

# Vedanta

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413 MAY- JUNE 2020

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**The Nature and Purpose of Prayer**  
*Swami Ritajananda*

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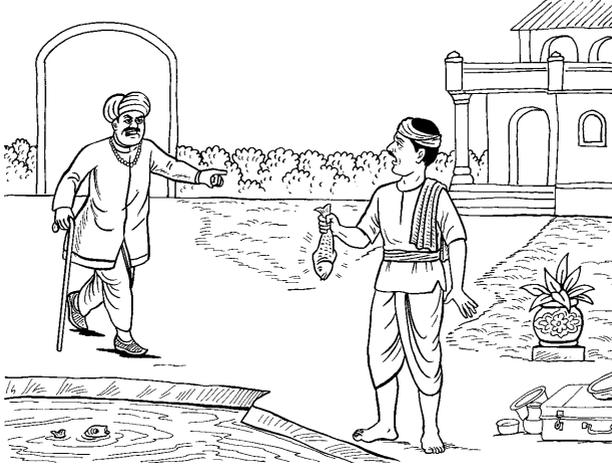
**Samkhya, Vedanta and Vivekananda - 2**  
*Buddha Chaitanya*

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## Divine Wisdom

### Illustrated Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna - 10



#### **Worldly Goods Are Not Thine for Ever**

The steward of a certain rich man was left in charge of his master's property. When asked by someone as to whose property it was, he used to say: "Sir, this is all my property; these houses and these gardens are all mine." He would speak in this strain and go about with an air of vanity. One day he happened to catch fish in a pond of his master's garden-house in contravention of his strict prohibition. As ill-luck would have it, the master came upon the scene just then, and saw what his dishonest steward was doing. Finding out the faithlessness of his servant, the master at once drove him away from his estate, disgraced and dishonoured, and confiscated all his past earnings. The poor fellow could not take with him even his rickety box of utensils which was his sole private property.

Such is the punishment that overtakes false pride.

# Vedanta

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ISSN 1355 - 6436

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## Love for God – 2

Swami Vivekananda emphasised some basic disciplines which are considered necessary by the devotional scriptures for the development of Bhakti or Love for God. Some of these are as follows:

1. *Viveka* or discrimination regarding *ahara* or food. Here *ahara* means 'that which is gathered in'. All the sensations we take in and which mould our mind can be termed as *ahara*. So pure food does not mean taking some food superstitiously considered to be pure but allowing the mind to take in through the senses only ennobling and pure experiences. The truth about it is this: *Prakriti* or nature consists of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. And our bodies are also made of these three constituents as are everything else in nature. Food is what makes our body. It must become more and more *Sattvika* if Bhakti or Love for God is to manifest through our personality. The food that we take in form one of the most important factors in this kind of purification. The purer the *ahara* or the food we take, the better it helps the development of *sattvashuddhi*. Controlling of the passions, practice of spiritual disciplines or sadhana, unselfish work or service, purity, strength and suppression of excessive joy are some of the other factors that help to produce *sattvashuddhi* or purification of being.

2. *Vimoka*: It means abandonment of all desires except the one, Love for God. It involves the prevention of the sense organs from going towards their natural objects. It is something like the practice of *Pratyahara* in Raja Yoga. To control and bring them under the guidance of the will is the central virtue in spiritual culture.

3. *Abhyasa* or constant practice: It is the effort to make the mind and our organs always directed towards God in place of being engaged in worldly thoughts and occupations. Japa, prayers, and devotional music etc. can be some of the forms of *abhyasa*. The

teachers of the devotional school have described *abhyasa* as the nine-limbed devotional discipline, the nine aids being: Hearing of God (*Sraavanam*), hymns on Him (*Kirtanam*), contemplation and remembrance of Him (*Smara nam*), service of the world as His feet (*Padasevanam*), worship (*Archanam*), obeisance (*Vandanam*), servanthship (*Dasyam*), intimacy (*Sakhyam*) and self-surrender (*Atma-nivedanam*).

4. *Kriya*: It means discharge of duties. It involves the five great sacrifice: discharge of man's duties to the gods by worship of them, to sages by study of scriptures, to the *manes* by offering *Tarpana* or prayer for their welfare, to man by works of service and offering of food, to lower creatures by practice of kindness towards them.

5. *Kalyana*: It means purity. It is the bedrock on which the edifice of Bhakti rests. External purity is comparatively easy, but internal purity is exceedingly difficult to practice. *Ahimsa* is one of the essential disciplines to attain purity. It means the duty of non-injury to all beings. In modern Hinduism vegetarianism has become the essence of *Ahimsa*. Swami Vivekananda said that every virtue is sometimes taken to the extreme by man. There are ascetics of certain sects who will not bother if their body begins to stink, lest in bathing they should kill some creatures. There are people who protect animals and insects as a part of their practice of *Ahimsa*, but injure their brother men in horrible ways like exacting ruinous interests, etc. Absence of jealousy is one of the most important signs of a man who practises real *Ahimsa*. Vegetarianism is only the superficial aspect of it. Even the so-called great men are prone to jealousy. Other aspects of the practice of purity as enumerated by Ramanuja are: *Satya* (truthfulness), *Arjava* (sincerity), *Daya* (doing good to others without expectation of any return), *Anabhidhya* (not coveting other's wealth and not indulging in vain brooding over injuries received, or in vain thoughts and words).

6. *Anavasada* or Strength (lit. not desponding) is another of the great virtues that help the development of Bhakti. 'This Atman is not to be attained by the weak,' says the Upanishad. Both physical and mental strength are included in this. Unless there is physical strength and nervous stamina, "the shock of reaction resulting from the attempt to control the organs" cannot be faced. Weak persons trying to do strenuous practice end by developing some incurable malady or eccentricities of the mind. Cheerfulness of mind is a part of mental strength. But at the same time excessive mirth (*Anuddhasha*) should be avoided. Swamiji says in his Bhakti Yoga, "Excessive hilarity is quite as objectionable as too much of sad seriousness, and all religious realisation is possible only when the mind is in a steady, peaceful condition of harmonious equilibrium."

What has been stated until now is about preparatory Bhakti, which gradually helps one to attain the state of *Para-Bhakti* or supreme devotion. Repetition of names, rituals, forms, symbols, etc., form part of preparatory discipline and are for the purification of the soul. But of all purifiers, renunciation is the most important, and no one can attain *Para-Bhakti* without that. And what is renunciation? Swami Vivekananda says, "When the human soul draws back from the things of the world and tries to go into deeper things, when man, the spirit, which has somehow become concretised and materialised, understands that he is thereby going to be destroyed and to be reduced almost into mere matter and turns away from matter, then begins renunciation, then begins real spiritual growth."

There are two views of man: One is that man is a body and has a soul; the other is man is a soul and has a body. Worldliness is the consequence of the first, and renunciation of the second. To one who holds the first view, even faith in God is only a means to obtain worldly enjoyments here and in a sensual heaven hereafter.

In a very inspiring and forceful manner Swami Vivekananda says, "They are like swine, wallowing in the mire of the senses, unable to see anything beyond. Though physically they are men, spiritually they are stagnating at the animal level, living as they do exclusively for sensuous satisfaction. Slaves of this world! Slaves of the senses! rouse yourselves; there is something higher than this. Do you think this man, the Infinite man, the Infinite Spirit, was born to be a slave to his eyes, his nose, and his ears? There is an infinite omniscient spirit behind that can do everything, break every bond--and that spirit we are, and we get that power through love." So long as our needs are confined within the narrow limits of this physical universe, we will not feel any need for God. Bhakti proceeds out of real want. Ordinarily man wants only food, clothing, wealth, sex satisfaction, acquisition of power, fulfilment of ambitions etc. When all these lower desires drop off little by little, man will begin to want God in a real sense. Until this purification through renunciation is affected, man's religion is clouded heavily by materialistic demand, and there is truly little difference between a devotee of this type and a materialist who lives honestly without any faith in God and higher life.

Bhakti-Yoga is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in love. One single moment of the madness of extreme love to God brings us eternal freedom. "Bhakti", says Nârada in his explanation of the Bhakti-aphorisms, "is intense love to God"; "When a man gets it, he loves all, hates none; he becomes satisfied for ever"; "This love cannot be reduced to any earthly benefit", because so long as worldly desires last, that kind of love does not come.

-Swami Vivekananda

# The Nature and Purpose of Prayer

Swami Ritajananda

**E**very object in the world has a support. The chair is supported on its legs. The building is supported on its foundations. Mathematics and other sciences are based upon certain axioms or hypotheses. Ideas are supported by the mind; and all existing things are supported by space. Thus, whether it is a material object or an idea, gross or subtle, everything depends upon something else which will support it and give it the necessary power to exist. The question of the support of things has been a matter of study for ages in India, and in the quest for the final ground and support of the universe as a whole, led to the discovery of Brahman as the one ultimate Existence on which the entire phenomenal universe is based.

Now, if we put the question, "On what is religion supported?", we have to say it is prayer. For it is not the belief in a creed or a dogma that gives man faith and inspiration in religion, but it is prayer. We gather strength for religious life through prayer. Our faith grows by prayer, and spiritual illumination also is the result of prayer. Thus, if religion is to give us any meaning or value, it depends on how our prayers are guided. So it is that every religion has a method of prayer, with a set purpose, depending upon what that particular religion considers as its ideal.

Humanity perhaps started praying when it felt helpless and found no earthly means of overcoming its difficulties. Even today most people keep it as the last resort when all their personal attempts have failed. In the crudest form, it is a selfish desire based upon personal needs. Praying for one's success in life or for health is superior to praying for the death of one's enemies. Praying for the good and welfare of humanity is superior to

seeking one's own happiness. Prayer as an end in itself is the highest devotion. The purpose of prayer is to bring us humility, egolessness, and purification of the mind and heart. To some, prayer is a duty—to remember one's obligations to the Lord for placing one in this world, with great opportunities for enjoyment and self-improvement. Here there is the feeling of obeying a law which one should not transgress. Not saying one's prayers amounts to sin and is capable of bringing down the wrath of God.

Many people have their religion started with training in prayer during their early life. Children in many homes learn to say their prayers when they are quite young, and temples and churches are there to encourage and direct all prayers.

What does prayer consist of? The answers to this question are many, depending upon the religion and the individual's taste. Although one may learn prayers through books and persons, this kind of prayer is like the recitation of passages from memory, but never going beyond. Here it resembles the prayer-wheels in Tibet, where strips of paper containing prayers are attached to the wheel and the wheel is turned round and round, lessening the individual's trouble of saying the prayers. The true prayer comes from the heart and not from the mouth. It is not the words but the feelings that make the true prayer. Carlyle said, "Prayer is and remains the native and deepest impulse of the soul of man."

So it is often felt that prayer is not something given to us from some outside power or person, but a natural function. God is compared to a magnet and it is natural for an iron piece to be drawn by it. It is equally natural for a child to seek its mother. In this manner, at some time or other, every human being is drawn by God and he goes towards Him. The external prayers are only helpful factors, which remove all obstacles to the free flow of devotion. Most often we believe that prayer should consist of

choice words, full of religious significance, having a scriptural background and a pious form. Some, finding that they do not have these possibilities, feel sad and think that they do not know how to pray. For them, prayer consists of a particular form. But they forget this fact: once we learn a particular form of prayer it becomes stereotyped and loses all its power and force. It becomes utterly lifeless unless it is accompanied by the feeling of attraction and nearness to God. Eloquence in words does not constitute prayer and is often a hindrance to it.

This happens in all religions, because the concept of God reached through external means is often vague. The proper relationship between man and God, and what God wants, are not made sufficiently clear. Prayer is more a realization of the close relationship with God. Hence it is a spontaneous expression of devotion, while the words used in prayer play a secondary role. Meister Eckhart said: "Ye pray not with many words nor minding much about the book, but rather where words fail in prayer does the prayer get home."

Prayer does not mean the enunciation of the attributes of God, His glories and His indescribable nature. Firstly, such an attempt will end in failure, for no one can exhaust all these. Secondly, we do not have any direct knowledge of God. And thirdly, God is not one depending upon our flattery or praise: it is foolish to think that God will be pleased if we recount his glories. Prayer is essentially an inward movement. The person who prays struggles to get rid of something that is oppressing him. It may be physical disease, mental anguish, a desire to overcome an intolerable situation, or the desire for spiritual enlightenment or guidance in life. Finding no earthly assistance, one seeks God. Hence no one can really be interested in prayer unless he feels the need or urge for prayer. The higher the need, the greater is

the dependence on God and the deeper is the prayer; and when the need is highest, spiritual realization or God Himself, one has to efface oneself and completely surrender to Him.

Prayer is private. To pray in public may be educative and helpful to some, but true prayer needs seclusion. It is the personal outpouring of one's heart, a confession of one's life and a quest for guidance. Before God one has no secrets and nothing to hide. Hence prayer is best when we are all alone; then only can we open our lives to God. That is why in all religions solitude is recommended for prayer. Students of the Bible can recall how powerfully, in simple direct language, Christ gave advice on prayer: "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee." Sri Ramakrishna advised people to pray in a quiet cave or a solitary corner of their house or in their own mind.

Prayers need not be loud demonstrations, and so Kabir says: "Why should you cry aloud to Him? Is your Lord deaf? The subtle anklets that ring on the feet of an insect when it moves are heard by Him."

For most people, life is without any ultimate purpose and without significance. They may be rich or poor, learned or ignorant: that does not make a great difference in their approach to life. But from the saint's point of view, man's purpose in life is not to play with the things of the world, but to become a partner in the divine life. The purpose of prayer, as William Law says, is to inspire. If a person has not become aware of this, he may as

well be said to be asleep. He goes through a variety of good and bad, pleasant and painful experiences of life, but never knows where to improve it. The evil in the world depends more upon himself than upon the outside world. Its existence depends upon his own condition, whether he is asleep or awake.

Most of us have learned to pray in our childhood. This is one of our first lessons, perhaps even before we learned how to speak. There was at that time no idea of ourselves or the world. Yet we were told to believe in an invisible God, to whom we addressed our words, asking for forgiveness of our trespasses—our childish mistakes, such as telling a lie or hitting our younger sister. We sought the blessings of Him who, though invisible, was omniscient and omnipotent. He could know all our thoughts and actions, could grant us favours or deal out punishment. Due to this early schooling the belief remains, for most of us, as part of our nature and life. When we grow older, we begin to reason about this and sometimes even to experiment. Is the omnipotent God capable of fulfilling my desires if I pray? This is a critical point and its effect on religious belief is very strong.

Most often people discard the belief that God grants our prayers for things of the world: it may be due to their education, or to personal experiment and failure. But some people's prayers are answered and they develop greater faith in God and religion. From the earliest times to the present, people have always made petitions of prayer with the desire to seek the aid of the invisible power in worldly affairs, although some may call it superstition. In the Bhagavad Gita, of the four types of persons who seek God, the suffering person asking for God's help is mentioned first. The Bhagavata gives a number of illustrations depicting God as the friend of the helpless. Krishna and Buddha were the first reformers to tell people that petitionary prayers for worldly

goods were selfish and meaningless. In the Vedas we come across such prayers, but later on, as seen in the Upanishads and the Gita, they were characterized as the lowest type of worship, for all enjoyments here or hereafter come to an end sometime or other. But the value of such prayers was recognized as the first step in bringing man into relation with God.

Although it may not be to acquire merit, troubled people do petition God when they do not find any earthly means of getting rid of their painful condition. Thus prayer is the last resort of people for help in straitened circumstances. When we see people praying loudly, asking for health and wealth, we need not feel shocked. Such prayer has gone on throughout the ages and throughout the world. It is a manifestation of the self-preservative instinct. As long as we live on the level of instincts only, our prayers will be influenced by them. Even those who laugh at these petitions may have recourse to them when they feel helpless. Since it is an undeniable fact that our thoughts and actions are governed by external circumstances, such types of prayer are natural and also may be of very great value in the beginning. When, after praying in a desperate condition, we get the help we want, it brings a tremendous faith in God and in religion and may change our life altogether. This is the main reason why the Gita included this type of supplicants among the worshippers of God. It is an elementary state of our spiritual evolution, but it can work its way up to higher forms of devotion through the gradual purification of motives.

First, petitionary prayers may be self-centred, but the next step is prayer for one's close relations, parents, and friends; then prayer for one's country and for people in general. It is a gradual evolution. The attempts to heal others by praying to God is one such illustration. For many people religious faith is created by

these miracles, if we can call them so. They believe it is religion producing tangible results, which thus assures them of many things they do not understand but which can take place. Here no argument is necessary since, they say, they are dealing with facts. The answering of our prayers is sufficient proof of the existence of God and His willingness to help. Perhaps these approaches are all encouraged by stressing one aspect of the life of Christ—his healing the sick, his bringing the dead back to life, and his other miracles. This prayer for the welfare of others sometimes takes interesting forms, where the people of one sect pray that the people of another sect may be drawn to their own, which they believe is the only means of salvation. They pray that the misguided be shown the right path. Sometimes it looks strange, to see how one's vanity makes one believe that one knows more than even God what is good and what is bad for others.

Broadly speaking, all petitions for personal welfare or the welfare of the community have something in common. Firstly, they have a worldly end in view. There is a request for some tangible return from the supernatural power. The result may be health or wealth, or success for oneself and the defeat of one's enemies. Secondly, there is a self-consciousness which can lead to strong egotism and the belief that one is the blessed person who is the chosen channel for God's power to manifest. Thirdly, by encouraging this kind of faith, all further search for God or higher Truth is blocked.

With our greater understanding of the human mind, we have found that suggestion can influence life. One is prone to question: "Why should we have God dragged into these matters?" Mary Baker Eddy said in one of her books, "Faith is belief, and not understanding, and it is easier to believe than to understand spiritual truth." She did not believe that God was influenced by

man. Petitionary prayers with a strong emotional tone sometimes create a psychic field which brings results—particularly in the area of healing is it often the case. As Aldous Huxley once remarked, if we believe in these healing demonstrations as the acts of God, we may as well consider that the working of a refrigerator, or someone's answering when we dial the telephone, are also miracles establishing the existence of God.

Although this petitionary prayer may be helpful to discover religion, the dangers are too many. One can be easily guided to seek miracles or to give wrong values. The inherent mental powers of humanity are only partially discovered and understood. Very often in the pure mind they become manifest: hence we see the saints capable of performing miracles. But this need not necessarily be taken as an unconditional proof of God or His powers. The saintly life only opens the doors of these powers inherent in the mind, which has great potentialities. The argument in favour of this view is that saints can be healers, but healers need not be saints. One can stumble on the vast resources of power in the mind and be in a position to draw sufficient energy to influence other human beings or the material world. Perhaps a few more statements may clarify the point.

First, nowhere and in no religion did the great teachers ask for such powers. They never encouraged their disciples to pay any attention to any miracle which they performed for its own sake. Miracles belong to the psychic realm and not to the spiritual. They all point out that the influence of petitionary prayer in the spiritual life of a person is not of great value if it is purely related to temporal goods.

Of a different type are prayers in which the desire is not for health or wealth, but for understanding, for a better life and for illumination. To ask for things of the world, which an

enterprising person can get by his own efforts, only shows our ignorance of the nature of God. If we are bound to the world, only the mundane objects have a reality and not the Reality itself, in the light of which these objects are extremely trivial. Sometimes we see a higher ideal in childhood training. Many parents tell their children to pray to God to make them good, to give them good ideas, etc. Here the petition is not of a temporal nature, since the wish is for self-improvement. The child not only learns to accept a higher power, but also learns about goodness as something valuable in life to be acquired by prayer. A presentation like this avoids all pitfalls or wrong concepts of God either as a stern moralist or as one who yields to flattery, but shows Him as one who can make us good.

This is a higher type of prayer and we may say the first step in the spiritual evolution of a man. There is a greater need of understanding the importance of goodness than even the concept of God; indeed, belief or faith in God, if it is explained in terms of values, amounts to goodness. As William Law puts it: "A good man is one who is concerned with the living inspiring spirit of God. Goodness in its essence depends upon how one's mind is turned towards God. God-centredness is goodness." The Bhagavad Gita uses the term divine attributes for good, and demoniac attributes for evil. Since the term 'prayer' itself is related to petition, the best approach should be of a higher type. The Hindus in their prayer, Gayatri, ask the Supreme Lord to illumine their understanding. Ordinarily our understanding is mostly guided by selfish desires and our judgments are governed by personal motives. A proper understanding is hard to reach. We need the guidance of higher powers to evaluate things in the right manner. This idea is repeated in the Upanishads also. In the Ishavasya Upanishad (15) we read, "Under a golden orb the face

of Truth lies hidden. Do Thou, O Protector, withdraw this cover, that I, devoted to Truth alone, may realize it." Again we read, in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad (3.4): "May He the creator and supporter of the gods, the Lord of all, the destroyer of evil, the great seer, He who brought the Cosmic soul into being, endow us with good thoughts. "In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad we again read, "Lead us from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, and from death to Immortality."

Thus those who imbibe the spirit of the higher prayers do not pray for any worldly goods. Sri Krishna calls them jnanis or men of wisdom: they are persons who have knowledge of God and seek realization and communion. They do not want anything of this world; they have known that their own nature is spirit and they seek the Lord only from that level. Sri Krishna says the jnanis are His beloved, for they alone know how to pray. Having realized His infinite nature, they want Him alone. In devotional literature, the saints are seen to be constantly seeking only love for God and nothing else. "Wealth, noble ancestry, physical beauty, austerity, scriptural knowledge, power, energy, courage, might, diligence, prudence and yogic practice—all these I deem of no avail in the worship of the Supreme Being. For indeed, the almighty Lord is pleased with the devotee not for anything else, but for his great devotion to Him." (Bhasavara, 7.9.9.)

A saint, Kulashekhara, prays: "Lord, I do not care for so-called meritorious acts, neither for wealth nor for the enjoyment of the objects of desire. Let that which is inevitable fall to my lot according to my previous karma. But this much is my cherished desire, that I should be endowed with love unshaken for Thy lotus feet in this life, as well as in lives to come."

"Let me be placed, O Lord, in heaven or on earth, or in hell, as it pleaseth Thee. I shall even in death think of Thy holy feet which

surpass in beauty the autumnal lotus blossoms." (Mukundamala, 7-8).

Thus in such holy ones the desire finally takes the form of devotion, and it is all they want by prayer. Coming from men of realization, the desires have completely changed from earthly objects to ethical ideals, and finally God Himself becomes the end sought for.

This is the culmination of religious life, since it is here that God is taken as the highest good and worldly objects mean nothing. It is here that prayer serves its purpose—the purpose of developing the consciousness of God and the spiritual life. The person is completely transported to a different plane. The devotees of the Lord always prayed to Him for proper guidance and for devotion. For example, Sri Ramakrishna used to utter the following prayer:

"O Mother Divine! I want no honour from men: I want no pleasure of the flesh: only let my soul flow into Thee as the permanent confluences of the Ganges and the Jumna. Mother, I am without devotion, without yoga: I am poor and friendless and I want no one's praise: only let my mind always dwell on Thy lotus feet."

In the same manner Tulsidas prays: "I have no other desire in my heart: I tell the truth, O Lord the Indweller of all. Give me devotion in abundance and make my mind free from all desires."

This happens in the lives of all great saints. They do not feel the need of praying for anything else. The Lord knows what is good for them. Hence, they do not ask Him for other things. St. Augustine prayed: "O Thou good omnipotent who so carest for every one of us, as if Thou carest for him alone: and so for all as if all were but one! Blessed is the man who loveth Thee and his friend in Thee and his enemy for Thee. I behold how some things

pass away that others may replace them, but Thou dost never depart. O God, my father supremely good. Beauty of all things beautiful, to Thee will I entrust whatsoever I have received from Thee and so shall I lose nothing. Thou madest me for Thyself and my heart is restless until it reposes in Thee."

These prayers bring out clearly the great significance of prayer. It is not a petition, nor is it a kind of mental exercise, but a soliloquy which can make a person feel good. They do not seek mental quietness or an alteration in their disposition by following a kind of mental gymnastics. The prayer of the saints is not the reflex actions of the mind, but it is the feeling of close intimacy with the Lord.

Perhaps the best explanation of the purpose of prayer may be found in the lives of the great spiritual luminaries. Not only did they not ask for any special gift or for anything of the world, but they continued the habit of praying all their lives. Prayer had become part of their nature. To people of the world they were extraordinary persons, but they pointed out that all their powers had a source, not in themselves but somewhere else. For example, Christ's life, his wonderful Sermon on the Mount, his actions all converging on one point—all bear out that "none can fulfil the divine will unless they are filled with the divine power". He seemed to charge his life with spiritual power by regular hours of prayer. He kept it up to the last day and the last minute of his life. What is the everlasting message he left? It is the Lord's Prayer, which is a condensation of all human aspirations. It is the Lord's kingdom to come; it is His will to be done; it is His kingdom, His power and His glory for ever. This is the prayer he taught and he lived. By such prayers humanity can go closer to God and have a greater understanding of the spiritual life. The Hindu sages used to say, by sincere prayer all one's sins are washed off

and one becomes purified. It is the only means by which one can free oneself from the distractions of the world and discover one's own true nature. The name of the Lord is said to be so great that one gets everything of the world by repeating it.

From our brief study we learn that prayer is an integral and essential part of religions throughout the world. Prayers may be petitions, intercessions, adorations or communions, or they may be contemplative. Prayer can start in our religious life with love for God under any conditions, but it works its way up. It may be answered or unanswered, it may be for the petty things of life or otherwise. Prayer fulfils its definite purpose, which is finally to draw our mind closer and closer to God. It will lead to knowledge; it will lead to discrimination; it will help in the manifestation of all the divine attributes, which is necessary for the completion of a spiritual life. Prayer is never wasted. Students of the Bhagavad Gita can recall the statement that the devotee who spends even a very little time in prayer to God will never lose its benefits. When it is sincere, it has no special words; it comes from the depths of the heart; it takes a person to the very foundation of life. It is the power by which extraordinary saints could convince the world of the reality of the Spirit. They themselves declare that the Lord takes complete charge of the saint. We are told that if we really seek the kingdom of heaven, everything shall be added unto us.

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, May-June 1959)

## Samkhya, Vedanta and Vivekananda - 2

Buddha Chaitanya

### Tanmatras and Mahabhutas

According to the presentation of the Samkhya, that portion of the ahamkara which is dominated by *tamoguna* evolves five subtle elements, each having a technical name and each corresponding to one of the five senses, giving to that sense the material which in the gross state it will perceive.

Swami Vivekananda, as we mentioned before, is more likely to describe it as the bifurcation of the *mahat* into the Vedantic akasha and prana and to explain the further creation in these terms. He may have felt it was a simpler description for a general audience. In his address to a different audience, the Graduate Philosophical Society of Harvard University, which we have quoted above, he did present the view of the Samkhya texts. Both explanations are acceptable in that vast synthesis which was to him Vedanta.

However, if we assemble everything he said about the *tanmatras*, we are again faced with some apparent contradictions. In one place he remarks that they can be subdivided into atoms. One passage tells us that they strike our sense-organs, but another that they cannot be sensed. Was he using the 'atom' in the framework of Indian philosophy rather than that of physics? Was he presenting the views of various commentators, or had he perhaps not definitely decided how the idea of the *tanmatras* was to be presented? The following quotation appears, in any case, to summarize his general attitude on the subject: "Different philosophers have different theories, and we know these are only theories. It is sufficient for our purpose to know that everything gross is composed of things that are very, very fine."<sup>15</sup> Here again we note the pragmatic tone so characteristic of him.

On the question of the formation of the gross elements from the subtle, Swamiji says only that the material of which the mind is composed goes also to form the subtle matter called the *tanmatras*; these become gross and make the external matter. The Samkhya texts attribute this to the increasing preponderance of *tamas*. But in the Vedantasara and some other Vedantic works, a more detailed description is given of how the subtle elements compound quantitatively in an arithmetical fashion, each successive element manifesting the qualities of the previous ones in addition to its own. One wonders about the significance of the fact that Swamiji nowhere makes any mention of this; it appears, by the way, that this detail had a very late entry into the Vedanta summaries. Let us read the only passage in which he seeks to give an explanation of this process in the language of physics:

"What we call matter in modern times was called by the ancient psychologists *bhutas*, the external elements. There is one element which, according to them, is eternal; every other element is produced out of this one. It is called *akasha*. It is somewhat similar to the idea of ether of the moderns, though not exactly similar. Along with this element, there is the primal energy, called *prana*. *Prana* and *akasha* combine and recombine and form the elements out of them ... The atoms become condensed, and as they are condensed different elements are formed. We generally find these things very curiously translated; people do not go to the philosophers or the commentators for their translation, and have not the brains to understand them themselves. A silly man reads three letters of Sanskrit and translates a whole book. They translate the elements as air, fire, and so on; if they would go to the commentators they would find they do not mean air or anything of the sort.

The *akasha*, acted upon by the repeated blows of *prana*, produces *vayu* or vibrations. This *vayu* vibrates and the vibrations

grow more rapid, resulting in friction which gives rise to heat, tejas. Then this heat ends in liquefaction, apah. Then that liquid becomes solid. We had ether, and motion, then came heat, then it became liquified, and then it condensed into gross matter; and it goes back in exactly the reverse way. The solid will be liquefied and will be converted into a mass of heat, and that will slowly get back into motion; that motion will stop and this kalpa will be destroyed."<sup>16</sup>

It would seem that this particular attempt on the part of Swami Vivekananda to interlock Sanskrit terms of an ancient cosmology and English terms from modern physics would be at least partially successful in the eyes of a scientist sympathetic to such an attempt. For although it is not a description of how matter behaves on our earth, as known to physics now, it does have some consonance with a current view of the evolution of the universe. In the principal theory of the cosmologist Hoyle, wherein hydrogen is 'created' or 'appears', gaseous material then whirls round, heats, and cools; liquefying comes indirectly from this, and the last step is solidification, which is the formation of planet.

To the writer it appears that more progress might have been made on correlations of this sort between Vedanta and science, since the days when Swamiji lived and taught amongst us, if writers and translators had followed his advice, and instead of translating the 'elements' as 'air', 'ether', etc., had made a serious attempt to find equivalents for these concepts in the vocabulary of modern science. We believe the Swami hoped for and expected such attempts. For example, it may prove more fruitful, as has been suggested, to regard the five-element theory as an analogy to the attempt to find a unified-field theory for the kinds of energy in the universe, than to look at it as a liquefaction and solidification theory. Simply to write it off as the misty musings of an ancient speculative philosopher — an attitude popular today — will not do.

## Cyclic Pralaya

The notion that the universe periodically undergoes de-manifestation and re-manifestation, called *pralaya* and *srishti*, is common to all the Indian philosophies, and it is a fundamental in the thought of Swami Vivekananda: "People talk about the beginning of the world, the beginning of man. The word 'beginning' simply means the beginning of a cycle. It nowhere means the beginning of the whole cosmos. It is impossible that creation could have a beginning. No one of you can imagine a time of beginning. That which has a beginning must have an end. . . . Wherever the beginning of creation is mentioned it means the beginning of a cycle."<sup>17</sup> And again: "We find that the effect is never different from the cause. It is only that this effect is a reproduction of the cause in a grosser form. Next, we learn that all these particular forms which we call plants, animals, or men are being repeated ad infinitum, rising and falling. The seed produces the tree. The tree produces the seed and so on and on: there is no end to it.... The seed comes out of the tree; it does not immediately become a tree, but has a period of inactivity, or rather, a period of very fine unmanifested action.... In the beginning, the whole of this universe has to work likewise, for a period in that minute form, unseen and unmanifested, which is called chaos, and out of that comes a new projection. The whole period of one manifestation of this universe.... is, in Sanskrit, called a *kalpa*, or a cycle. Next comes a very important question, especially for modern times.... We have seen that the cause is the same as the effect, and the effect is only the cause in another form. Therefore, this whole universe cannot be produced out of nothing. Nothing comes without a cause.... Out of what has this universe been produced, then? From a preceding fine universe. Out of what has the tree been produced? Out of the seed; the whole of the tree was there in the seed. It comes out and becomes manifest. So, the whole of this universe has been created

out of this very universe existing in a minute form. It has been made manifest now. It will go back to that minute form and again will be made manifest. This coming out of the fine and becoming gross, simply changing the arrangements of its parts, as it were, is what in modern times is called evolution. This is very true, perfectly true; we see it in our lives. No rational man can possibly quarrel with these evolutionists. But we have to learn one thing more. We have to go one step further, and what is that? That every evolution is preceded by an involution. The seed is father of the tree, but another tree was itself the father of the seed....The whole of this universe was present in the cosmic fine universe. The little cell, which becomes afterwards the man, was simply the involved man, and becomes evolved as a man. If this is clear, we have no quarrel with the evolutionists, for we see that if they admit this step, instead of their destroying religion, they will be the greatest supporters of it."<sup>18</sup>

We have quoted Swami Vivekananda at length because he elaborates this idea in many places, trying to make it very clear and logical to those who have never thought in this way, and yet the concept is not well understood. It is a big promise, that the evolutionists will become the greatest supporters of religion, but as yet we do not find them giving much consideration to the principle of involution. Students of science have taken issue with the above on the grounds that it is an oversimplification: the whole of the tree is not there in the seed, and the evolved tree does not re-involve as its seed; that the biologists do not speak of the effect as the cause in another form; that evolution means more than mere ontogeny, as it includes phylogeny, and also includes by implication what the Swami calls involution. We should reply that whether or not his analogy (between the tree-seed series and the universe as a whole) can be literally construed, the important thing for Swami Vivekananda was that behind every development, even

that of this complex universe, there is a blue-print. That blueprint was prepared in a previous universe, and, as is the nature of organisms, the present universe will leave a blue-print for a succeeding one. It is a philosophical argument, not really a biological one. Whether astronomy, archaeology and anthropology do or do not turn up any evidence of a series of *kalpas*, cannot prove or disprove it; for what happens in the whole cannot be tested from inside. The point he wants us to see is, if the sub-atomic particles are the simplest form we can now determine of evolution's 'origin', and if the human brain is taken as its present culmination, then what is the justification for attributing intelligence more to that complex mechanism than to the simple electron? The only justification, the Swami might say, is apparent manifestation. The electron, etc., is what he would call 'involved' intelligence: the brain, because it is highly organized and its connection with thought more apparent, is intelligence 'evolved'. But for him, as for Samkhya and Vedanta, there is Something standing beyond, apart from the cyclic evolutions and involutions of nature, which is the essence of intelligence.

However, it is important to notice in this connection that the Swami has a reservation, as we find in another passage: "Some of these philosophers hold that the whole universe quiets down for a period. Others hold that this quieting down applies only to systems: that is to say, that while our system here, this solar system, will quiet down and go back to the undifferentiated state, millions of other systems will go the other way and will project outwards. I would rather favour the second opinion, that this quieting down is not simultaneous over the whole of the universe, and that in different parts different things are going on."<sup>19</sup> It is strange that from the Indian side there has been little comment on this statement since his day. The point might have been discussed profitably with an eye to parallels in the thinking of modern

astronomers. For instance, in the 'big bang' school of the astronomer Gamov, it is indeed presumed that our solar system will one day contract by reversing its formation-processes and will again expand.

On the other hand, we find that in the West the complementary concept of involution, which Swamiji emphasized so much, has been rather neglected. It is true that it is implied in evolution as carefully defined today, but the implications are not generally thought through. Probably the first question which needs thorough airing is, to what extent does the present-day concept of evolution cover the same ground as that covered by the Indian concept? The prevailing conviction in Western cosmologies is of an 'emergent evolution'—that intelligence, for example, is an end-product or by-product of 'matter'. On this Swami Vivekananda is unequivocal: how can mind or intelligence 'emerge' from anything in which it was not inherent? His argument that this is a hen-and-egg proposition seems not to have been squarely met by any evolutionist we know of. Western thinkers have an almost inherent difficulty in entertaining the idea of a witness-consciousness and the possibility of disidentifying oneself with the body-mind. It does not occur to them to think of an evolution of space-time rather than in space- time, and this is of course traceable to the basic mind-matter cleavage so tragically traditional to the West.

### **Purusha**

The Purusha is the crown and glory of the Samkhya system. It is described as the essence of consciousness, the silent witness beyond time, space and causation, self-luminous and self-proven, all-pervasive, and is translated as soul, self, or spirit. Samkhya declares that each of us is a Purusha, for they are infinite in number and we know that here Swami Vivekananda took issue with Kapila, holding high the ultimate generalization of Vedanta. "Difference

in identity means exclusion, and exclusion means limitation," says he, "hence there can be but one infinite, that is, one Purusha." "There is only one Purusha, the Brahman of the Vedanta; God and man analysed are one in It." The microcosm, he said, is X plus mind; the macrocosm, Y plus mind. When mind is transcended, X must equal Y.

But as pointed out earlier, Swamiji prefers not to use the word consciousness in the traditional way: "Purusha is not consciousness. .... " Clearly he does not wish to confuse the Purusha with any kind of ordinary consciousness which we associate with that word. It is the same entity, the same realization, which is indicated by the two terms, Purusha and Brahman, but the latter always carries the implication of singleness: the impersonal, the neuter, the all-pervading. The Swami, like his fellow Vedantins, affirms it as the more comprehensive and satisfactory concept.

He accepts the Samkhyan explanation of causation. The effect is the cause in another form: the grosser state is the effect, the finer the cause; destruction means reverting to the cause. So, for prakriti we can make an equation: prakriti is to the universe what clay is to the clay pitcher, etc. Further, he equates causation within nature with the familiar principle of the conservation of matter.<sup>20</sup> But Purusha, the Swami reminds us, "is the unwitting cause of all the changes in the universe." It is neither intelligence nor will but it is the cause of all these. It is its presence that sets them all going and combining. It does not mix with nature: it is not intelligence, or *mahat*, but the Self, the pure, is Purusha. "I am the Witness, and through my witnessing, nature is producing all that is sentient and all that is insentient."<sup>21</sup>

It is for the Purusha that nature does all she does, to serve Its purposes. This is the teleology of Samkhya, and the Vedanta philosophy agrees in spirit. The Purusha, erroneously thinking

itself the buddhi, can utilize the processes of prakriti for his own enjoyment; or he can choose to use the same ladder to reach his liberation. Only the latter is true, the other is error: for Purusha is really not the enjoyer, but the witness. Swamiji presents the point beautifully: "Why does nature do all this? Nature is undergoing all these changes for the development of the soul; all this creation is for the benefit of the soul, so that it may be free. This immense book which we call the universe is stretched out before man so that he may read, and he discovers eventually that he is an omniscient and omnipotent being."

### **Ishvara**

Finally, with respect to Ishvara, even the Samkhya philosophers differ among themselves. Swami Vivekananda once said of Vedanta that it is the name of a series of books written at different times. It is true more or less for Samkhya and the other darshanas. The later commentators are more theistic than Ishvarakrishna, who is called atheistic although he does not try to disprove the existence of God, but claims that Purusha-prakriti is a sufficient explanation of everything. As we know, Swamiji made this one of the chief points on which he asserted the superiority of the Vedanta, and parted company with the Samkhya doctrine. He always acknowledged the pre-eminent position accorded to God by the Vedanta and regarded the God-idea, entrenched as it is in the human condition, as useful and essential, at least for a long time to come. Yet, one of the attractive traits of Swamiji's remarkable personality is his fair and whole-hearted—even enthusiastic—presentation of views differing from his own: "I must here tell you that some of our best psychologists do not believe in God in the sense in which you believe in Him. The father of our psychology, Kapila, denies the existence of God. His idea is that a Personal God is quite unnecessary; nature itself is sufficient to work out the whole of creation. What is called the Design Theory, he knocked

on the head, and said that a more childish theory was never advanced. But he admits a peculiar kind of God. He says we are all struggling to get free, and when we become free, we can as it were melt away into nature, only to come out at the beginning of the next cycle and be its ruler. We come out omniscient and omnipotent beings. In that sense we can be called Gods; you and I and the humblest beings can be Gods in different cycles. He says that such a God will be temporal, but an eternal God, eternally omnipotent and ruler of the universe cannot be." <sup>22</sup>

Then, warming to his own theme, the Vedantic conclusion, he asks how the cosmic series—universal intellect, universal egoism, universal mind, fine and gross materials—can be complete without the universal Purusha behind them as ruler and governor? If the individual series of prakriti's manifestations requires a Purusha behind it and beyond it all, why not the universal? Denial of the one means denial of the other. And this Universal Self beyond the cosmic modifications of prakriti is what is called Ishvara, the Supreme Ruler, God. From a note of a class-talk by the Swami, we get the further interesting comment that this Vedantic belief in an eternal Ishvara and the Samkhyan belief in a man-become-God are reconciled in the Puranic doctrine of the Incarnation.

### **Eastern Philosophy and Western Science**

We have sought to indicate the uses made by Swami Vivekananda of the ideas and ideals of the Samkhya philosophy in his multiform presentation of Vedanta, on different occasions, seeking to clarify what it is that Swamiji found important there, and wanted us to understand. Surely he was seeking to expose the common ground of science and religion, of ancient philosophy and modern discovery, as is shown in one of his most eloquent utterances: "We do not pretend to throw any new light on those all-absorbing problems, but only to put before you the ancient truth, in the language of modern times, to speak the thoughts of

the ancients in the language of the people, to speak the thoughts of God in the language of poor humanity, so that man will understand them; for the same divine essence from which the ideas emanated is ever present in man, and therefore he can always understand them."<sup>23</sup> We have also shown how Swamiji did in fact accomplish this modernization to a considerable extent by trying to re-define the concepts in the language of the day: "...the Hindu is only glad," he said at the Parliament of Religions, "that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language, and with further light from the latest conclusions of science."<sup>24</sup> A comprehensive picture of all the Swami's declarations (he himself once called them speculations) vis-à-vis Indian thought and Western Science is too vast for the subject in hand. In commenting on the psychologist Patanjali, he finds equivalents in physiology for the *ida*, *pingala*, 'lotuses', *ojas*, and so on. As we have seen, where he turns to Samkhya he relates the *indriyas* to brain-centres, the *pranas* to nerve-currents, and sees the five elements as various physical states of matter. In Advaita Vedanta, he finds the ultimate generalization of all knowledge, the professed goal of theoretical science.

Swami Vivekananda never abandoned the ground on which all Indian philosophy stands: that truth is best found intuitively, i.e., by the pure mind, the purified heart. "The great truths about atoms," he reminds us, "and the finer elements, and the fine perceptions of men, were discovered ages ago by men who never saw a telescope, or a microscope or a laboratory. How did they know all these things? It was through the heart: they purified the heart. It is open to us to do the same today; it is the culture of the heart, really, and not that of the intellect that will lessen the misery of the world."<sup>25</sup> Yet he never claimed that his own intuition was infallible in these matters. The candour of this revealing letter to a disciple is disarming: "The leading physiologist in America, I

hear, has been charmed with my speculations. At the same time, there have been some in England who ridiculed my ideas. Good! My speculations of course are awfully bold, a good deal of them will ever remain meaningless, but there are hints in it which the physiologists had better have taken up earlier. Nevertheless, I am quite satisfied with the result."<sup>26</sup>

Our final extract from the Swami's writing shows clearly the high ground of the Vedanta on which he stood, to survey Samkhya, science, and in fact the entire world of thought: "Modern philosophers say that intelligence is the last to come. They say that unintelligent things slowly evolve into animals, and from animals into men. They claim that instead of everything coming out of intelligence, intelligence itself is the last to come. Both the religious and the scientific statement, though seemingly directly opposed to each other, are true. Take an infinite series, A-B-A-B-A-B-, etc. The question is, which is first, A or B? If you take the series A-B, you will say that A is first, but if you take it as B-A, you will say that B is first. It depends on the way we look at it. Intelligence undergoes modification and becomes the gross matter, this again merges into intelligence, and thus the process goes on. The Samkhyas, and other religionists, put intelligence first, and the series becomes intelligence, then matter. The scientific man puts his finger on matter, and says matter, then intelligence. They both indicate the same chain. Indian philosophy, however, goes beyond both intelligence and matter, and finds a Purusha, or Self, which is beyond intelligence, of which intelligence is but the borrowed light."<sup>27</sup>

Is it not very important for us to remember that Swami Vivekananda thought of this process of interpreting the eternal knowledge in modern language as a continually unfolding one? He felt himself only an instigator of it. It is because his dedication to the Vedanta was so complete, that he never considered its

revelation was finished, its canon closed. It seems likely that future expounders of Vedanta will work with more refined definitions, will find perhaps better illustrations for certain details. But that will be nothing but proof of one of Swamiji's own dicta: that it is easy to give a finishing touch to a building when it is constructed. He wished his Western students to ponder and understand the teachings of Kapila and Patanjali, Shankara, Ramanuja, and Shri Ramakrishna. We are sure that he would have wished his own countrymen, too, to study and evaluate the ideas of the influential thinkers of the West—Darwin, Einstein, Freud, Marx. Thus, the meeting of East and West was to go on. This challenge to mutual discovery has been thrown down by the Swami, and it is true that he was himself the best taker of that challenge. But he saw that many more would come in future. We are looking for them, for the time is ripe. The dialogue between religion and science must go on, and in that dialogue many problems, such as these raised by the Vedantic cosmology of Swami Vivekananda, remain to be probed. Those who would come forward to take up the challenge seem to be all too few.

### **References:**

(All references are to The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 5th ed. The Roman numerals refer to the volumes.)

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(Reproduced from Vedanta for East and West, November-December 1968)

## Peace on Earth, Good will Towards Men

Swami Gnaneswarananda

**M**ay I change the biblical phrase and make it "good will to all," which conforms more closely to the Hindu ideal? From time immemorial, the watchword and slogan of the Hindu view of life has always been "for the good of all, for the gain of all." Consequently, the success and achievement of every activity of life is considered from the highest utilitarian standard as to how much good it brings for all, instead of for the doer alone. The utilitarian standard of ethics which we discuss in the present age had its origin in human history in remote Hindu times. It was understood in a much broader sense including all beings within its scope and was carried to such an extreme by the early Hindus that the standard was applied even in the matter of cooking food. If the food was cooked only for an individual person or family, it was considered impure. The custom of compulsory ritual has always been to set apart a portion of the food to be distributed to the five great worlds from whom we have been receiving so much benefit for our daily existence. These great benefactors are: (1) the world of the unseen *Devas*, or the gods and higher beings who are supposed to have some control over human welfare; (2) the world of the Rishis, or the seers of truth, from whom we have inherited all ancient knowledge and wisdom; (3) the world of the "Pitris" or the departed forefathers whose name we bear, and whose prestige, honour, and dignity we inherit; (4) the human world; and (5) the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdom.

If you were the only human being on this earth, what kind of a life could you live under that circumstance? You could become no better than a cave-man or a savage forest dweller. So we owe a heavy debt of obligation to the world at large, and

daily we should pay our homage of reverence and appreciation to all.

Therefore, in doing any action, one ought to consider how much benefit it does to all. If an act of piety, religious exercise or spiritual practice brings benefit only to the agent, it is considered selfish, and for that matter it is no longer spiritual. However, any endeavour that brings benefit to many, whatever may be the nature of the act, has always been considered spiritual. According to that standard of cosmic utility, even one's religious practice should be performed in such a form and spirit that the results can be shared by all beings. In India, at the conclusion of any spiritual practice or religious ceremony, a special ritual is always performed which sends the fruits of the action to all directions in the universe, so that all creatures may derive benefit from the good act.

Even after going through all the different steps in the time-honoured procedure of one's meditation, the concluding process must be a renunciation of the fruits of the exercise. The Yogi does not want any personal benefit from the practice of his meditation. If any benefit is to be derived, let it go for the advancement, happiness, peace and prosperity of all.

Those people who believe in a personal God or who meditate on the form of any special deity offer the fruits of their meditation to God with the words: "Oh, God, Thou art the Soul and the basic reality of every being that is, was, or will be. By offering the fruits of my meditation to Thee, I offer them to all. May it please Thee to grant peace, prosperity, purity, goodness, and truth to all beings in the universe."

Those of a philosophic bent of mind, not caring about a personal ideal, and considering themselves as the fountain head of all good thoughts, meditate on the idea that from their

cosmic consciousness, constant streams of good thoughts are pouring all around on the visible and the invisible universe, creating a strong vibration of truth, goodness and beauty in the hearts of all beings. Under all circumstances we must renounce all expectation of results from our practice of meditation. If any is to come, let it be shared by all beings.

Moreover, when we act for others it always helps us to manifest our inner spiritual perfection in a more distinct and pronounced way. When we give, we are great spiritually; whereas when we beg, no matter what it is, we always become small. The ocean of our spiritual perfection dwindles down into a mere drop at the very idea of begging.

Suppose because of poverty a self-respecting person has been reduced to a state of extreme hunger and suffering, I doubt if any of us could approach the door of a rich person to ask for our own food. There would always be a sense of terrible shock and hesitation for any self-respecting person even to think of begging for himself. But suppose he finds another almost at the point of death by starvation. Under the spiritual inspiration of saving another person's life, that very same man can go to any person to beg for food, without feeling humiliated at all. A great spiritual strength and power will be manifested in his personality with the realization that in this case he is giving. He could inspire or even compel someone, with the force of his sympathy and feeling, to come forward to render necessary help.

Comparing these two events, we can easily convince ourselves of the truth that whatever we do for our own benefit undermines our spiritual strength. In a very subtle way it makes us feel small and humiliated. But whatever we do for the benefit of others at once kindles the spirit of universality, goodness and spiritual strength within us.

Therefore, if our meditation and spiritual practices are done only for our own benefit, in the last analysis we do not gain much. But if they are performed with the intention of helping or serving others, the little drop of our spirituality multiplies into the ocean.

There is a common saying that a labourer is only worthy of his hire. He cannot expect more than a few pennies for his work. A very beautiful story is told to illustrate this point. One day some labourers came to work for the king. After strenuous work they received their hard-earned wage: at the end of the day they used to stand in line and their money was thrown at them with spiteful negligence. In that group of workers there happened to be one who worked only to help the labourers, and to see that the work was well done. It was his pleasure to do the work. He did not work for any wage. Therefore whatever he did was done with an attitude of love to help the workers, and to construct something of beauty and value. It did not take long for the higher officials to discover that the best worker in the field was not on the payroll and did not seem to care at all for his wages. That attracted the attention of the superintendents. Gradually it became known to the king, who watched him and finally discovered that he was not a day-labourer, but a lover of humanity, utility and beauty. Loving all the workers, he was never too tired to help them; loving the king, he wanted to see that the king's work was done with utmost perfection, since to create was his particular joy. That drew the attention of the king, so much so that he eventually became one of the king's dearest friends, and the king would not do anything without his advice and guidance. In fact, he became the "right hand" of the king.

This little story shows that if we care for our daily wages only, it will be thrown at us, hurting the dignity of the inner

spiritual self. Whereas, if we can resist the temptation of receiving a daily wage, can develop a spirit of love for all, as well as a love for beauty and utility through our actions, it will draw the attention of the "king", who is the source of all power and strength, and will eventually make us realize our unity with the fountain head of all power and absolute perfection.

It is absolutely necessary to develop an altruistic attitude regarding our meditation. Do not look forward to any results, to how much progress you have made in the course of the few months or years that you have been practicing, or what you have received, and how much more there is to come. This spirit of impatience for results has been compared to the attitude of a foolish planter, who after transplanting a small tree would uproot it every morning to see how far the roots had spread. If we always keep a part of our mind engaged in the calculation of our gain and loss in the trade of our meditation, it can at best be a business enterprise and not a method of spiritual unfoldment. For that reason it is absolutely necessary for a student of spirituality to forget all about results.

It has been my unshakable conviction that the greatest amount and degree of service that one can render to the universe can only be in the realm of thought. There is a common saying that "thoughts are things." In my estimation, thoughts are even more potent, substantial and permanent than mere things. If you give a coin or a car to another, it will be spent, lost, exhausted or worn out before long. But if you can give your genuine good thoughts to him, beyond any doubt and contradiction, it brings more benefit than anything else. Owing to our gross and materialistic impatience, we fail to appreciate the value of thoughts. But with higher unfoldment, we come to understand that we can help the world more by creating

spiritual vibrations of thought than by offering any material thing.

Very often we come in contact with people who need help. It is not possible for us, no matter how rich or affluent we may be, to supply the material want of all needy persons whom we meet. Because of this condition, a spiritual person always feels some disturbance in his mind. That disturbance hampers the progress of his spiritual unfoldment. As a remedy for the disturbances that arise out of the sufferings of others, this special exercise should be practiced. Raise a very potent and powerful thought vibration during every meditation, sending out a current of love, peace, and goodwill to all beings. In the first place, you will find that at least the worry which you used to feel from the sufferings of others will be gone. You yourself will enjoy a more calm and peaceful state of mind regarding the sufferings of the world. Secondly, viewing the matter from an objective angle, it can be established that those needy persons actually get the help which you send to them in the form of your good thoughts.

Many people raise the objection that by sending out a good thought for a hungry person you might only solve your own problem. You might feel calm and peaceful yourself, but does the hungry person get that piece of bread which he needs so badly? With all the emphasis at my command, I will insist that in bringing the much-needed material relief as well, such thought vibrations are far more potent than a few material things. It is my strongest conviction that even a hungry man does not suffer so much from the want of a piece of bread, as he does from the lack of a spiritual state of consciousness, which, if he could have, would place him above all sufferings. This consciousness he undoubtedly receives from the sincere good thoughts of a spiritual benefactor. Moreover, it has been found

that the powerful good thoughts of a spiritual person are caught or contracted by others having the material resources, who feel the urge to supply the material need. The "good will" of the Yogis and spiritually advanced people are contracted imperceptibly by the wealthy people of the country, inducing them to help the poor and needy.

However, the subjective benefit is to be considered the most important of all. I do not know if in the future history of the world a time will ever come when, objectively, all needs, sufferings, and sorrows will be abolished. They will remain as long as creation lasts. But any person can go out of the consciousness of suffering by means of his higher spiritual understanding. The remedy always will be a subjective one. So if we can rise above the consciousness of suffering subjectively, and help others do the same, we shall be solving the deepest problem of the world.

It reminds me of a very beautiful instance recorded in the life of the great American, Abraham Lincoln. The story is told that he was one day marching at the head of an army. Looking ahead on the road he found a little insect lying on its back, trying very hard to get on its feet again. Hearing the sound of the horses' hoofs, the helpless insect became all the more excited in trying to get away from the road, and in its desperate effort only became more exhausted and almost gave up in a terrible frenzy. Lincoln saw this and at once stopped the army, got down from his horse, took the little creature on his hand, and walked away from the road, setting it in a safe place on its feet again. He mounted his horse, feeling very happy, and was about to start, when he was asked, "What was the meaning of doing that?" With a smile Lincoln answered, "Now I feel very much better."

This is the real spiritual benefit which one derives from service of any kind. One feels much better, subjectively.

Whatever we give without hope for return comes back to us multiplied a thousand-fold. I do not want to say that we should send our goodwill to the universe with the hope of getting it back a thousand-fold, because that would be begging again. When one performs any good act only because one cannot help it, never thinking about the returns, it brings very rich results for the advancement of one's peace, happiness and spirituality. For that reason, let it be definitely understood that we should not look for any result whatsoever from our spiritual practices.

Psychologically speaking, such an attitude of looking for results makes a person impatient and irritable very easily. I have seen people who for some reason or other could not quite rise above the expectation of getting results from their practice of meditation. With all enthusiasm they started, and practiced for a considerably long period. But when the time was almost ripe for them to attain that special state of unfoldment where they could enjoy a rich harvest of wonderful peace, bliss and spiritual power, they suddenly grew impatient and irritated, gave up their practice, turned reactionaries, and denounced the whole science, saying, "I have seen it all; I have practiced hard and long enough, but it is all nonsense. Nothing comes of it." I have seen some of these rebellious souls turning back to Yoga again with regret and repentance. By starting their practice over again they eventually attained the desired state of unfoldment.

It is a very hopeful fact, however, that whatever we attain at any time of our life in the field of spiritual advancement is never lost. It is permanently credited to our spiritual account. As soon as we turn back, we get the full benefit of whatever was attained, either in this or previous lives.

In order to maintain patience, cheerfulness, and ardour of practice, one should consider one's practice as its own benefit.

Instead of considering the practice as a means to an end, one ought to consider it as the end in itself.

Of course, those who practice for the attainment of results do attain them. Some psychic phenomena or power of performing a few miracles manifests in them. But as soon as they get interested in unusual phenomena they fall down from the height of their spiritual consciousness, and running after phenomena they lose all excellence of character. Eventually, even the so-called power which they attained leaves them, and they find themselves in a very deplorable and utterly mean and degraded condition.

A student of Yoga must banish from his heart the idea of gaining power or proficiency in any material realm whatsoever. In the course of practice certain phenomena of a supernatural type may appear, like the power of hearing unusual sounds, seeing unusual things, or the power of healing, but when one stops there to make use of them, all further progress is deterred. Unusual phenomena, if they appear, should be considered as so many milestones by the side of the highway of progress. A traveller speeding by looks at them and realizes that he is making good progress. But if he stops, fusses around them or embraces them as a great achievement, it becomes absolutely impossible for him to proceed further. These phenomena are good since they signify progress along the line of spirituality. Don't stop! Don't show off! Don't be vain! Don't talk about your unusual experiences, but cheerfully advance forward until the highest goal is achieved.

Let me remind you again, do your practice without hope of return from any quarter, without even thinking of what you are gaining from it. Do it for the good of the many, for the benefit of the many. Do it to feel good. You will miss it if you do not practice. Make your exercises the very breath of your nostrils.

## Sri Ramakrishna's Parables and their Power

Dr Vayu Naidu

**S**ri Ramakrishna's parables are power packed and ever ready to wake us up. Waking up from variations of smugness and complacency is the base camp of our spiritual journey HOME. This is not a paradox – it is Truth that comes full circle; we begin in the dark and arrive at the Truth and the Guru that shines the light on our arrival at the spiritual goal. We see, we are home. 'Home' here signposts the inward direction to the Atman to Tat Tvam Asi / That Thou art.

Sri Ramakrishna punctuated knotted situations between people and their assumptions with a parable. Through the story encoded parable, He illustrated for our accurate understanding, the Soul Truth that stretches like an archer's bow beyond historical time. His evocation of the Soul Truth includes the minutiae of the little realities and daily denials of life. Sri Ramakrishna's parables released the arrow of jnana to hit its mark at the heart of His listeners', our, spiritual development. A warning: His parables are not merely academic, or anecdotally entertaining; they are fired in the furnace of renunciation aimed at getting us to remove the scales from our inner eyes – or what the scriptures call de-superimposition. He enables His listeners then and now, there and here to enquire: What is it that comes between limitation and the unlimited, what comes between the little self and revelling in the vastness of Tat Tvam Asi? He holds the light up to describing the indescribable, a force to be reckoned with: Maya.

While these parables are taken from the Kathamrita and were uttered in a specific context, here they are recalled because they are relevant beyond a historical moment to our very own Covid-19 days of self-reflection. In the parables that are selected here, Maya is the underlying theme. Each parable is part of the structure

enabling our understanding of theory; methodology and practise; assimilation and experience that takes the seeker beyond the matrix of Maya. While the parables were cited independently by Sri Ramakrishna in diverse contexts, here they are curated as they continue to make meaning of our time.

The first parable selected is mythological narrative serving as theory. The second parable illustrates enquiry as methodology and practise, and the third parable evokes the totality of the experience combining self-effort and vitally the Grace of God. Three essential ingredients are active: engaging; learning through practise; and listening, to endorse experience.

Sourced from mythological narrative about Maya, Sri Ramakrishna creates a parable about Narada the Storyteller who has access to the Worlds of Gods, Mortals, and the mythic underworld, relevant to our time: Once, Narada besought (Vishnu) the Lord of the universe, "Lord, show me that Maya of Thine which can make the impossible possible." The Lord nodded assent. Subsequently the Lord one day set out on a travel with Narada. After going some distance, He felt very thirsty and fatigued. So, He sat down and told Narada, "Narada, I feel much thirsty; please get me a little water from somewhere." Narada at once ran in search of water.

Finding no water nearby, he went from the place and saw a river at a great distance. When he approached the river, he saw a most charming young lady sitting there, and was at once captivated by her beauty. As soon as Narada went near her, she began to address him in sweet words, and before long, both fell in love with each other. Narada then married her and settled down as a householder. In course of time he had a number of children by her. And while he was thus living happily with his wife and children, there came a pestilence in the country. Death began to collect its toll from every place. Then Narada proposed to abandon the place and go

somewhere else. His wife acceded to it, and they both came out of their house leading their children by the hand. But no sooner did they come to the bridge to cross the river than there came a terrible flood, and in the rush of water, all of their children were swept away one after another, and at last his wife too was drowned. Overwhelmed with grief at his bereavement, Narada sat down on the bank and began to weep piteously. Just then the Lord appeared before him, saying, "O Narada, where is the water? And why are you weeping?" The sight of the Lord settled the sage, and then he understood everything. He exclaimed, "Lord, my obeisance to Thee, and my obeisance also to Thy wonderful Maya!" (Parable 34 p.49)

The Narada story is woven in detail, signifying how even the best and the brightest, the noblest and the wise, who can pray and know the companionship of God/Vishnu and have His Grace is still unable to grasp the illusory characteristic of desire-manifest-extensions of the senses that Maya generates. However here, Narada is also an enquirer and indeed an adventurer who in fact 'asks the Lord' how the impossible of chimera, is made possible into tangible substance that we believe is real. The Enquirer's risk-taking while holding on to the safety of asking the Lord directly of this experience of Maya to be shown, is what we learn from; the spirit and the content of the parable. Through that cinematic parable, time and space vanish in a blink. We as listeners are anticipating how we will see or discern Maya, which is the cause of this exploration.

Water is the flowing element through the narrative and our recognition and realisation – Narada asks Vishnu to 'show' him His Maya. In that very instant, the Lord develops a 'thirst' and requests Narada to fetch Him some water. 'Thirst' as desire and fetching water as an act to fulfil the desire are two great propellers of Maya, and Narada's mind believes it is alleviating the universal Lord's fatigue! Narada, leaves the side of the Lord, going to the

river - going outward, and beguiled by his senses, he gets caught up in a web of interweaving knots. He acquires a wife, a family, a successful enterprise. All the while Narada believes in this marvellous circus of 'happiness' he has found.

Then a total change of scene. The flood. The current of the river in flood decimating all Narada thought he had secured flows like the water of his tears as he grieves for nothing that exists anymore. With a blink another change of scene - the Lord/Vishnu calling from the depth of Real Time for His request of Water, to quench the thirst of Whom? Once Narada hears the sound of the Lord, he recognises that the blink of Time is actually an eclipse of the Soul Truth. It exterminates the concatenation of events that made him lose the real purpose of setting out – ie. the enquiry of what is this Maya. Hence Narada offers his obeisance to the Lord for revealing to him that beguiling Maya, the Lord's manifest power, untouched by it Himself. Every aspirant's self-effort, if propitiated by the Lord's grace, will then see the Lord operating the machine that propels the chimera or images on the screen, 'as it were.'

But how do we get to that state of recognition, and then offer our obeisance? Time and time again Sri Ramakrishna urges us to go further, take a step back as a Witness in the process of self-effort. Listening to the bewitching aspect of Maya in the previous parable and forming a theory of its indescribability as it were, we move into a process that is enabled – being a Witness to our desire-manifest-extensions of Maya. This is toward a path of releasing the unlimited from the limited. So the story of the *Avadhuta* is being cited here – about methodology and the quality of practise.

The second parable, a kite with a fish in its beak was followed by a host of crows and other kites which were pecking at it and trying to snatch the fish away. In whatever direction it went, its tormentors cawing, till at last they made it let go in vexation. Another kite instantly caught the fish and was in its turn followed

by the whole lot. The first kite was left unmolested and sat calmly on the branch of a tree. Seeing this quiet and tranquil state of the bird, the *Avadhuta*, saluting him, said, "Thou art my Guru, for thou has taught me that peace of mind is possible in this world, only when one has given up one's adjuncts (*upadhis*); otherwise there is danger at every step." (Parable 166, p.215)

While the end of this parable too is about recognition that Maya is a force within the daily denials and minutiae of life, the parable teases out two elements of the enquiry. The first: what is causing agitation in the aspirant/us, symbolised by the kite. The second: there is a method of practice – getting rid of limitations impacted by the senses on the body. In the parable, the kite is the spirit or soul of the aspirant. As the aspirant realises it is the senses symbolised by the fish, that attracts more adjuncts that limit the call of the spirit, the kite/aspirant drops the 'fish' that is then swooped up relentlessly by another kite. Result: from self-effort understanding the cause of the agitation and getting rid of it (in the case of an aspirant the myriad of thoughts that distract from progressing toward the Soul Truth), tranquillity is possible in the midst of the world. Hence, the *Avadhuta* salutes the kite as the Guru who has shown the way of peace of mind where the Soul is a home Truth.

Finally, the third parable is the ultimate experience of the all that is, is *Tat Tvam Asi*.

There was a holy man who used to live in a state of ecstasy and would not speak with anyone. He was regarded as a lunatic. One day having begged some food in the village, he took his seat by the side of a dog and fell to eating. A strange sight now presented itself and attracted a crowd of spectators, for, the holy man would put one morsel into his own mouth and the next into that of the dog, so that the man and the beast went on eating together like a pair of friends. Some of the spectators began to laugh at the holy man as

being a mad fellow. Thereupon he said, "Why do you laugh? Vishnu is seated with Vishnu, Vishnu is feeding Vishnu; Why do you laugh O Vishnu; Whatever is, is Vishnu." (Parable 153 p.200)

This is possibly the most indescribable experience where Sri Ramakrishna removes all knots of limitations for the listener to perceive a human with a dog, watched on by others, while food is shared. The holy man can only experience the ultimate Soul Truth that even in the multiple forms of bodies there is only One.

While Sri Ramakrishna's methods of teaching were various, the parables were unique in the form of direct speech in a given context and its elucidation. The parables are simple, touch the heart, hit the target of awakening enquiry, investigating approaches to practise, as the taste of Soul Joy is the ultimate Home in this very life. Sri Ramakrishna was the greatest Teacher. He experienced the Experience, contained it, and always more than the words of knowledge, He urges in the Parables for us to go to the original source of all teachings: listening, reflection, cry with a yearning heart, practice and experience in solitude.

In spite of acknowledging the theory and the method and the mechanics, perhaps the first question we begin our journey Home with is: Who is this stranger who lives with us daily – screening us from the great knowledge of Brahman, of the Atman that we are, whom we are to make our own?

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## Leaves from an Ashrama - 72

The Magic Formula  
Swami Vidyatmananda

There was an article in a recent issue of Newsweek magazine concerning what is called Quick-Fix therapy. People suffering from depression and other psychological maladies, instead of spending as much as five years and many thousands of dollars on deep analysis, are now availing themselves of new, shorter-term, and much less expensive treatments. Thus the title Quick-Fix. These cures are carried on by therapists often equipped with only a modest amount of training, who concentrate on the immediate problem and try to help the client resolve it, rather than delving deeply into the patient's subconscious. Such therapists work on the basis of establishing a close, sympathetic relationship with the sufferer—much as a confessor or guru does—and helping the patient to discover swiftly the cause of his maladjustment—and hence go on rapidly to a cure.

A humorous anecdote was given, meant to illustrate the workings of this Quick-Fix therapy. It is the story of a middle-aged man who had been the despair of his family for years because of his compulsive habit of tearing paper to bits and scattering the pieces wherever he went. At great expense but to no avail the family dragged the sufferer to world-renowned Freudian, Jungian, and Adlerian psychiatrists. Nothing helped. Finally they turned to an obscure but innovative new therapist. With the anxious family looking on, this visionary put his arm around the patient's shoulder and said, "Let's take a little walk." The pair walked from one end of the small office to the other, the doctor whispering in the patient's ear. At last they stopped, and the doctor said, "You can take him home. He's cured." A year later, when the habit had

not returned, the amazed and grateful family asked the doctor: "What did you do? What did you tell him?"

"I told him," shrugged the miracle worker, "Don't tear paper."

Many of us, as devotees, suffer—not like the man in the story—but from other maladies far more grave. We are not at peace with ourselves; and we are not at peace with others—or as these ills are called nowadays, we suffer from personal stress and a tendency to view others in a spirit of confrontation. Ramakrishna's teachings and especially those of Sri Sarada Devi offer a Quick-Fix therapy capable of ending these troubles. We are not obliged to struggle our way through endless scriptures, to pay priests and implore gurus, to wear ourselves out in performing pointless austerities. The method is brief and direct. It is what my guru whispered in my ear. Agreed, I was not as rapid a learner as the patient in the story. It took me several sessions of whisperings and both of us enough walking to wear out the rug. But at last I seemed to have got it; and I do know that it works, capable of producing peace and goodwill toward men (including oneself): "Learn to feel for others," was the magic formula. "My child, you must learn to feel for others."

Every soul is destined to be perfect, and every being, in the end, will attain the state of perfection. Whatever we are now is the result of our acts and thoughts in the past; and whatever we shall be in the future will be the result of what we think and do now. But this, the shaping of our own destinies, does not preclude our receiving help from outside; nay, in the vast majority of cases such help is absolutely necessary. When it comes, the higher powers and possibilities of the soul are quickened, spiritual life is awakened, growth is animated, and man becomes holy and perfect in the end.

-Swami Vivekananda

## Vedanta

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

Phone: (01628) 526464

[www.vedantauk.com](http://www.vedantauk.com)

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

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The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else. We may study books all our lives, we may become very intellectual, but in the end we find that we have not developed at all spiritually. It is not true that a high order of intellectual development always goes hand in hand with a proportionate development of the spiritual side in Man. In studying books we are sometimes deluded into thinking that thereby we are being spiritually helped; but if we analyse the effect of the study of books on ourselves, we shall find that at the utmost it is only our intellect that derives profit from such studies, and not our inner spirit. This inadequacy of books to quicken spiritual growth is the reason why, although almost every one of us can speak most wonderfully on spiritual matters, when it comes to action and the living of a truly spiritual life, we find ourselves so awfully deficient. To quicken the spirit, the impulse must come from another soul.

-Swami Vivekananda

