited, is the infinite Self, the Self that is the very centre of all aliveness and independent of the innumerable forms and sensations through which it shines. Involuntarily, accidentally, we have caught for a passing second a pale and distant glimpse of that which the

man of renunciation consciously strives to know permanently and in full measure.

Renunciation, it should be noted here, is never the mere outward denial of the senses: it is the persistent attempt to focus the attention upon the essence rather than the form, to centre one's identity in the all-embracing Self rather than in the limited ego. It is always easier, however, to break old habits of thought by avoiding old haunts. It is because of this simple fact that the man who aspires toward the real turns from the world and its ways. One cannot serve God and mammon: one cannot, in other words, serve both the Self and the ego at the same time; one cannot perceive the limitless and the limited at once. Thus, if the spiritual aspirant mortifies his senses, it is never for the sake of mortification, but for the sake of learning to perceive the unalloyed source of joy. His is a positive and not a negative move: it is motivated by the conviction that beneath the world of changing form and beneath his own psycho-physical being lies the eternally real and eternally fulfilled Self.

But still we may ask: is not his whole way of life based upon a mere speculation? How can he know that the goal which he sets for himself is humanly attainable? Is not the whole quest an impractical one? The only really satisfactory answer to this is that the goal has been attained—not once but many times. Indian sages agree wholeheartedly with the empirical philosophers of the West in their emphatic insistence upon experience as a test of truth. Just as modern Western philosophy is built upon sensory experience, so the highest systems of Indian thought are built upon mystical experience; they are never mere intellectual gymnastics. They are, on the one hand, a rational interpretation of transcendental experience and, on the other, a guide to the attainment of that experience. They serve as a bridge between the relative and the absolute: not a bridge of words, but of very real and vital facts.

We in the Western world are at a great disadvantage in grasping the true significance of spiritual philosophy and practice, in that men of supersensory experience do not, to say the least, abound among us. Despite the fact that the teachings of Christ are available to all and that Christianity has produced its great saints and mystics, the average Western man has little conception of what spirituality really means. This is not to say that there are not many sincere students of mysticism in the West; but it is not enough to be told by one of these who has not experienced its truth that the goal of life is the realization of the Self. Regardless of the fervour the student puts behind his own words, there is nothing in our ordinary experience that sounds a responsive note, and nothing new wakes up within us. Politely, and even hopefully, we may agree that what he says is true, but still the words seem nothing but words, and we do not want to exchange what we know of the real, however transitory and limited it may be, for a mere conception, however glorious.

But to hear the same words from one to whom the transcendental experience is a fact is an entirely different matter. When such a person speaks, his voice rings with the authority of direct knowledge, and his words have the power of awakening within us our own intuition of their truth. Spirit speaks to and awakens Spirit, just as life generates life. Were this not true, religion would become a mockery, a bundle of superstitions and wishful thinking, as it has, in fact, become in cultures where it is not an actual and transmittable power in living men. It is only because illumined men have lived and spread their influence that we can know that supersensory experience is not only attainable but transforming—that through it man becomes truly godlike. To ignore the lives and teachings of such men is to ignore man's greatest achievement and most profound experience, and hardly bespeaks the open-mindedness of which modern thinkers boast.

The accusation of selfishness levelled against those who undertake the life of renunciation is, in large measure, due to the same lack of knowledge which brings about the charge of impracticability. The criticism is often made that he who renounces the world does so solely for the sake of his own salvation with no regard whatsoever for the rest of the world. But Buddha, whose philosophy is thought by some Western scholars to be the most negative and world-denying of all, renounced the world for the sole purpose of tracing down the basic cause of world misery that he might discover its cure. His own salvation was never a consideration. Christ was a man of renunciation: the Western world need not be told that he was not selfish. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were men of intense renunciation and also of intense compassion. Selflessness is, of course, expected from those who are considered to be Divine Incarnations, for they came to the world solely in order to help it. But even lesser holy men and saints are known to us by virtue of their self-abnegation and power to lift others.

The fact is that there is nothing to distort or obstruct the spontaneous and beneficent action that flows from the fully enlightened individual. Having attained to that beyond which there is nothing more to desire, his motives for action are entirely pure. He cannot fear another as a possible threat to his happiness: he cannot become attached to another as a means of self-gratification. He is unconcerned with the pleasures and pains of his own psycho-physical existence, for his real life is centred in his eternal being. It is from this vantage point that he understands the true significance of all human struggle and sorrow. He knows man's real need and how to fill it. Knowing himself and all men as divine, his service to others is transformed into worship and is undertaken not with a sense of duty, but with self-forgetful reverence. He is, in short, anything but selfish. He is the very embodiment of selflessness.

On the whole, what we really mean when we criticize the man who undertakes a life of renunciation is that we miss his participation in those worldly pursuits and interests the value of which we ourselves, in our hearts, question. We are like blind and frightened men stranded on a small raft in a vast ocean. When one of our members, less blind than the others, has glimpsed land close by and strikes out alone to bring back help, we find him insane for we do not believe that help is possible; we find him lacking in the will to live, for we think he has thrown himself into the black unknown to drown; and we find him selfish because he has withdrawn his support from the group whose only comfort is in clinging together. Above all, we cannot easily forgive him for deep within us we suspect that, in some way we do not understand, he is right.

But some day we too shall strike out for land. The life of renunciation is natural to that stage of spiritual advancement which every soul will reach in its progress toward truth. Therefore it is a life whose psychology and aims every man should understand now, for an understanding of them will give him not only a greater insight into the profundity and universality of Indian thought but a greater sympathy with those who actually live in accordance with, and thus give power to, that thought. Theirs is the life we all shall one day lead, in this birth or another—the life in which we shall acclaim our true humanity and aspire toward the full realization of our essential reality. It is a positive and abundant life, undertaken by the world's most hardy and intuitive souls. It is by their courage and aspiration that the whole world can be strengthened in hope and brought closer to the eternity of peace and certainty that we all without exception seek.

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Active and Contemplative Life

Swami Prabhavananda

Before we can understand the kind of a life we must live, we must know the end, the goal, and the purpose of life and living. In regard to the end or the goal of life, all religions are in complete agreement. Jesus says: "Be ye perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect." St. Paul explains this goal by saying: "Ye are complete in Godhead." The Upanishads declare: "Blessed is he who realizes God in this life; if not, he has lived in vain." And: "There is no happiness in the finite; in the Infinite alone is happiness." Shankara says: "A man is born not to desire life in the world of the senses, but to realize the bliss of a free soul in union with God."

To attain perfection in union with the Godhead and thereby enjoy the bliss of a free soul is the one goal of human life. Your life and achievement on earth will determine your life after death. The degree to which you have unfolded the divine qualities in this life will determine the degree to which you will enjoy union with God after death. There is an erroneous idea prevalent in the mass mind that heavenly felicity is to be attained only after death. But the many Scriptures of many religions and the illumined seers of God in every age and in every country point out very definitely that the heaven is within ourselves and that it has to be attained here and now. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." And this birth in spirit is to be had here and now. The Upanishads emphasize, "Attain liberation here and now, not after the fall of the body."

There is a proverbial saying amongst the Hindus, "When the husking machine dies and goes to heaven, what will it do there

but husk!" If we have not been able to overcome hatred, jealousy, and passions in this life, we shall not be able to overcome them after death; for we carry the same quality of the mind to the other world. What we have to earn, we must earn here on earth. We must reach the unitive knowledge of Godhead and enjoy the bliss of heaven even in this life.

According to the Hindu theory of evolution, nothing is added in the course of evolution, but what is only potentially existing becomes unfolded. The whole of the tree potentially exists in the seed. Now if we study the process of evolution in the universe we find in one extreme what we may call dull, dead, inert matter, and in the other extreme a Christ, a Buddha, a Ramakrishna, Children of Light, Light themselves. These have become one with God. God whom we see unfolded in these Children of Light is therefore existing potentially in the minutest atom. Swami Vivekananda rightly defined religion as the manifestation of divinity already in man. To unfold this divinity already existing within is the end of evolution and the goal of life.

Through the process of evolution God, Satchidananda, Existence, Consciousness, Bliss Absolute, God who dwells everywhere, becomes unfolded. Shankara, by his subtle logic, proves that Existence, Consciousness and Bliss Absolute are not attributes of God, but identical with God, nor are they different from one another. God is existence itself, and that which is existence is also consciousness and is bliss itself as well. We shall not enter into that subtlety of his reasoning. But let us simply state the fact that God, who is existence, consciousness and bliss absolute, is everywhere. "The light shineth in darkness but the darkness comprehended it not." Though He shines everywhere, He is not comprehended by all because of darkness.

Take the mineral kingdom, for instance. There is God there; there is life, and there is consciousness. But this life and

consciousness remain covered by the darkness of matter. In the vegetable kingdom we find, though darkness of matter predominates, that there is a certain release of life and consciousness. Within the past forty years, a Hindu scientist, J. C. Bose, conclusively demonstrated that the plant can breathe, has life and consciousness, and does act and react. In the lower animal kingdom we find consciousness predominates, but there is not evolved self-consciousness. In man the self-consciousness is unfolded, but man again is a slave to matter. In the illumined seer, in a Christ or a Buddha or a Ramakrishna, we see that infinite consciousness infinitely released. They have become one with God. Self-consciousness or the sense of ego is not yet evolved in the lower animal. In man it is evolved self-consciousness. A God-man again transcends the sense of Ego, the ego which limits the infinite consciousness or God in man. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "When the ego dies, all troubles cease."

To transcend this ego and unfold the infinite consciousness is what Christ would call, "The birth in spirit," and Buddha would call "The awakening," and the Mandukya Upanishad says, "Turiya, the Fourth, the transcendental consciousness."

The condition for the birth in spirit, for the inner awakening, is in the words of the Bible: "Love God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." In other words, we must devote ourselves completely and wholeheartedly to loving contemplation of God. Our consciousness becomes matter-bound or released to infinity according to the object of consciousness, the object of our love. If we devote our mind to worldly objects, our mind remains clouded by the darkness of matter, and if we devote ourselves to the Inner Light, the covering of darkness is removed, and the Light shines forth.

The natural tendency of the mind, however, is to run outward towards the objects of sense. Senses are drawn naturally to objects

and the mind is attached to the senses because of ignorance of the Inner Light.

Why does the mind become attached to the senses and the objects of the senses? It is because through ignorance it accepts the shadow of life, the appearance of a world as real.

There is the infinite God, the Inner Light, within each one of us. There is also the covering of darkness. The mind receives the reflection of the Inner Light, gets the fragrance, as it were, of God-Existence, Consciousness and Bliss Absolute; does not know wherefrom the fragrance comes; seeks to find fulfilment in the objective world by running after the shadows of life. Thus the mind becomes externalized.

In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the causes of our bondages to life are said to be, first, Avidya, the universal ignorance which covers the face of Reality. From this ignorance, or forgetfulness of the presence of the Divine Reality within, there arises next the sense of ego. Then there come in man attachment to pleasing things of the world, aversion to unpleasant things, and, lastly, thirst for life.

Swami Vivekananda used to say, if the room is dark, you cannot remove the darkness by crying aloud "It is dark! It is dark!" But bring the light and the darkness will vanish. Our mind is darkened by ignorance. To remove the ignorance, we must look to the Inner Light that shines in spite of the covering of darkness. In short, contemplation of God is the direct means to reach the Inner Light of God.

This does not mean, however, that we must give up activity, or that we should neglect our duties. On the other hand, duties must be performed in order that we may practice detachment through action and rise above the sense of ego, the obstacle to the

uncovering of the Inner Light. In the words of Sri Krishna in the Gita:

"Let him who would climb
In meditation
To heights of the highest Union with Brahman
Take for his path
The Yoga of action."

Work in the spirit of egolessness is a means to contemplative life. In this connection, let me emphasize once more that in regard to the end, all religions are in complete agreement. That end is the life in union with God. Contemplative life is a stage in our progress that we arrive at through selfless action. Action is not the end, but only a means. But unfortunately the modern man, if he makes any concession to contemplative life, will regard it only as a means to greater urge to action and achievement in the external world. The modern man, through his progress in the knowledge of science and his outward achievements in the external world, has come to believe in a sort of millennium; he thinks that with a greater progress of machines, man will also have greater moral and spiritual progress. Instead of making the attempt to reach the unitive knowledge of Godhead, instead of trying to live a life of inner check and a life in union with God, he is busy in achieving progress in the external world by trying to bring more cash and comfort to mankind.

History, however, has proved again and again that Utopia can never be reached in the external world; that it is like a "dog's curly tail". To quote the words of the great American poet-philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson:

"There are two laws discreet
Not reconciled:
Law for man, and law for thing; The last builds town and fleet,
But it runs wild,

And doth the man unking."

Unfortunately again, the professed Christians also have begun to believe that by bringing progress in the outward world through action they can bring down heaven on earth. And that God needs the help of man to achieve this millennium. I was once told by a Professor of Theology that God has not yet reached His fullness and infinitude and that we as human beings must help God to achieve His fullness! What an egocentric theology it is, I thought to myself! Just the very opposite of what Jesus had taught! No, on the contrary, we need God. We need to forget ourselves, and wipe out all sense of ego, in love for God and in His contemplation.

The ideal, the end of life, is the unitive knowledge of Godhead—this must never be forgotten. The modern man in the name of practicality often regards a man with the spiritual ideal as a queer creature, a dreamer. Suppose you see a man walking with a heavy burden on his shoulders. You ask him, "What is this burden you are carrying?" He answers, "I don't know." "Where are you going?" "I don't know." If such are the answers you receive from the man to your queries, what would you think of him? Would you consider him a practical man? Yet, such is the irony of this age that he who tries to find an answer to such questions is considered a dreamer.

True it is that everyone tries to form some ideal, some end he may strive to achieve. But until a man learns the spiritual ideal, he cannot find the exact purpose of life and living, and in the words of the Gita, "his will wanders in all directions, after innumerable aims."

We must understand the spiritual ideal and our will then must be directed singly toward one ideal. No compromise must be made with this ideal and then it is possible to "develop that concentration of the will which leads a man to absorption in God."

Contemplative life, absorption in God, is a stage in our development. To achieve that we must be active. Work is a means and not the end. To quote the words of the Gita, which teaches absorption in God: "Nobody can become perfect by merely ceasing to act. A man who renounces certain physical actions but still lets his mind dwell on the objects of his sensual desire is deceiving himself. He can only be called a hypocrite. The truly admirable man controls his senses by the power of his will. All his actions are disinterested. All are directed along the path to union with Brahman. The world is imprisoned in its own activity, except when actions are performed as worship of God. Therefore you must perform every action sacramentally and be free from all attachment to results."

What is the secret of worshipping God through actions? Try to understand that behind our surface life and our outward consciousness there is the deeper life, the inner consciousness which is identical with God. The appearance of a world cannot exist without some Ground behind it. That Ground is Brahman—God Reality. Learn therefore to see God within yourself and in the universe. Then act with your senses and let your work be the worship of God. To quote the words of the Gita again:

"If a man sees Brahman
In every action,
He will find Brahman."

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favourite of the king, and as soon as the request was made the king doubled his pay. All this pay he saved and put into the jar, but the greedy jar showed no signs of filling. At last he began to live by begging from door to door, and his professional income and the income from begging all went into the insatiable cavity of the mysterious jar.

Months passed, and the condition of the miserable and miserly barber grew worse every day. Seeing his sad plight, the king asked him one day: "Hello! When your pay was half of what you now get, you were happy, cheerful and contented; but with double that pay, I see you are morose, care-worn and dejected. What is the matter with you? Have you got 'the seven jars'?" The barber was taken aback by this question and replied, "Your Majesty, who has informed you of this?" The king said: "Don't you know that these are the signs of the person to whom the Yaksha consigns the seven jars. He offered me also the same jars, but I asked him whether this money might be spent or was merely to be hoarded. No sooner had I asked this question than the Yaksha ran away without any reply. Don't you know that no one can spend that money? It only brings with it the desire of hoarding. Go at once and return the money." The barber was brought to his senses by this advice, and he went to the haunted tree and said, "Take back your gold, O Yaksha." The Yaksha replied, "Alright." When the barber returned home, he found that the seven jars had vanished as mysteriously as they were brought in, and with it had vanished his life-long savings too.

Those who do not understand the difference between what is real expenditure and what is real income, lose all they have.

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Devote your mind to God, and your joy will be great. Devote your mind to the world and the pleasures of the world, and great will be your suffering. Never forget the ideal of human life. This is not given us to while away in eating, drinking and sleeping like animals. Since you have been born as a human being, spurn all worldly enjoyments. Firmly resolve to realize God and attain infinite bliss. Don't waver, even if you die in the attempt. Isn't it wiser to enjoy the present life in an ecstasy of devotion and spiritual practice and then enter the doors of infinite bliss forever? Think of Him as your own, and like a child speaking to its mother, ask Him: "Lord, reveal Yourself to me." When a devotee is in earnest, God can't remain unmoved. He hurries to him and takes him on His lap. Oh, how inexpressible is that joy! How boundless is that bliss! He alone knows it who has had that supreme experience. Compared to it, worldly pleasures, so dear to most people, seem insipid and worthless.

Swami Brahmananda

