

Vedanta

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One God of Many Names

Swami Sundarananda

The Virtues of Yama or Self-control

Chandra Kumari Handoo. M.A.





Court marriage and you court servitude

It is 'woman and gold' that binds man and robs him of his freedom. It is woman that creates the need for gold. For woman one becomes the slave of another, and so loses his freedom. Then he cannot act as he likes. The priests in the temple of Govindaji at Jaipur were celibates at first, and at that time they had fiery natures. Once the King of Jaipur sent for them, but they did not obey him. They said to the messenger, "Ask the king to come to see us." After consultation, the king and his ministers arranged marriages for them. From then on, the king didn't have to send for them. They would come to him of themselves and say: "Your Majesty, we have come with our blessings. Here are the sacred flowers of the temple. Deign to accept them." They came to the palace, for now they always wanted money for this thing or

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Mantra Japa or Repetition of the Holy Name – 1

A *mantra* is a holy name or a combination words signifying God with or without form or attribute. In Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and to some extent in the Eastern Orthodox Church and Latin Western Church, repetition of the Holy Name or ceaseless prayer to God form one of the most important spiritual practices undertaken by an aspirant. In Hinduism, this practice comes from the central belief proclaimed in the Vedas that the *nama* – the name is not different from the *nami* – the named. *Mantra Japa* or repetition of the Holy Name is thus a spiritual practice that unites the aspirant with God through the repetition of the *mantra*. The term '*mantra*' is derived from two roots in Sanskrit '*man*' (to think) and '*trai*' (to protect). The term *mantra* means "that which protects its votary." In this ever-changing world or nature (*Prakriti*) there cannot be any permanent security or protection. The ultimate protection is in transcending Nature or *Prakriti* in its entirety and uniting the individual soul with *Purusha* or *Brahman* (God). *Mantra Japa* is one of the easiest ways to seek true security and everlasting peace.

In the Hindu tradition Brahman is described as the Supreme Sound (*Shabda Brahman*). It is from this concept of *Shabda Brahman* that the deep reverence for the Holy Name has sprung. *Mantra* can be just one word or a combination of two or more words.

Swami Vivekananda says in his book *Bhakti Yoga*, "But we are now considering not these *Mahâ-purushas*, the great Incarnations, but only the *Siddha-Gurus* (teachers who have attained the goal); they, as a rule, have to convey the gems of spiritual wisdom to the disciple by means of words (*Mantras*) to be meditated upon. What are these *Mantras*? The whole of this universe has, according to Indian philosophy, both name and form (*Nâma-Rupa*) as its

conditions of manifestation. In the human microcosm, there cannot be a single wave in the mind-stuff (*Chittavritti*) unconditioned by name and form. If it be true that nature is built throughout on the same plan, this kind of conditioning by name and form must also be the plan of the building of the whole of the cosmos.

यथा एकेन मृत्पण्डिनेन सर्वं मृन्मयं वज्जिज्ञातं स्यात्

— "As one lump of clay being known, all things of clay are known", so the knowledge of the microcosm must lead to the knowledge of the macrocosm. Now form is the outer crust, of which the name or the idea is the inner essence or kernel. The body is the form, and the mind or the *Antahkarana* is the name, and sound-symbols are universally associated with *Nâma* (name) in all beings having the power of speech. In the individual man the thought-waves rising in the limited *Mahat* or *Chitta* (mind-stuff), must manifest themselves, first as words, and then as the more concrete forms.

Om is the most sacred word of the Vedas. It is considered to be one with Brahman – the highest Reality, personal or impersonal. Om is the Logos, the undifferentiated word from which all the manifested universe has been created. We also read in the Bible, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

About 'Om' Swami Vivekananda further says, "In the universe, *Brahmâ* or *Hiranyagarbha* or the cosmic *Mahat* first manifested himself as name, and then as form, i.e. as this universe. All this expressed sensible universe is the form, behind which stands the eternal inexpressible *Sphota*, the manifester as Logos or Word. This eternal *Sphota*, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names is the power through which the Lord creates the universe, nay, the Lord first becomes conditioned as the *Sphota*, and then evolves Himself out as the yet more concrete sensible universe.

One God of Many Names

Swami Sundarananda

A comparative study of different religions satisfactorily proves that they differ only in the language and the emphasis, while the ideas conveyed are much the same intrinsically. The Sanskrit word Parama means great and Iswara means God. In conjunction, Parameswara means the Great God. Similarly, in Arabic Akbar means great and Allah means God. Allahu Akbar means the same: Great God. To sincere religious men all over the world, the art of seeking such points of agreement among the different religions is a pleasant pastime and the opposite process of dwelling upon their differences is sheer pain.

In China, when savants of different religions meet, it is their custom to ask each other, "To what sublime religion do you belong?" The first savant is perhaps a Confucian, the second is a Taoist and the third a disciple of the Buddha. Each begins with a panegyric on religions generally, not on his own particular religion. After that they repeat in chorus, "Religions are many; reason is one; we are all brothers." "The teachings of sects", said Sin Shun Yan, a distinguished Buddhist scholar, "are not different. A large-hearted man regards them as embodying the same truths and a narrow-minded person observes only their differences." Separatism, dogmatism, and fanaticism characterize the lay mind; the enlightened mind feels oneness, non-separateness, unity, and all-inclusive sympathy.

The word religion which is in use in the Christian world is derived from Latin re and ligare. Re means again and ligare means to bind. Religion, therefore, means that which binds human beings in bonds of love and sympathy, and binds them to God. The corresponding Vedic word is dharma, which is derived from the

root dhri, to hold. The Buddhist dhamma in the Pali language has the same significance. The word Islam has a profound and noble meaning which by itself is the quintessence of religion. Derived from salaam (peace) or salama (to submit to God), it means the peaceful acceptance of God, the calm resignation and surrender of the smaller self to the greater Self, the letting out of egoism and the letting in of God. This resignation, embodied in the saying "Thy Will be done", is the essence of Christianity also. Khristos means the anointed one or one bathed in divine wisdom. Vedic dharma, derived from vid to know and dhri to hold, etymologically means the religion of knowledge and wisdom. Vedic religion, also called Sanatana Dharma, means the Eternal Religion, or the way to the knowledge of the eternal Self, or the way to Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, or the way to freedom from all bondage. The religion preached by Lao-Tse in China is Tao, which again points to the way of freedom from bondage.

The whole problem of religion and philosophy lies in solving the riddle of three, and finding unity in the trinity of God, nature and man. The eternal quest of all philosophical systems of thought from time immemorial has been to find an explanation of these three different entities. In India, as far back as the Rig-Vedic period, these questions were raised, and their solutions offered. The answer found was that man was in essence one with God, and nature also was God's nature. Nature is the ever-changing garment of the unchanging Self. The meaning and purpose of life is that God has hidden Himself in man and that man has to find Him out again. All the religions state this truth in different languages and in different ways. For instance, the fundamental principle of Vedanta has been embodied in the cryptic saying, "Brahman is real; the world is unreal (ever changing); the jiva (individual self) is nothing but Brahman." This universe is a projection of the supreme Reality. This world, the manifested universe, is (in the spiritual sense) only an appearance.

Behind this appearance of names and forms He dwells, not only as an immanent but also as a transcendental Entity. Due to our ignorance we do not see Him, but when this veil of ignorance shall be removed, we shall see Him in all things and in all beings.

There is no real difference between jivatman (individual self) and Paramatman (supreme Self) except in the sense that the individual has taken a covering of limitations in the shape of name, form and various qualities, while the supreme Self is beyond all limitations. It is the same conscious Spirit which exists in both; only in one case it shines partially owing to limitations and in the other it shines fully and freely. Consequently, when through purity of character and through wisdom man finds his real Self, this veil of ignorance drops off by itself. Then man and God, or the apparent self and the eternal Self, merge, as it were, becoming one and inseparable. "The knower of Brahman becomes one with Brahman." The sage who attains this highest stage declares, "I am He." The Holy Koran, the revealed book of Islam, hints at the same truth: "Close is He to us, closer than the very artery of our napes." "I am in you, but the blind, ye see Me not." Again, in another context: "He who hath known himself hath known God." A Sufi saint says, "Nearer am I to thee than thine own heart." We find the Jewish saying, "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." Jesus the Christ said: "I and my Father are one," and "The kingdom of God is within you." The Old Testament of the Jewish faith, especially the book of Isaiah, gives out the same truth repeatedly: "I am God and there is none else." And St. Paul said: "The spirit of God dwelleth in you." In one of the Udanas, the Buddha, rising from samadhi, uses the exact words found in the Upanishads. The only difference is that the Buddha's words are in Pali. The words are: "That Brahman may give to Himself the name of Brahman." In a similar mood of exaltation, Bayazid-al-Bistami re-echoed, "How wonderful am I, salutation unto Me." The Ormazd Yasht of the Zoroastrian religion declares, "My first name is Ahmi" (Sanskrit:

asmi, I am). The Taoist says, "Find the Tao in yourself and you know everything else." Confucius declares: "What the undeveloped man seeks in others, that the advanced man seeks in himself."

So, where is the difference amongst different religions so far as the highest ideal is concerned? There is absolutely no difference in ideal. Only languages and expressions differ but the ultimate truth referred to is the same.

There are more points of agreement to be found even in the details of different religions. The liberated soul who attains this realization of the Oneness of all life, this inseparable connection with all other living beings, is called a Mukta by the Hindus. Supreme love of God as embodied in the life of Chaitanya points to the same Mukta state. The Buddhists call the Muktas either Buddhas or Arhats, which correspond to the Jaina Tirthankaras, the helpers-across, the ferrymen of the unliberated, the Messiahs and Christs in Christianity. Islam calls them Isan-ul-Kumil, Mard-i-tamam, Muzhar-i-Atamm.

For a perfect realization of the identity of the individual self with the universal Self, every soul passes through three main stages. In terms of knowledge they constitute three main views or visions, respectively: darsanas or systems of thought, known in India as Dvaita (Dualism); Visishtadvaita (Qualified Monism); and Advaita (Monism). Islam's Ijadiyah, Shuhadiya and Wajadiah bear the same meaning.

The ways of attainment of Oneness are described by the Hindus as the path of knowledge, the path of devotion and the path of selfless work, which correspond to haquiqat, tariqat and shariat of Islam, respectively. The way of knowledge, the way of devotion or mysticism, and the way of charity in Christianity have the same significance. In the Buddhist eightfold path, the three most prominent ones under which they may be included are right knowledge, right desire and right action, and they are the same as

the Vedic ways. The Jaina right vision, right idea and right way convey the same significance.

These religions recognize three principal layers or koshas (sheaths) in the make-up of man. Vedanta calls them physical, subtle and causal bodies. Islam describes them as nap, dil and ruh. The Sufi sect uses the words jism-i-kul, rah-i-kul and agl-i-kul. The Jainas know them as oudarik, tejas and karmanyas. The Buddhist nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dhammakaya correspond to the Christian body, mind and soul, respectively. The Jewish mystics designate them as nafesh, ruah and neshamah.

The five yamas of Yoga philosophy correspond to the five shilas of the Buddhists. They are also five of the ten commandments of Moses which were repeated and confirmed by the Christ. The same process is to be found in the Koran as well. Mohammed too enjoins fiqr and shukr, which are complete renunciation of property and cultivation of utmost contentment, known in the Hindu scriptures as aparigraha and Santosh, respectively. Jesus said, "Resist not evil." The Buddha advised, "Conquer hatred with love." Mohammed enjoined, "Recompense evil; conquer it with good." The Vedas say, "Conquer hatred by love, untruth by truth." Lao-Tse taught, "Recompense injury with justice." Confucius admonished, "Reward injury with kindness." Lao-Tse's disciple, Chuang Tse, answered, "To the good I would be good, and to the not-good I would also be good in order to make them good."

I shall conclude by repeating a short but interesting story illustrative of the unity of all religions, from Maulana Rumi, a Sufi saint. It is the Persian counterpart of the well-known Vedantic story of the six blind men who felt with their hands the different limbs of an elephant and disputed among themselves about it, until they were enlightened by a man gifted with eyesight. Once upon a time an Arab, a Turk, a Persian and a Rumi happened to become fellow

travellers on the road of life. The long trek in the sun made them hungry and thirsty. So, all of them thought of purchasing grapes, which would serve the purpose of both food and drink. The Arab cried out enab, the Turk said in a loud voice lizam, the Persian shouted angur and the Rumi roared astapil.

They frowned, their eyes reddened, and they clenched their fists. A fruit-vendor happened to pass along that road at the time. He had to deal with many foreign customers. Naturally, he knew many languages. He rushed in between them and placed before them his basket of fruits. Forthwith the clenched fists were loosened, their voices became sweet, their eyes softened, and their faces beamed with smiles. Each one of them found in the basket the self-same thing of his choice in the shape of sweet grapes.

From the above story we get an idea of how the different religions of the world are not at all contradictory. No doubt they differ in non-essentials, but they equally emphasize essential points. The life of Sri Ramakrishna in India was a practical demonstration of the fact that the different religions lead men to the same goal. He said from his spiritual experiences that the different religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic to one another. The one eternal religion has been existing through all ages and will ever exist, and this one religion is expressing itself in various ways in various countries. Therefore, instead of being intolerant, we must show sincere sympathy with all, knowing that as long as differences of nature and temperament continue in this world, the same eternal religion will require different adaptations and interpretations to suit different times and temperaments.

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The Virtues of Yama or Self-control

Chandra Kumari Handoo. M.a.

Freedom in the choice of one's spiritual path is an integral part of Hinduism; and since a great deal of scope is given to individual talent, education and inherent capacity, some difference in outlook even amongst the followers of the same path is more or less inevitable. This becomes all the more striking when the paths are numerous and varied. Notwithstanding these differences however, there is also an underlying unity which should not be overlooked in dealing with the subject. It runs like a thread through all forms of sadhana, binding them together and giving to Hinduism its tolerance, coherence, and strength.

Certain rules of conduct known as yama and niyama are the starting point of all sadhanas worth the name. They are of universal application and each consists of five virtues.

We shall now deal with them one by one:

(i) *Ahimsa*, harmlessness or non-violence, is a positive virtue with a negative name; though literally meaning not to harm or hurt anyone, it includes compassion, forgiveness and love for all living creatures, in thought, word and deed. But by the common consent of civilized humanity, and also on the strength of the scriptures, it is recognized to be the highest expression of a truly religious life; it is the firm belief of Hinduism, exemplified in the lives of its saints, that the mere presence of a man of ahimsa is sufficient to wipe out all thoughts of violence and retaliation in the hearts of men and even beasts. In literature and mythology favourite illustrations of this truth are the tiger and the deer. It is said that both lived amicably, grazing on the grassy meadows of the anchorites' ashrama, forgetful of the inborn desire to devour its prey on the part of the one, and fear on the part of the other. But to the struggling aspirant *ahimsa* presents great difficulties in practical life; for instance, can we stop the killing of the

numerous micro-organisms which fill the air and the water? Even the strictest adherents of *ahimsa* like the Jains cannot eliminate this form of *himsa* (injury) from the food they eat and the air they breathe. The question arises again, should you allow a thief or a dacoit to rob or kill you, your family, or your neighbours? Our common sense answers a hundred times, 'no'. Thus it seems that discrimination is necessary even in the application of this great maxim of ethics. Each concrete case must be judged in its totality, and the spirit of the law rather than the letter must claim our loyalty and devotion.

A very good example of the conflict that *ahimsa* can create in the heart of an earnest seeker is to be found in the life of Balaram Bose, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Born in a Vaishnava family he scrupulously observed *ahimsa* in his daily life. One day, when mosquitoes were troubling him whilst he was at prayers, it suddenly occurred to him that there could be no harm in killing a few mosquitoes if by doing so, he could concentrate his mind on God. The idea was a revolutionary one and created a conflict in his mind. With a view to solving this problem he went to Sri Ramakrishna, and to his great surprise, he found the Master busy killing bugs from his own pillow. His doubts were cleared at once, and from the new light that he received he was able to understand higher truths in their proper perspective.

(ii) *Satya* or truth came into existence before the world. The root meaning of *satya* is that which exists or that which never ceases to exist. So, truth is identical with the ultimate reality and is the Para-Brahman Itself. "*Satyam vada*", or "speak the truth" is the highest law, and in this dark age of Kali (Iron Age), it constitutes a sadhana by itself which can be practised even in the midst of a worldly life. Speech is the medium of man's activities; so, Manu the lawgiver says, "Speak only that which has been purified by truth (*Satya putam vaded vacham*)."

B. G. Tilak has devoted a chapter in his *Gita Rahasya* to the discussion of the moral law. He makes a distinction between verbal truth and practical truth; the former being confined to truthfulness of speech belongs to a lower category, while that which is beneficial to humanity is denoted by the latter. Practical truth is the highest law and verbal truth must ever remain subservient to it. Tilak gives a quotation from Narada, who in the *Santi Parva* of the *Mahabharata* says to Suka, "Speaking the truth is the proper thing; but rather than truth speak that which will lead to the welfare of all; because that in which the highest welfare of all consists is in my opinion the real truth." (*Gita Rahasya*,1.47) He also gives relevant quotations from some Western scholars, one of which is as follows: "We do not think that truth ought always to be told to children or madmen, or invalids, or by advocates: and we are not sure that we are bound to tell it to enemies or robbers, or even to persons who ask questions which they know they have no right to ask." (*Gita Rahasya*,1.47)

Penances were prescribed by the *Shastras* so that truth might not be neglected or overlooked for trivial reasons; good men also willingly accepted any punishment, human or divine, which was meted out to them for the breaking of the moral law, if by doing so they could mitigate the suffering of others. The conflict that truth was bound to create led the *Upanishads* to formulate another law which says, "Speak the truth, speak sweet words, but do not speak the unpleasant truth. Speak sweet and true words only, for this is the eternal *dharma*". Once I had the good fortune of discussing the same topic with a senior Swami of the *Ramakrishna Order*, well-versed in scriptures and respected by all for his austere and saintly life. My contention was that Truth is sometimes necessarily harsh and bitter. He was firmly of the opinion that provided our efforts were sincere, a way could always be found of avoiding the unpleasant truth. A difficult case soon arose. Though sceptical of the result, I was determined to give his words a trial, and was very surprised when his formula worked.

Since then I also have been converted to his view which conforms to the Upanishadic text quoted above. Truth protects its votary in a miraculous manner.

Sri Ramakrishna also considered truth to be the highest law. He said that after the vision of the Divine Mother, he could surrender everything to Her excepting Truth. He did not mind giving up knowledge and ignorance, holiness and unholiness, good and evil, but he ended by saying, " I gave up everything at Her feet but could not bring myself to give up truth". (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 855)

(iii) *Brahmacharya* is perfect chastity in thought, word, and deed. A life of complete continence gives great intellectual and spiritual powers. It helps to collect the scattered energy of the mind and develop the will power and memory. It is not to be imagined that brahmacharya, a source of creative power and energy, is a mere negation. It has a positive aspect which by far outweighs the negative one. Spiritual life aims at reducing the consciousness of the body to a minimum by fixing the mind on God. The soul is sexless, and it would be derogatory to the dignity of its real nature to identify the pure Atman or spirit with its gross physical form. The divinity and animality of man are his dual inheritance, and due to the antithesis, that they present he is destined to struggle throughout life. This struggle is the first condition of human progress and can only be slowly overcome by proceeding on the spiritual path. By constant dwelling on God the physical awareness recedes, and the sexual energy is slowly transformed and sublimated into spiritual energy. Swami Vivekananda says, "If the performance of Yajnas is the corner-stone of the work portion of the Vedas, as surely is brahmacharya the foundation of the knowledge portion." (*Complete Works, IV.250*). The Gita (*VIII.11*) also says that the Imperishable is reached by the self-controlled through the practice of brahmacharya.

If complete brahmacharya is the law of monastic life, the ideal of the Hindu marriage is also very closely allied to it. Continence is

enjoined on married couples also and is to be broken only for procreation which also is an act of sacrament. Self-control and the giving up of sense pleasures is the aim of both the recluse and the householder. In the one case it is rigid and severe while it is a gradual process in the other. Purity of the mind is held to be greater than mere physical continence; for instance, the chastity of the married woman known as pativrata (the vow of fidelity to the husband) has been looked upon as a path by which one may attain Self-realization. The unsullied purity of the Hindu wife is a byword in the Indian tradition and has been exquisitely described in our own times by Sister Nivedita. She says of her, "The ideal that she like the nun pursues, is that of a vision which merges the finite in the infinite, making strong to mock at separation, or even at change. And the point to be reached in practice is that where the whole world is made beautiful by the presence in it of the beloved, . . . and where, above all, the sense of unrest and dissatisfaction is gone for ever, in the overflowing fulness of a love that asks no return except the power of more abundant loving". (*The Web of Indian Life*, p. 51-52)

Sri Ramakrishna also advised householders saying, "After the birth of one or two children, husband and wife should live as brother and sister and only talk of God. Then both their minds will be drawn to God, and the wife will be a help to the husband on the path of spirituality." (*The Web of Indian Life*, p. 51-52)

(iv) *Asteya* or non-stealing includes a complete lack of covetousness, for the good of others. Covetousness arises from unrestrained desires and shows an absence of mental discipline. In an essay entitled, *A Free Man's Worship*, Bertrand Russell talks of unfettered thoughts "not weighted by the load of eager wishes". He continues to say, "Freedom comes only to those who no longer ask of life that it shall yield to them any of those personal goods that are subject to the mutations of time ." (*The Web of Indian Life*, p. 51-52) The mind has several layers of consciousness and each one of them is filled with

innumerable desires, which may even be contradictory to one another. Our birth in the world is itself the result of our past desires, and they are so many that even eternity cannot satisfy them. No sooner are the gross ones eliminated or controlled than the subtle ones begin to show up. These can play havoc with the mind because the subtler they are, the greater the difficulty in detecting and controlling them. Only the sadhaka who is constantly alert and introspective can follow the mind in its vagaries and restrain it from the sin of covetousness.

Stealing also may be of many kinds. The commonest refined form of stealing of which we all are more or less guilty, is that of ruining another man's reputation through idle gossip, envious criticism or an obstinate habit of fault-finding. Knowing the weakness of human nature in this direction, the saint Tulsidas prayed significantly in one of his songs: " May I not look upon the virtue of others as vice, for by following the footsteps of the holy ones in this manner I am sure to attain devotion to the Lord ".

(v) *Aparigraha* or not receiving or expecting gifts even in time of necessity, comes last on the list of the virtues of yama. But in no way is it implied that it is the least of them all. That *aparigraha* should be held in such high esteem seems strange at first until one thinks over it deeply and assesses its influence on the life of the struggling seeker. Firstly, the idea is that with every gift, some impurity of the giver contaminates the mind of the receiver. Gifts are seldom given without any purpose, so in most cases the sensitive receiver feels obliged to fulfil the desire in return for the gift. If the desire is for knowledge and spiritual enlightenment the teacher is only too glad to instruct him. But sometimes in the case of a worldly man the desire is to gain health, wealth or children. This is greatly to be deplored; the man who gives with such motives cannot be regarded as a seeker of religion and he handicaps the sadhu in his spiritual life, adding to those very fetters which the latter is trying to get rid of. Hence all good monks are extremely reluctant to accept anything in cash or kind from all

and sundry. It is said in the scriptures that by observing *aparigraha* for twelve years we develop the memory of our past lives. We then understand that we have been coming into the world over and over again, suffering the pangs of birth and death and the many ills of life on earth. It is then only that dispassion is truly born in our hearts, which in turn pushes us onwards, enabling us to pursue our path with renewed vigour and enthusiasm.

As a rule, life in the world follows a way that is entirely opposed to *aparigraha*. There is no relationship which does not demand or expect something in return for the affection or care that is given to the loved one; the best of us would be satisfied with loyalty, gratitude or attention, but not so the ordinary man. Most disappointments or frustrations in life are due to expectations that have not received fulfilment; a great deal of cynicism and bitterness may also be traced to the same source. As the Sanskrit saying goes, "Verily, hope or expectation is the greatest sorrow and to be without it the greatest joy." This brings us to the second aspect of *aparigraha*. In acting as a check upon our desires it resembles the principle of *asteya*. The greatest asset a man of *aparigraha* has is his independence. He is manly and strong and looks to no man for petty favours. The eyes of the average man are always turned towards his fellow human beings who constitute his world. But the spiritual man is made of sterner stuff; undaunted by the taunts or criticism of the weaklings of the world and equally unmoved by their applause or appreciation, with confidence in himself and faith in God, he marches forward towards his desired goal.

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The Worship of God as Mother

Swami Ghanananda

In the West, God is usually adored as the Father, although millions are drawn to the worship of God through the Divine Child. In India, from very ancient times, He was worshipped in a variety of relationships, namely as the Creator, the Master, Friend and Companion, Child (Son or Daughter), Parent (Father or Mother), and as the Beloved. Of all these relationships, that of God as Mother has a peculiar fascination for millions of people in India.

Who is this Divine Mother? She is the Primal Cause as Power.

I

Tyndall's little book on the conservation of energy mentions two great teachings of modern science, namely:

- A. That the sum total of energy in the universe is the same,
- B. That this is indestructible.

We need not consider matter and energy to be different. The progress of science has brought about the disappearance of the dividing line between matter and force, between the living and the non-living. In the words of Herbert Spencer, "We are able to regard every phenomenon as a manifestation of some Power by which we are acted upon; although Omnipresence is unthinkable, yet as experience exposes no bounds to the diffusion of phenomena, we are unable to think of limits to the presence of this Power: while the criticisms of science teach us that this Power is incomprehensible. And this consciousness of Incomprehensible Power called Omnipotent from inability to assign its limits, is just that consciousness on which religion dwells."

II

We have references to this mighty Power behind the universe in the Upanishads and other ancient books. In the first question

in the Prashna Upanishad, Katyayana Kabandhin asks his teacher Pippalada, "Venerable Sir, whence are these creatures born?" And the answer is given, "The Creator (Hiranyagarbha), desirous of creatures, performed penance. Having performed penance, He created the pair, Matter and Energy, thinking that they together would variously produce creatures for Him." Indeed, the ancient seers came face to face with the mighty Power of the God of gods. Creation, preservation, and destruction are three successive expressions of the same Infinite Power. The Kena Upanishad tells the following story of the gods and their defeat, in glorification of this Power of Brahman (the Absolute):

'It is said that Brahman once won a victory for the gods (over the demons). Although the victory was due to Brahman, the gods became elated by it, and thought, "Truly this victory has been won by us. Ours is the glory of it."

Brahman knew their vanity, and He appeared before them, but they did not understand who that adorable Spirit was. The gods said to Fire: "O all-knowing Fire, find out who this adorable Spirit is." He agreed.

Fire hastened to the Spirit. The Spirit asked him who he was. Fire replied, "Verily, I am Fire, the omniscient."

"What power resides in such as you?" asked the Spirit. "Why, I can burn up everything, whatever there is on earth," replied Fire.

The Spirit put down a straw before him and said, "Burn it!" Fire dashed at it, but he was unable to burn it. So, he returned to the gods, saying, "I could not find out who that adorable Spirit is."

Then the gods said to Wind: "O Wind, find out who this adorable Spirit is." He agreed.

Wind hastened to the Spirit. The Spirit asked him who he was. Wind replied, "Verily, I am Wind, the King of the air."

“What power resides in such as you?” asked the Spirit. “Why, I can blow away everything, whatever there is on earth,” said Wind.

The Spirit put down a straw before him and said, “Blow that away!” Wind dashed at it but was unable to move it. So, he returned to the gods, saying, “I could not find out who that adorable Spirit is.”

Then the gods said to Indra (the chief of gods): “O Indra, find out who this adorable Spirit is.” He agreed and hastened towards the Spirit, but the Spirit disappeared from his view.

And in that very spot he beheld a woman wondrously fair, the daughter of the snowy mountain Himavan. And of Her he asked, “Who could this adorable Spirit be?”

“Brahman!” She exclaimed. “Indeed, through Brahman's victory have you attained greatness!” Then alone he understood that the Spirit was Brahman.'

III

The primal principle of creative energy remains sometimes in the potential form and sometimes in the kinetic. Sri Ramakrishna therefore compared it to the serpent at rest and the serpent in motion. It has no beginning in time, and it returns to and remains in the Absolute Being or Brahman at the end of each cycle of its manifestation or differentiation. Any form of energy, physical, mental or spiritual, comes from that primal source of all energies, i.e. Shakti (Divine Power), manifesting in that form. This Shakti is All-Power, All-Intelligence and All-Love. Unlike mechanical power which by itself has no consciousness, this Divine Power is the Power of Consciousness and therefore not blind but is All-Intelligence.

This Shakti corresponds to the Prakriti of the Sankhya and to the Maya of the Vedanta. This Power becomes kinetic at the beginning of a cycle, but at the end of it remains latent in Brahman.

Brahman is to Shakti as fire is to its burning property, milk is to its whiteness, and a gem is to its lustre. Brahman and Shakti are inseparable. It is believed by the followers of the Tantrik School that this Energy exists in Brahman the Absolute (although Advaita Vedanta does not accept any power as an integral part of Brahman). Otherwise, query the Tantriks, how can the cosmos come, as the Absolute is beyond the activity of creation, preservation, and destruction? And this Power has no beginning, for if it had any, we should have to admit a beginning for the whole cosmos and for the soul, and to admit that God Himself is cruel and partial. But, says Vedanta, as there is no knowledge of this Energy at all in samadhi (super-consciousness), it is real only up to the point of our reaching samadhi, unreal in the state of samadhi, and becomes real again when we leave samadhi. The intellect itself being a relative thing, it cannot grasp this Power. Indeed, this Power is mysterious.

To millions of people the Supreme appeals as Infinite Power, and to others as Infinite Being. And those in India, to whom the Power aspect of the Supreme appealed more, developed a system of disciplines consisting of the practice of repetition of sacred words, rituals and meditation, by which to capture this divine Power in their hearts and raise themselves to a spiritual plane.

IV

The highest teaching of Vedanta is usually expressed in the words "Thou art THAT". It is called the Brahman beyond attributes, name, and form. It is this non-dual Brahman that is indicated in the words, "Then was not non-existence nor existence . . . THAT only breathed by its own nature: apart from THAT was not."

One mysterious sound alone, OM, denotes THAT. Moreover, it is taught: "All this is verily Brahman."

“This” is used for the universe and the universe is Brahman, because from ‘It’ it is born, into ‘It’ it is merged, by ‘It’ it is maintained. All that man sees around him has come forth from that Fullness which is Brahman and is as the shadow of that Substance. We need not go far to seek the Truth, “this my Self within the heart, this (is) Brahman”.

This is the supreme wisdom, and it is to be gained by purity, devotion, self-sacrifice, and knowledge.

We also read: “Verily O Satyakama, this Omkara is the Supreme and the lower Brahman.” And again: “There are two states of Brahman, one with form and another formless, one changing and the other unchanging, one finite and the other infinite, one existent and the other beyond existence. This second Brahman is not another but is Brahman conditioned and therefore limited and manifesting. It is called Saguna Brahman, that is, Brahman with attributes.”

This universe existed in its unmanifest condition as Mula-Prakriti, the Root of Matter. This becomes manifest only when the Lord shines forth. The emergence is simultaneous, because He cannot become manifest except by clothing Himself in this, and this cannot become manifest save as ensouled by Him. This universe therefore is the body of God and He its soul. The Self and the non-Self, the Purusha and Prakriti, Sat and Asat, everlasting but appearing and disappearing, this two-in-one is the cause of all things. He is the Saguna Brahman, He has been declared in His own nature as Sat, Chit, Ananda—Pure Being, Pure Consciousness, Pure Bliss. He is the Akshara, the Indestructible One on Whom Prakriti is woven. The eternal Subject is the Spirit, the Self; the eternal Object being Matter, Mula-Prakriti, the non-Self.

The Divine Power which is the cause of all things is the second member of the Duality. This Divine Power, the will of Ishwara,

making Prakriti manifest, is called Maya. Maya is allegorically considered feminine and is inseparable from Ishwara. The unity of God and His Power is like that of the moon and its light, that of a word and its meaning. This will-power is Uma, the Eternal Virgin. While inseparable from the Lord, when directed towards Him, she is called Mahavidya, the Great Knowledge, and when turned away from Him, she is also called Avidya (Nescience) and Mahamaya (the great Illusion), as She permeates Mula-Prakriti and becomes inseparable from it. Thus, vidya and avidya, knowledge and ignorance, are both manifestations of Maya.

Krishna teaches "Earth, water, fire, air, ether; Manas, Buddhi also, and Ahamkara, these are the eightfold divisions of My Prakriti". This is the lower Prakriti. He then adds: "Know my other Prakriti, the higher, the life-element, O mighty-armed, by which the universe is upheld."

This other Prakriti is called by Krishna, "My divine Prakriti", His own power, his Yoga-Maya by which this universe is upheld. Maya is Prakriti: its possessor is the great Lord. The Lord and Maya are inseparable.

Says the Devi-Bhagavata: "She (is) Bhagavati, the Goddess, the cause of all. Mahavidya, Mahamaya, the Fullness, the imperishable Prakriti ..."

"The Will of the Supreme Self verily (is She), in Her nature (uniting) the ever-lasting and the ever-passing ..."

"(Her) embryo is the Veda, the long-eyed, the primal Goddess of all."

"At the Pralaya, having rolled up the universe, She sports, hiding within Her own body the types of all living beings ... Mula-Prakriti is she indeed, ever united with Purusha. Having made the world-systems, she shows them to the Supreme Self ... The cause of it (is) She, the All, Maya, the benignant All-Ruler."

“She, Maya, is ever in the Supreme Essence, whose nature is Consciousness, subordinate to Him and by Him ever sent forth among jivas (beings).”

“Therefore, should be worshipped that Consciousness, whose nature is Sat, Chit and Ananda, Lord of Maya, the Divine, with Maya, the Supreme Lady.”

Maya is the illusion-producing power and is therefore known as the cause of bondage and also as the path to liberation. As avidya She deludes man. As vidya She leads him to Her Lord, and as She vanishes in Him the Atman knows Itself as free.

Says the Devi-Bhagavata: “He (the Lord) by His Maya, conjoined with kama and karma, because of the samskara of past experience, and the ripeness of time and karma, and because of non-differentiation of the tattvas, becomes desirous of creation. This emanation, O King of mountains, is not preceded by buddhi. This transcendental form of Mine that I have described to thee is the undifferentiated Avyakta, and the Maya-coloured; in all the teachings is it described as the Cause of all causes, and the first Element of all the elements, the embodiment of Sat-Chit-Ananda ... the base of iccha, jnana and kriya. It is declared by the mantra HRING and is called the Adi-tattva.”

“From it was born akasa, in the form of the tanmatra of sound. Thereafter arises vayu, of the nature of touch. Then tejas, of the nature of vision. Then water, of the nature of taste. And then earth, of the nature of smell ... From them arose the great Thread, which is called the Linga. It is declared to possess the nature of all. It is the subtle body of the Atman. The Avyakta is the causal body, declared before, in which the world exists as a seed, from which the Linga arises, wherefrom (arise) the gross elements in the way of panci-karana (quinduplication) ...”

We have already pointed out that the Devas were taught that all power comes from Brahman and that no power belongs to them, as they are but vehicles or manifestations of the Power of Brahman. This teaching, according to the Kena Upanishad, was imparted to the Devas by Lima, who is also known as Durga. The identity of Uma is not explained by the Upanishads, but She is not only the Teacher, through whom the Devas learnt the greatest lesson of their lives, but also the Power of Brahman Itself. This Power (Shakti) is all comprehensive as It comprises all kinds of powers, physical, mental, moral, and spiritual, in man and is the Power that creates, preserves, and dissolves the universe.

The Power of God in Itself is beyond the thought of all genders, yet It is associated with the feminine form of Uma or Durga; and It manifests through the working of the feminine principle in nature. This Power is called the Mother, because it is a natural law that it is the mother that brings forth children, tends them and nurses them to strength, and if any of them happens to pass away unfortunately, it is she who does the final service by folding the dead body of the little one in clothes and taking it to the burial or cremation ground. Thus, from beginning to end it is the mother that plays the vital part in the life of the children. It is to her that they look in moments of fear, distress, or helplessness. It is from her that they learn about their father, their brothers and sisters, relatives, and friends. Even if the mother chides them or punishes them, they do not leave her, for even while punishing she keeps them in her arms or on her lap!

The whole universe being a manifestation of the Divine Power, the Mother is present in both animate nature and inanimate nature, or rather it would be more correct to say that both animate nature and inanimate nature are the Mother Herself. Attraction is power, repulsion is power, movement is power, life is power, and death

too is power. As the Divine Power is abstract, it is difficult for beginners to realize It, but It can be intellectually comprehended to some extent. Therefore, the devotee is advised to think of this Power as expressed through any of the spiritual or divine forms which are Its expressions. Indeed, all manifestations of God in the Hindu pantheon such as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, as well as all the Incarnations or Saviours such as Rama, Krishna and Ramakrishna, are all expressions of that supreme Power of Brahman, nay, that Power Itself. Yet as this Power Brahman is associated with the feminine form, so Uma or Durga and other feminine forms of the divine have a special meaning for the devotee.

Supreme Love, which is the highest form of devotion to God, is possible only if directed to the infinitely beautiful. And the highest beauty is always associated with the Divine Mother. Who else is more beautiful than She? It is Her beauty that is seen everywhere in nature as the majesty of heaven and the sublimity of mountains, as the loveliness of flowers and the golden hue of fruits, the music of streams and the breathing of the ocean waves.

The external manifestations of an infinitesimally small part of this Divine Beauty madden men. Its mental manifestations make them geniuses in science, philosophy, and arts. Its moral and spiritual manifestations make them saints and holy men.

It has been aptly said that if a man becomes a saint and his spiritual influence is felt within a radius of a hundred miles, the spiritual influence of a holy woman works over a radius of a thousand miles. There is much truth in this observation. The power to draw to the Divine the souls of men, if possessed by a woman, is many times greater than the power of man to draw souls to God.

VI

There has been a spiritual tradition amongst Indian women even from the Vedic times. We see the working of this tradition in

the days of the virgin philosopher Gargi, as well as Maitreyi, whose husband Yajnavalkya wanted to settle on her a share of the property and take leave of her before renouncing the world and embracing the monastic ideal, but who asked him:

“If, indeed, venerable sir, this entire earth filled with wealth were mine, would I become immortal through it?”

Yajnavalkya: “No, like the life of the rich even so would your life be. Of immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth.”

Maitreyi: “Then what shall I do with that by which I cannot become immortal? Tell me, venerable sir, of that alone which you know to be the only means to immortality.”

In answer to this question Yajnavalkya imparts to his wife the great teachings of Vedanta.

Right through the ages India has given birth to great women mystics, thinkers, and devotees, who realized God in some aspect or other. Each of them had great qualities of head and heart, and helped to keep up the spirit of Hinduism and enrich it by her life, spiritual struggles, illumination, and teachings. All of them accepted celibacy as the grand means by which body and mind could be purified with a view to realizing the highest goal of life. This spiritual ideal has produced among Indian women Brahmacharinis and Brahmavadinis, who studied and discussed scriptures and philosophies, practised severe austerities, profound meditation and Yoga disciplines.

Sri Sarada Devi was an embodiment of all those qualities and virtues which made Indian women great. Her life was unique. It has become a source of inspiration to men and women, the married and the unmarried, the laity and the monks.

She was born on December 22nd, 1853 in the hamlet of Jayrambati, in the district of Bankura, Bengal. At the age of five she was betrothed to Sri Ramakrishna, who had then been

practising such intense spiritual disciplines that he was taken for a maniac. The betrothal was arranged by his parents, who hoped that his mind would come down to normal and be cured of its strange ways and moods brought on by his mad passion for God. After the betrothal he returned to Dakshineswar, the scene of his austerities. For the first time after the betrothal Sarada met him when she was seven. They met again when she was fourteen, and he then taught her all that a Hindu girl should learn—everything from cookery to meditation. After a few months he returned to Dakshineswar and continued his spiritual disciplines. Four years passed and she became a woman at the age of eighteen. Some months later she went to Dakshineswar, accompanied by her father and other relatives, to meet her husband, as it was rumoured that he had become insane and she wanted to ascertain the truth. He received her and her relatives with great kindness and hospitality, and arranged for her rest and treatment, as she was very tired after the journey and had come to Dakshineswar with an anxious mind. She was greatly relieved to find that he was the same to her as before and that he was absolutely free from all traces of insanity, which was attributed to him by people without understanding, who did not know what they were saying.

Sri Ramakrishna had by now finished practising all the disciplines of Hinduism and attained a variety of experiences, nay more, as he had realized the truths of other religions as well and the underlying harmony of all faiths. He was then thirty-six years of age.

After the betrothal, when Sri Sarada Devi was growing into womanhood, he had fervently prayed to the Divine Mother to remove all traces of carnality from her mind so that she might remain pure and immaculate. During the early days of her stay at Dakshineswar, he once asked her whether she had come to drag

him down to the worldly life, but she replied: "Why should I do it? I have come only to help you in the path of religious life."

It was during these early days of her stay in the same premises as Ramakrishna that he performed a form of worship known as Shodashi Puja. On the seat intended for the Divine Mother to be worshipped he asked Sarada Devi to sit. The worship began at about 9 p.m. with the usual rituals and mantras. She was in a mood of spiritual fervour throughout. After sprinkling holy water on her several times, he invoked in her the Divine Mother by addressing the following prayer: "O Divine Mother, Thou Eternal Virgin, the Mistress of all powers and abode of all beauty, deign to unlock for me the gate to perfection. Sanctifying the body and mind of this woman, do Thou manifest Thyself through her and do what is auspicious."

All through the worship Sri Sarada Devi was in a state of semi-absorption, and when the worship was over, she went into deep samadhi. It was a transcendental union of the worshipper and the worshipped who realized their identity of being as Brahman.

A long time passed in that state of spiritual absorption. Late in the second watch of the night Sri Ramakrishna regained a little of physical consciousness. Then he resigned himself completely to the Divine Mother, and in a supreme act of consecration, offered to the Deity manifest before him the fruits of his austerities, his rosary, himself, and everything that was his. He then uttered the following mantra: "O Goddess, I prostrate myself before Thee again and again—before Thee, the eternal Consort of Shiva, the three-eyed, the golden-hued, the indwelling Spirit in all, the giver of refuge, the accomplisher of every end, and the most auspicious among all auspicious objects."

In the course of ritualistic worship, it is usual for the worshipper to invoke the Deity in him, and when the worship is over to pray to the Deity to mingle again with the universe from which It came. Although the worshipper feels his identity with the Deity for a while, he is soon overpowered again by worldly consciousness and completely forgets his spiritual identity with the Divine. When Ramakrishna invoked the Divine Mother in Sarada Devi, she attained a high state of spiritual experience. When she came to, she did not lose sense of her identity with the Divine but retained it throughout life. Further, the worship symbolized her participation in Ramakrishna's life, and in the fruits of his own austerities and in his spiritual ministry. Henceforth, her body and mind became the instruments of that Energy which is known as the Divine Mother and which played through the body and mind of Ramakrishna. They saw in each other only the Divine Mother. Their minds never once came down to a lower level. She was holy as he was holy. He was the "divine man", and she the "divine woman". She was a mother to his disciples and their disciples as much as to her own. Nay, she was more than a mother, for through her that Energy known as the Mother whom Ramakrishna worshipped and realized was made manifest. It is no wonder that she is known today as the Holy Mother—a name which at once evokes mingled feelings of love and reverence, of affection and adoration.

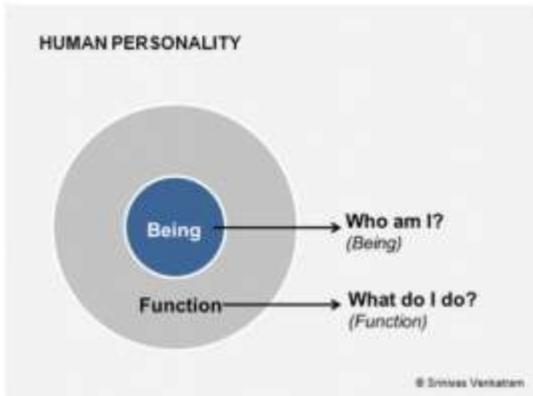
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Enablement through Education

Srinivas Venkatram

To understand the idea of enablement, we begin with a simple, but quite powerful, model of the human personality.

In this model, the human personality comprises two broad zones of learning, reflection and growth—the zone of being and the zone of function.



The zone of 'function' is accessed when we ask the question: "what do I do?" This question brings forth answers related to our profession, our training, skills and competencies, our

roles in the workplace, our visible achievements, and so on.

The zone of 'being' is accessed when we ask the question: "who am I?" Answering this question brings forth answers related to our aspirations, our values and ideals, our choices, our identities related to our colour and race, our religions, our social affiliations, among others.

Our education system systematically prepares and develops people at the function level but is largely blind to helping people develop at the being level.

To elaborate, we emphasize strengthening and developing people at the function level, going to great lengths in helping people to develop their skills, competencies, and professional capabilities, etc. On the other hand, we pay far less attention to

strengthening and developing people at the ‘being’ level. We do not systematically help people to clarify and develop ‘being’ level capabilities such as the capability to respond to life, build positive identities and self-esteem, to clarify their vision of themselves and the lives they really want to lead.

Our education system thus prepares people to create and deliver value to society but does not necessarily teach people to live lives of intrinsic value to themselves.

The world has dimly recognized this one-sided vision of education for a long time but has not felt an urgency to do something about it. But things have changed. The world is transforming faster than even the most astute observers are able to comprehend. Size is now as much a disadvantage as it is a resource. And people need to be curious, adaptive, agile and resilient, besides being competent at their jobs.

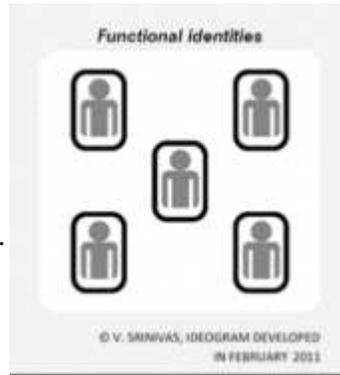
In such a world, training and strengthening people at the functional level but letting people sink or swim at a deeper being level is no longer an option. There is a necessity to enable and strengthen people at the being level on a systematic and scalable basis, so that a whole generation becomes capable of navigating an uncertain world, and is able to deal with the human consequences of bewildering environmental complexity.

The forms of enablement

How do we strengthen people at the ‘being level’ on a systematic and scalable basis? Where do we start? In the rest of this essay, we explore four types of enablement that will help strengthen people at the being level.

1. Identity level enablement The first form of enablement is identity level enablement—giving people the freedom to be who they want to be.

An identity that is functional is inherently self-limiting. Individuals who identify with a set of skills and professional expertise often end up excluding the possibility of learning or growing in a new area of their life. People have to develop identities that are beyond a particular professional skill. This keeps them open to growing and learning all the time.



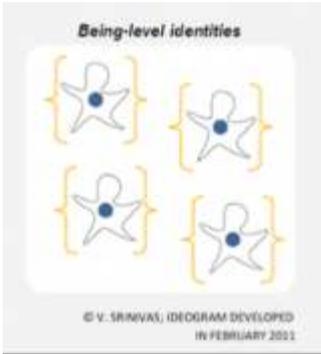
Consider the case of people who take voluntary retirement in organizations. They have been employees for 20-30 years when suddenly at the age of 45-50 they have to do something new in their lives. There is a search for a new identity.

Another example is where whole technologies undergo a change. In the software industry, for example, entire generations of technology are rendered redundant because of changes that take place. Employees who have identified themselves with a specific set of technologies or software skills may suddenly find their entire domain area redundant or worthless.

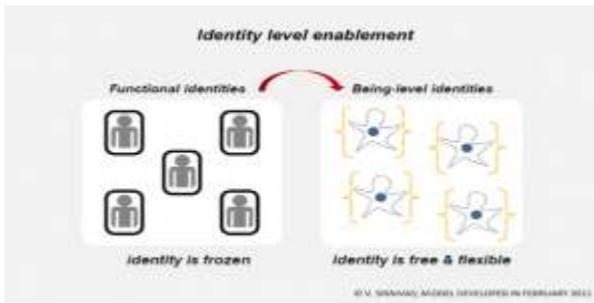
When the search for a new identity comes, people cannot be trapped with an earlier identity. They need a freedom space which says "I can be many things. I do not have to be one thing alone." So, even if someone, for whatever reasons, has become an engineer or a doctor, that person must have the courage to say "I don't want to be that tomorrow" and be something else altogether. This can take place if and only if they do not have a self-limiting identity. If people have to reinvent themselves in a fast-changing society, they must learn to adopt identities that are not potentially self-limiting. An individual who is trapped by a self-limiting identity based on a specific domain (for example, healthcare), or a specific

set of skills or a narrow specialization, may find that the very identity that gave them self-esteem or pride is becoming a cage from which they cannot escape.

To enable them to make this shift, they need to be helped to shift the very basis of their identities from functional or competence/professional/role/positional identities that allow them to see themselves as learners, adaptors, growth-oriented individuals—all of which are associated with who they are rather than with what they do. This



helps people to change, and over time to stay open to new possibilities in this lifetime. That freedom to become who you want to become only comes when you operate at a being level. This is the first and most fundamental form of enablement: to enable people to be free to take on different identities and roles as society changes, and to be free to grow themselves, to morph themselves, depending on lifestyle situations. If they are themselves trapped in an internal mental form and shape and with a limited set of attributes, they will be incapable, at an identity level, of coping with any kind of response in the world.



2. Behaviour level enablement

The second kind of enablement is giving people enablement at a behavioural level.

Behaviour level enablement should not be confused with behaviour change. Rather it should be seen as freeing people to design their own responses to life.

In a study on the quality of interactions between the police force and citizens of one of India's major metros, it was found that, on average, a police officer had around 5 negative or unpleasant interactions in a single day. In a police force comprising 40,000 police officers, this adds up to nearly 200,000 negative interactions every single day, all over the country. What was interesting was not the number of negative interactions, but the diversity of the interactions.

There was, in fact, very little diversity in the reactions. A traffic police officer would face almost the same kind of situations every day, and would react in the same way every time when provoked—all while trying to control the chaotic roads of an Indian city.

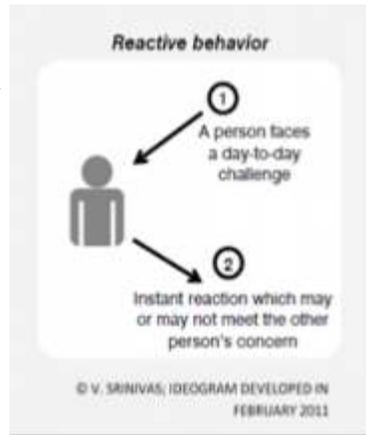
This means that most of the police personnel had slipped into repeating patterns of response to the challenges from the environment. The situations were similar. The reactions were almost programmed, and the emotional and psychological impact of these reactions on the police personnel was adding up day after day, leading to them feeling trapped by their own response patterns. This is a "habit of response". Every time a person faces a similar challenge, that person does not solve or pause to reflect, but acts out of the same "habit or response".

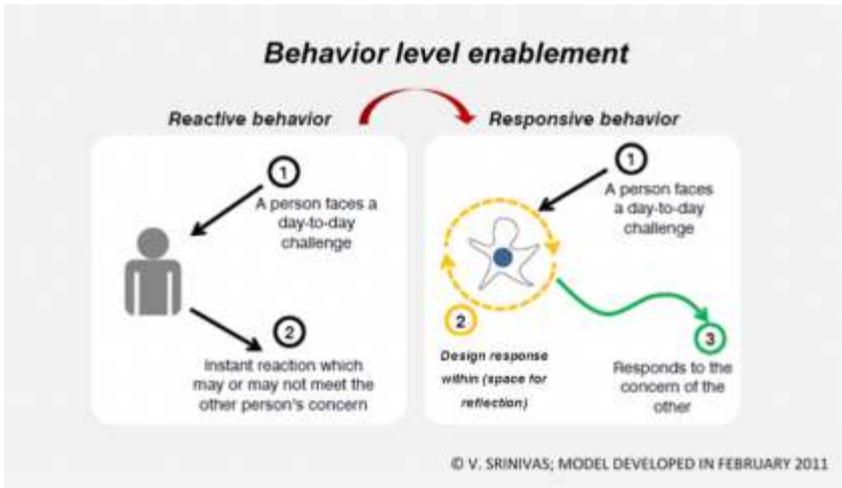
While most people were trapped by their habits of response, some seemed to be different. They chose not to 'react' but to 'respond' to the environment. They developed simple but effective ways to handle the various types of people they encountered — people who wanted 'immediate solutions', people who wanted to be treated differently or especially, people who genuinely needed attention and engagement, and so on.

By designing responses to these different types of people and their behaviours, this small group of effective police officers had transformed their own work day. They had not quantitatively transformed the situation (they faced the same people and situations that others do), but qualitatively transformed the interactions and their own life.

Each one of us faces our own universe of challenges. Behaviour enablement means giving people like us that magic space of reflection and design in our day-to-day behaviour.

In the diagram, the dotted circle is a small island which represents space. Thus the whole idea is to give people those little islands where there they can sit quietly when the torrent of life is going on around them. That is also enablement. Behaviour enablement also means giving people the space to respond.





3. Knowledge enablement

This is the third kind of enablement: people have an asset view of knowledge. Skills, concepts, information are all knowledge assets. Degrees and certificates are also assets.

While millions of people across the globe collect knowledge assets, only a small proportion of people are able to translate these knowledge assets into contribution and value.

Many of us have learnt physics, chemistry, maths, social sciences, and several other subjects.

But few of us use more than a small fraction of our knowledge

effectively in the way we deal with the environment or solve problems we face in everyday situations.

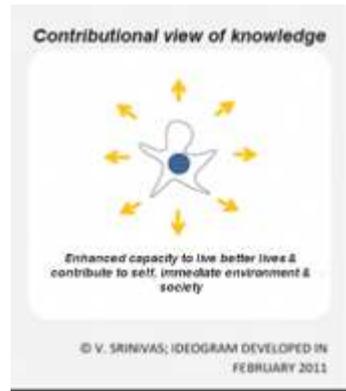


This gap between what we know and how much we end up using effectively is called the “learning-doing” gap. The learning-doing gap is the gap between what we know and what we are able to translate into superior quality of thought or action.

This gap is somewhat addressed at a functional level. But it remains completely unaddressed at the being level of our personality. Why? We understand how to use knowledge as long as it is objective, but when new knowledge forces us to challenge our way of thinking, our cherished opinions, mental beliefs, the way we live and deal with other human beings, goals we pursue, and our willingness to put others before ourselves, then we find that we know much but translate little into doing or living more effectively.

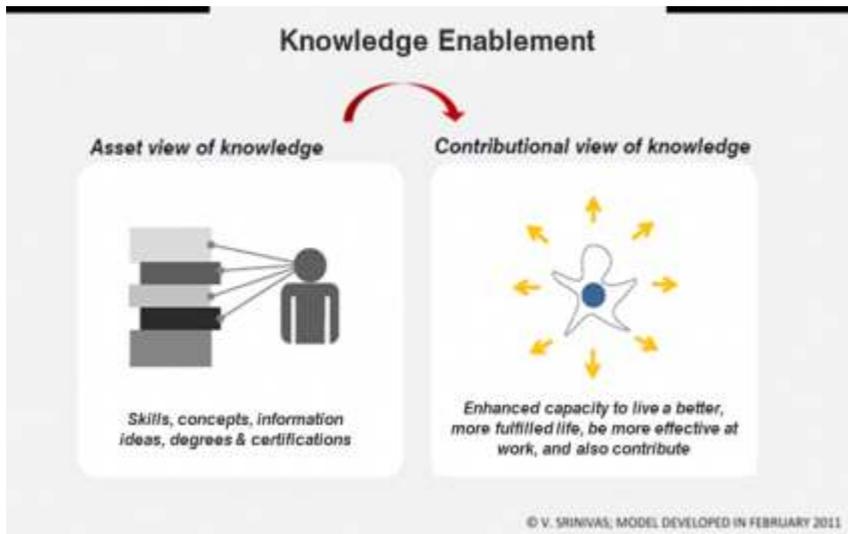
People therefore need to be enabled to learn new ways of thinking and responding, to be open-minded to alternative perspectives and narratives, to adapt psychologically to changing circumstances, and to self-reflect and discover their own tacit values and aspirations, so that they can live lives aligned to who they are.

This will help to build an education system that not only gives people knowledge, ideas and skills, but also enables people to make wiser choices, more enlightened choices which include not just their own narrow interests but also the larger interests of the community and of society. This needs one more kind of enablement that can be called knowledge enablement.



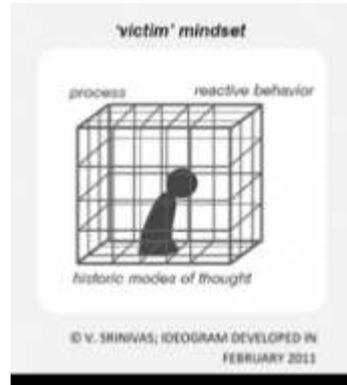
Through knowledge enablement, people will be helped to bridge that gap which then enables them to answer questions such as How do I use what I know most effectively? How do I use what I know to contribute effectively to society and participate in solving the wicked challenges of our times? How do I use what I know to become a different/better person?

The reservoir of water is there; all people have to do is to create the pipeline and the tap, so that water can then be used for washing, for bathing, or for whatever purpose it is needed. Teaching people to build the bridge between knowledge and a better life is called the third form of enablement.



4. Mindset level enablement

The fourth kind of enablement speaks to our mode of engagement with life. How many people do you know who complain about life and other people? How many people do you know who live in the past or are attached to older ways of thinking and working? They often feel, psychologically, that they are trapped. They are locked up in history, in memory, in a reactive behaviour. They are locked up in the 'process of life' spoken of earlier. This is the picture that describes them.



Many of them carry a belief that life is out of control, that they have no say, no ability to influence, that they cannot really make a difference. "I would like to, but it is far beyond me." "There is somebody out there who is far more powerful." Only the rich and powerful can make a difference.

For example, in a conversation with a group of people who were senior leaders of a large organization, I found many of them referring to 'senior management'. Even senior people who are considered powerful by people junior to them feel powerless. That is a victim mindset. If someone above me is going to be more powerful, it means that person is going to take responsibility and that person is going to take all the decisions. This is also a victim mindset.

So, this victim mindset is not restricted to one group of people in society. Similarly, a person may be brilliant academically, but

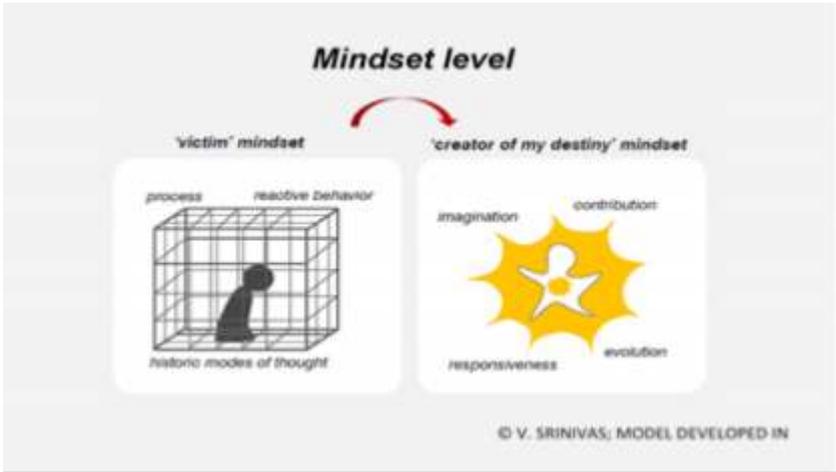
they could still be a psychological victim when it comes to society and the world around them.

If someone is a victim, that individual cannot contribute, cannot consciously adapt and respond to a changing world; instead they will be trapped in reactive modes of mind.

Releasing people from that victim mindset into a world of imagination, of possibilities, where they can actually make a difference, releasing them into a mode where they can be free to grow – "I am free to think about and reflect about who I am" – this is the definition of enablement.



So, if we really want to bring about change, if we really want to have a different society, we also need to bring about enablement at this level.



People who are enabled to be ‘creators of their destiny’ recover for themselves their own hidden resilience, their own adaptive capacities, their own capacity to heroically transform the life and circumstances in which they find themselves.

People cannot be creators of their destiny only during a war or a crisis. They also need to be in that state of mind if they are to ride the waves of change sweeping across the world.

The Education for Enablement vision

We need an education system that goes beyond building capacities and skills at the function level alone and starts investing in enabling young people to develop the deeper being level dimensions of their personality. We need an education system that helps people to build identities that enable them to grow and reinvent themselves; a system that gives people the power to design responses to challenges, instead of being trapped by their own habits and patterns of thinking; a system that helps people to break free of their own psychological cages that make them feel powerless and victims of life; and, most importantly, a system that helps people to build a bridge between all that they are taught into the lives they lead and the choices they make.

Kali Worship—Swami Vivekananda's 'Special Fad'

Dr. Umesh Gulati

In the early part of 1884, Narendra (Swami Vivekananda), just before he received the result of his B.A. examination (which, of course, he passed), his father, Vishwanath, suddenly died. Narendra, being the eldest son, suddenly became the only support of his mother and brothers. When the time came to look into his financial assets, Narendra found that his father spent more than his income and had left nothing but debts. And besides, some relatives tried to get a share in the family's property, though they lost the suit in the court.

Even before the prescribed period of mourning was over, he began to go from one office to another in search of a job, but to no avail. Some mornings when he got up, he would find not enough food for all the five or six members of the family, so he would feign that a friend had invited him to his house for lunch and therefore he was going there. In fact, during such days he had nothing to eat, for he had no money in his pocket, and he was too proud to talk to anyone about it outside the family.

Sometimes, rich men would invite him into their houses to sing and play at their parties, which he usually did, but those rich people seldom asked him how he was getting along. A very few used to ask, "Why do you look so pale and sad today?" But only one of them actually found out the reason how things really were, but not through Narendra himself. That friend started sending money to his mother from time to time, anonymously. "I am under an eternal debt to him," Narendra recalled. Despite all this, he never lost faith in the existence of God and His divine Providence.

Besides, his determination to preserve his moral and sexual purity never wavered. People would invite him to drink wine and

go to places of ill fame, but Naren shunned these invitations without giving them a second thought. A distorted version of these events, including Naren turning into an atheist, not to mention even some silly rumours about his character entertained by some devotees, reached Sri Ramakrishna. Some of those devotees had even gone to the Master to tell him about it. And when one of those devotees wept and said, "Sir, we never dreamed Naren would sink so low!", the Master cried out excitedly, "Silence, you scoundrels! Mother has told me that Naren could never do such things. If you talk about this anymore, I won't have you in the room!" What faith the Master had in his beloved Naren!

But even when Naren had in fact talked about turning into an atheist, it was merely to assert his boldness and pride before these so-called friends. As Naren himself put it: "The experiences I had had from my childhood and, most of all, since meeting the Master, rose vividly into my mind in the brightest colours and I said to myself, 'God certainly does exist - otherwise, what is life for, what is it worth? The path to God has to be found, no matter how great the struggle'."

The summer season had passed, and the rainy season had begun in Bengal. Naren continued looking for a job as before. One night when he was completely drenched in the rain, and had not eaten all day, he was returning home and exhausted. He lay down like a log in the open veranda of a neighbour's house and lost his external consciousness. All kinds of thoughts and pictures were going through Naren's mind, which he did not have the power to ignore. Then suddenly it occurred, or rather was revealed, to him that one cannot ignore the divine Providence; and God's justice indeed does exist. He was beside himself with joy. Afterward, when he continued his walk home, he found that there wasn't an iota of fatigue in his body and his mind was filled with infinite peace and strength.

Naren was firmly convinced that he was not born to earn money to support the family or to enjoy worldly fame. Rather, he secretly began preparing himself to renounce the world like his grandfather had done, and decided to become a wandering monk. And then he heard that very day the Master was coming to the house of a devotee in Kolkata. He thought it would be very nice to see the Master in the neighbour's house before leaving his own house for ever.

But as soon as Naren met Sri Ramakrishna (from whom nothing could be hidden!), the latter told him that he was going to Dakshineswar and Naren must go with him too. Despite Naren's various excuses, the Master insisted that he must accompany him in the carriage; and Naren had no alternative but to give in. When they arrived, they both went into the Master's room. Some other devotees were also sitting there. Then the Master went into an ecstasy, and suddenly taking Naren's hand he began to sing, with tears pouring down his face:

I am afraid to speak,
I am afraid not to speak,
For the fear rises in my mind
That I shall lose you

Up until this time, Naren had fought back strong emotions, but he could not do so any longer, and tears poured down his cheeks. At night, the Master called Naren to his side and said with great feeling: "I know you are born for Mother's work. I also know that you will be a monk. But stay in the world as long as I live, for my sake at least." The Master wept again.

Soon after that Naren got a temporary job, which was barely sufficient for hand to mouth living for the family. One day Naren asked the Master that since Kālī the Divine Mother listened to his prayer, why shouldn't the Master himself ask that favour of the Divine Mother to relieve Naren of his poverty. When he put the suggestion to Sri Ramakrishna, the Master told Naren that he

(Naren) suffered because he did not acknowledge Kāli as the sovereign Mistress of the Universe.

The Master added, "Today is a Tuesday, an auspicious day for the Mother's worship. Go to her shrine in the evening, prostrate yourself before the image, and pray to Her for any boon; it will be granted. Mother Kāli is the embodiment of Love and Compassion. She is the power of Brahman (the Impersonal God; Mother Kāli is the personal God). She gives birth to the world by her mere wish. She fulfils every sincere prayer of Her devotees."

At nine o'clock in the evening, Narendranath went to the Kāli temple. Passing through the courtyard, he felt in himself a surge of emotion, and his heart stirred with joy in anticipation of the vision of the Divine Mother. Entering the temple, he cast his eyes on the image and found the stone figure to be nothing else but the living Goddess, the Divine Mother Herself, ready to give him any boon he wanted—either a happy worldly life or the joy of spiritual freedom. He was in ecstasy. He prayed for the boon of knowledge, wisdom, renunciation, and Her uninterrupted vision, but forgot to ask the Deity for money. He felt great peace within as he returned to the Master's room. The Master asked if he had prayed for money, but he replied that he forgot to ask. So the Master sent him back again, and told him to ask the Divine Mother for money.

Naren did as he was bidden, but every time he went in front of the Mother, he forgot to ask for money; instead, he asked for discrimination, wisdom and renunciation. Suddenly, however, Naren realized that Sri Ramakrishna himself made him forget to ask the Divine Mother for worldly things; perhaps he wanted Naren to lead a life of renunciation. So, he now asked Sri Ramakrishna to do something for the family. The Master told the disciple that it was not Naren's destiny to enjoy worldly life but assured him that his family would be able to eke out a simple existence.

Previously, Narendra's idea of God had been confined either to that of a vague Impersonal Reality or to that of an extra-cosmic Creator removed from the world. He now realized that Godhead is immanent in the creation, which after projecting the Universe from within Itself has entered into all created entities as life and consciousness, whether manifest or latent. The same immanent Spirit or the World Soul, when considered as a Person creating, preserving and destroying the creation, is called the Personal God, and is worshipped by different religions as the father, mother, king or beloved. These relationships have their appropriate symbols, and Kāli is one of them.

Embodying in Herself creation and destruction, love and terror, life and death, Kāli is the symbol of the total universe. In one respect She is death, without which there cannot be life. She is smeared with blood, since without blood the picture of the phenomenal world cannot be complete. To the wicked who have transgressed Her laws, She is the embodiment of terror, and to the virtuous, She is the benign Mother. She contains within Her womb the seed of the universe, which is left from the previous cycle. After the manifestation of the universe She preserves and nourishes it, and at the end of the cycle She draws it back within Herself and remains the undifferentiated Sakti, the creative power of Brahman. She is non-different from Brahman.

When free from the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, the Spirit in Its cosmic aspect is called Brahman; otherwise it is called the World Soul or the Divine Mother of the universe, or, as in the words of Sri Ramakrishna, Shakti. She is, therefore, the doorway to realization of the Absolute (Brahman). To the daring devotee who wants to see the transcendental Absolute, She reveals that by withdrawing Her phenomenal aspect. Brahman is Her transcendental aspect. She is the Great Fact of the universe, the totality of all created beings. She is the Ruler and the Controller.

All this had been previously beyond Narendra's comprehension. He had accepted the reality of the physical world and yet denied the reality of Kāli. He had been conscious of hunger and thirst, pain and pleasure, and the other characteristics of the world, and yet he denied the Mother, who controlled them all. That is why he suffered. But on that auspicious Tuesday evening the scales dropped from his eyes. He accepted Kāli as the Divine Mother of the universe and became Her ardent devotee.

Many years later, Swami Nikhilananda in his book, *Vivekananda, A Biography* (page 47), wrote: 'Swami Vivekananda (Narendra) wrote to an American lady, "Kali worship is my special fad." But he did not preach about Her in public, because he thought that all that modern man required was to be found in the Upanishads. Further, he realized that the Kāli symbol would not be understood by humanity at large.'

It is amazing that unlike ordinary devotees who would accept readily whatever their Guru says, Swami Vivekananda was clearly no ordinary disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. If Swamiji's father had not died and therefore he would not have had to look for a job to support his mother and siblings, would the "Kali worship be his 'special fad'." But Providence has Its own way of accomplishing Its task!

It was not the first time, however, that Swamiji accepted something that Sri Ramakrishna had cherished very much. A few months before the above event unfolded, "Kali worship is my special fad", the Master wanted to train Narendra in the teachings of non-dualistic (Advaita) Vedanta. But Narendra found such teaching atheistic and blasphemous. Talking to a friend, he said: "How silly! This jug is God! This cup is God! ... And we too are God! Nothing could be more absurd." The Master came out of his room and gently touched Narendra. Spellbound, he immediately perceived that everything in the world was indeed God. Returning home in a dazed state, he found the food, the plate, and people

around him were God. When he walked in the street, he saw that the cabs, the horses, the streams of people were all Brahman. While walking in Cornwallis Square (in Kolkata), he struck his head against the iron railings to see if they were real or just a dream. Such a state lasted for several days, and he soon realized that the words of the Master were indeed true.

From then on, he never doubted the veracity of his Master's words on Advaita Vedanta, the religion of Oneness. In fact, it is this, the crown jewel of Hinduism, which he preached in the West. He never failed to impress on all people the moral implications of strength, unselfishness, fearlessness, and love that flow from Advaita. When he returned to India, he embarked on a lecture tour throughout the country, which can be read in a book, *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*. These lectures show the patriotic side of Swami Vivekananda, his love for his country, which had remained under foreign domination for centuries. Said the patriot-saint Swami:

“What our country now wants is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic will, which nothing can resist, which will accomplish their purpose in any fashion ... That is what we want, and that can only be created, established, and strengthened by understanding and realizing the ideal of Advaita, the ideal of oneness of all. ... Our aristocratic ancestors went on treading the common masses of our country underfoot till they became helpless, till they forgot that they were human beings. ... Let them [people] hear of the Atman—that even the lowest of the low have the Atman within, who never dies and never is born—Him whom the sword cannot pierce, nor the fire burn, nor the air dry, immortal without beginning or end, the all-pure, omnipotent, and omnipresent Atman.”

another—the building of a house, the rice-taking ceremony of their babies, or the rituals connected with the beginning of their children's education.

This *Sphota* has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is the ॐ (Om). And as by no possible means of analysis can we separate the word from the idea this Om and the eternal *Sphota* are inseparable; and therefore, it is out of this holiest of all holy words, the mother of all names and forms, the eternal Om, that the whole universe may be supposed to have been created. But it may be said that, although thought and word are inseparable, yet as there may be various word-symbols for the same thought, it is not necessary that this particular word Om should be the word representative of the thought, out of which the universe has become manifested. To this objection we reply that this Om is the only possible symbol which covers the whole ground, and there is none other like it. The *Sphota* is the material of all words, yet it is not any definite word in its fully formed state. That is to say, if all the peculiarities which distinguish one word from another be removed, then what remains will be the *Sphota*; therefore, this *Sphota* is called the *Nâda-Brahma*, the Sound-Brahman.

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Now, as every word-symbol, intended to express the inexpressible *Sphota*, will so particularise it that it will no longer be the *Sphota*, that symbol which particularises it the least and at the same time most approximately expresses its nature, will be the truest symbol thereof; and this is the Om, and the Om only; because these three letters ॐ (A.U.M.), pronounced in combination as Om, may well be the generalised symbol of all possible sounds. The letter A is the least differentiated of all sounds, therefore Krishna says in the Gita "I am 'A' among the letters." Again, all articulate sounds are produced in the space within the mouth beginning with the root of the tongue and ending in the lips — the throat sound is A, and M is the last lip sound, and the U exactly represents the rolling forward of the impulse which begins at the root of the tongue till it ends in the lips. If properly pronounced, this Om will represent the whole phenomenon of sound-production, and no other word can do this; and this, therefore, is the fittest symbol of the *Sphota*, which is the real meaning of the Om. And as the symbol can never be separated from the thing signified, the Om and the *Sphota* are one.

